

8/24/23 Thursday

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BRICS Expansion to 11 Nations, 37% of Global GDP Offers 'Big Boost' for Multilateralism

The massive new expansion of the BRICS economic bloc offers substantial opportunities, including for trade in non-dollar currencies between a vast swath of humanity and even greater investment opportunities using institutions outside of the US or Europe, an expert told Sputnik. Amid the BRICS summit in Johannesburg, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa announced that the economic bloc of emerging industrial nations was more than doubling its membership, adding six new nations: Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov clarified, however, that the bloc would not change its name, in order to show continuity.

As a result, BRICS will now account for 37% of the world's gross domestic product (GDP) and almost half of the world's population.

In its [declaration from the summit](#), BRICS said it aims to increase the representation of poorer nations at the United Nations and called for increasing the use of local currencies in international trade and financial transactions between BRICS members and their trading partners, posing a further challenge to the position of the US dollar as the presumed de facto currency of international trade.

Sputnik spoke with Ashraf Patel, Senior Research Associate with the Institute for Global Dialogue and Member of the South Africa BRICS Think Tank Network, about the momentous change and what it will mean for the global economy.

"Yes, as you can imagine, this is big news. It's a huge development for BRICS and BRICS +, and the expansion. So it is significant in a sense that it takes the BRICS to a new region, which is not in Africa or the Middle East. And that is a significant region for the bridge between the different regions, and also the growth of Ethiopia as a key member. You must remember Ethiopia hosts the African Union and it is significant that now Ethiopia is a member of BRICS. And then of course Argentina, being a big player in Latin America. So this is big news and positive news for BRICS expansion."

Patel noted that despite making its second-ever membership expansion after adding South Africa in 2010, and having received a number of applications from other nations not yet admitted to the bloc, BRICS has not yet drawn up a formal list of membership criteria. However, because BRICS makes decisions based on consensus, reaching a unanimous decision to admit a country as a member has served as the de facto criterion.

"The criteria have been in development for the last year and the BRICS model is around consensus. And for a long time, at least 3 to 4 members have been supporting true consensus on all these new members, and so we took some kind of persuasion in the last few weeks to get all countries to agree by way of consensus," he said.

"Criteria is mainly around a number of factors: economics, trade. And I would imagine a country like Saudi Arabia and the UAE have got significant resources - capital - and then they would

inject that into institutions like the BRICS Development Bank. So, that increases the pool of resources for funding. So, yes, it's a big development. The criteria is not fully known. It is also not very complicated. And that is the positive nature of BRICS."

Patel said the vast expansion of BRICS offers both "huge challenges" as well as "huge opportunities."

"Number one: remember, it's about economies of scale. It's about large populations, and large populations translate into significant markets. It also means that through institutions, maybe like BRICS currency or regional currency format, and then a new development bank, it increases cooperation, it makes it easier for companies in BRICS nations to facilitate trade. And that's important. So it is a positive development purely from a number of viewpoints, a regional footprint, but significantly, population. It's about large populations that makes large markets viable. So these are big boosters."

"These are important developments. National currency-to-currency, for instance, China and Brazil are looking already at the currency in yuan. And that's a model, and this starting with that in commodities, because they are big commodity traders. I would imagine the different regions could start with country-to-country, bilateral, and then regional commodities. So as a step-up, it would get into a phase-by-phase process leading up to a more common-base currency in the near future."

"So yes, it's a big boost. With new members, it means they would need to follow the BRICS norm and the BRICS norms are very unique. And over the next few years, these new nations would get into the value of norms in understanding the norms and the models, and then that would increase trade. So in a world where we need multilateralism, this is a big boost for the world order."

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Fed's Latest Victim: US Mortgage Rates Hit 20-Year High

Real estate is a major driver of the US economy, accounting for 17% of its gross domestic product (GDP). Private home ownership has long served as the gateway to the middle class for working Americans, leading to the proliferation of suburban sprawls outside cities. But in the 21st century, new attention has come to urban investments, too.

Freddie Mac, the state-chartered mortgage aggregator, announced on Thursday that 30-year fixed-rate mortgages had hit their highest point in more than 20 years. The trend has put a damper on home sales and highlighted one of the many risks associated with the Federal Reserve's response to inflation.

"This week, the 30-year fixed-rate mortgage reached its highest level since 2001 and indications of ongoing economic strength will likely continue to keep upward pressure on rates in the short-term," Sam Khater, Freddie Mac's chief economist, said in [a news release](#).

"As rates remain high and supply of unsold homes woefully low, incoming data shows that existing homes sales continue to fall. However, there are slightly more new homes available,

and sales of these new homes continue to rise, helping provide modest relief to the unyielding housing inventory predicament,” Khater added.

The firm noted that on Thursday, the average interest rate for a 30-year fixed-rate mortgage was 7.23%, up from 7.09% just a week prior and 5.55% at this time last year. A 15-year fixed-rate mortgage averaged at 6.55% on Thursday, up from 6.46% a week ago and 4.85% a year ago, Freddie Mac said.

The last time mortgage rates were this high was in June 2001. The result is that fewer Americans are buying or selling homes, especially first-time buyers. Recent data from the [National Association of Realtors](#) shows that home sales had fallen by 16.6% in July 2023 as compared to the same month last year. There’s little surprise as to why, either: home prices are at their highest in 40 years.

The high rates have come as the yield on a 10-year US Treasury bond, widely considered the benchmark for other interest rates, sits at a 16-year high.

However, the yield on 2-year Treasury bonds is even higher - an unusual gap called an [“inverted yield curve”](#) that suggests investors expect a recession within a year’s time.

The cause of both is the same: the Federal Reserve’s effective federal funds rate, which [sits at a 22-year high](#) amid the central bank’s efforts to clamp down on inflation. The interest rate restricts how much banks can lend to each other overnight, which puts a damper on borrowing and slows down investment. The gamble is that doing so stops the currency from depreciating before it stops the economy from working and plunges it into a recession.

“Earlier this year, it looked as though inflation was being brought under control and the Fed may be almost ready to declare victory... now, however, as inflation has ticked up and bond yields are rising amidst economic uncertainty, it is a different situation,” Lisa Sturtevant, chief economist at Bright MLS, said in a statement.

“Instead of talking about rates falling to 6% this year, the question is how much above 7% are we going to go?”

Despite the high interest rates - which could still go higher, thanks to [new economic troubles](#) in recent weeks - economic forecasters at the Fed and in private banking institutions alike have [softened their previously-dire](#) expectations for the US economy in the coming months.

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GOP Would-Be Presidential Nominees Come Out Swinging in First Debate as Trump Sits Aside

Eight candidates met in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on Wednesday for the first Republican presidential primary debate, part of the process of sorting out who will eventually receive the party's nomination to be on the November 2024 ballot and face off against the Democrats' nominee.

The Republican Party held its first debate in the 2024 presidential primary race on Wednesday, bringing together eight candidates to highlight the similarities and differences between their platforms for voters.

[Absent from the stage](#), however, was the party's clear front-runner: former US President Donald Trump, who is currently embroiled in a massive legal fight related to his attempts to reverse the outcome of the previous presidential election in 2020, which he lost to Democratic candidate Joe Biden.

Vivek Ramaswamy, a political neophyte businessman from New York City and the youngest candidate on the stage at just 38, was the most-searched-for candidate on Google searches that evening, according to US media.

"I think Ramaswamy did a good job of elevating himself as an equal to politicians and candidates who have been doing this for a long time," Nathan Gonzales, editor of Inside Elections, told one US newspaper. "We'll have to see if voters warm up to his message and profile as they hear more from him."

Ramaswamy turned heads with a forceful defense of Trump, who he hailed as the greatest president of the 21st century, but added that Trump needed to step aside and let a newer generation of leaders take over. He has said he would pardon Trump if he were to be convicted of the criminal charges he is currently facing in four separate cases.

Prior to the debate, Ramaswamy held about 10% of prospective GOP voters, according to an [Emerson College poll](#) released last week. That put him roughly tied with Florida Governor Ron DeSantis for second place in the primary race. However, a survey of viewers conducted by JL Partners immediately after the debate gave the Indian-American businessman a slight lead over DeSantis, albeit within the poll's margin of error.

Ramaswamy took wide swipes at his rivals in the debate, accusing them of being "bought and paid for," "professional politicians," and "superPAC puppets." The barbs practically invited attacks by his rivals, with former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie saying Ramaswamy sounded like the ChatGPT AI program, and former UN ambassador Nikki Haley blasting him for having no foreign policy experience.

"Now is not the time for on-the-job training," quipped Mike Pence, who served as Trump's vice president. "We don't need to bring in a rookie."

DeSantis entered the evening seen as the barely-second-place candidate, his ranking having slipped in recent months due to a series of political missteps and unrelenting attacks by Trump. However, compared to Ramaswamy, DeSantis attracted comparatively little offensive fire from his rivals.

Rich Lowry, the editor of the conservative magazine National Review, [said on social media](#) that the Florida executive "helped himself" with a demure performance and sticking to his political message.

"Vivek was preposterous, got swatted down by Haley, but won exchanges w/ Pence and Christie and had some tremendous answers - his moment will continue," Lowry also summarized, adding that "Nikki Haley was good and outshone Tim Scott," the US Senator from South Carolina, the state where Haley was once governor.

Across the aisle, Biden's former press secretary-turned MSNBC commentator, Jen Psaki, mused that DeSantis was "basically ignored" by his rivals.

A question about a nationwide abortion ban became another moment of contention, as the candidates wrestled with the conservative priorities of restricting or banning abortion on the one hand, and with states' rights on the other.

Haley - the only woman on the stage - attacked her rivals for their uncompromising stance on abortion. Haley urged caution, noting that it would be an incredibly difficult road to passing such legislation, and that her male counterparts' rhetoric could hurt women.

"I think Nikki is going to get a second look from some people based on some stuff she said tonight on abortion," said Kellyanne Conway, a former Trump adviser and political commentator. "I'm very pro-life, but I like what she said - that you don't demonize or punish women. That's important."

Haley also took some swings at Trump, her former boss, saying he contributed enormously to the national debt - another conservative bugbear - and said the GOP "can't win an election" by running "the most disliked politician in America," which drew some boos from the audience. In the aftermath of the debate, commentators in US media have generally regarded the other candidates, North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum and former Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson, as having largely failed to seize the opportunity to win themselves more exposure, spending much of the debate off-screen as their rivals duked it out.

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Astronomers Detect Dark Spot on Neptune for First Time Using Earth-Based Telescope

The solar system's most distant planet, Neptune has remained an elusive object of study for astronomers since it was discovered in 1846. Very little was known about it until the Voyager 2 spacecraft flew past it in August 1989, snapping the first-ever up-close photos of the icy giant. Astronomers at the European Southern Observatory (ESO) in the remote desert of northern Chile have announced a new first for humans on Earth: they managed to detect a "dark spot" on Neptune from Earth for the first time.

When [Voyager 2 flew past Neptune](#) in 1989, it snapped photos of a massive "Big Dark Spot" on the planet, a massive storm analogous to Jupiter's Big Red Spot. However, unlike Jupiter's cyclone, Neptune's has not persisted through the decades, disappearing and then reappearing again later.

When the Hubble Space Telescope first observed Neptune after being launched in 1993, the dark spot was nowhere to be found. Only in 2018 did the Hubble finally see a new spot on Neptune.

Now, however, astronomers spotted it from Earth.

"This is an astounding increase in humanity's ability to observe the cosmos," said Michael Wong, a researcher at the University of California and a co-author of [a study published](#) in Nature Astronomy on Thursday.

"At first, we could only detect these spots by sending a spacecraft there, like Voyager. Then we gained the ability to make them out remotely with Hubble. Finally, technology has advanced to enable this from the ground."

They made the discovery using ESO's Very Large Telescope (VLT) and a device called the Multi-Unit Spectroscopic Explorer (MUSE), which allowed them to break up the sunlight

reflected off the planet and enhance it, revealing the dark spot, according to an [ESO news release](#).

Little is understood about such spots, which might be created by the mixing of gas particles from different layers of the planet.

On frigid Neptune, 2.8 billion miles (4.6 billion kilometers) from the sun, the average temperature is negative 392 degrees Fahrenheit (negative 200 Celsius) and the atmosphere is made up by icy crystals of water, methane, and ammonia just as much as they are light gases like hydrogen and helium. However, the materials predominate at different levels of the atmosphere, with hydrogen and helium forming the majority of the upper layers and the icy contents being found deeper inside.

Another study [published just last week](#) found a direct correlation between the sun's regular cycle and the degree of cloud cover on Neptune, with cloud cover increasing on Neptune about two years after the solar maximum. The correlation provides strong evidence the sun's ultraviolet (UV) radiation might initiate a photochemical reaction in Neptune's atmosphere, leading to cloud formation, the scientists in Hawaii and California said.

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US Military Confirms F-18 Crashed Near Marine Corps Air Station Miramar in San Diego

WASHINGTON, August 25 (Sputnik) – US military confirmed on Friday that an F-18 military jet crashed near Marine Corps Air Station Miramar in San Diego.

“We are aware of an accident involving an F/A-18 Hornet in the vicinity of MCAS Miramar at 11:54 P.M. PST. This aircraft is not part of 3rd MAW but was operating out of MCAS Miramar,” the station’s press service said in a statement.

Search and rescue operations are ongoing, and an investigation has begun, it added.

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Chinese Not Among Highest Buyers of Agricultural Lands in US Last Year – Reports

WASHINGTON, August 25 (Sputnik) – Chinese buyers purchased less than 1,400 acres of agricultural lands available in the US, an NBC News report found on Friday.

Amid a push towards stricter regulations on foreign ownership of lands in the US over concerns that Chinese acquisitions are creating a risk for the country’s national security, only 0,03% of the 1.3 billion acres of available US farmland were bought by individuals related to China, the report said.

A review of thousands of documents from the US Department of Agriculture also found that the federal oversight system tasked with reporting foreign ownership is barely being enforced.

Contrary to the belief that China might be buying significant amounts of assets in the US, most

sales and leases made since January 1st, 2022, in 35 States, were attributed to European companies working in the wind power sector, the report said, forty of them to an Italian company who build wind turbines in rural Illinois.

Furthermore, in the same 35 States and over the same period, the USDA had only recorded 11 transactions related to Chinese-based entities, the report continued.

Moreover, the report noted that from a historical perspective, only 40 million (3.1%) out of the 1.3 billion acres of US farmland have been owned by foreign interests, a third of it by Canadian entities, whereas Chinese-based companies possessed some 400,000 acres.

The report findings happen amid rising concerns in some sectors of the country over the acquisition of lands by China that could be used for espionage, notably on nearby military facilities.

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US F-18 Military Jet Crashes Near San Diego – Reports

WASHINGTON, August 25 (Sputnik) – A US F-18 military jet crashed near Marine Corps Air Station Miramar in San Diego on Friday, according to ABC News.

A defense official confirmed it crashed during a training flight, ABC reported. The cause of the crash and the condition of anyone who may have been onboard have not been disclosed.

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Trump Booked, Released in Atlanta Over Georgia Election Meddling Charges

(Adds details, background in paras 4-7, clarifies quote in para 2)

ATLANTA, August 25 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump after being arrested and released on election interference charges said he did nothing wrong and has the right to challenge a "dishonest" election.

"What has taken place here is a travesty of justice. We did nothing wrong, I did nothing wrong. And everybody knows that I've never had such support," he said before boarding a plane in Atlanta on Thursday. "We have every right, every single right, to challenge an election that we think is dishonest."

Trump also said this is the way his political rivals campaign, just like the other three instances, before accusing them of election interference.

"It's a very sad day for America, this should never happen," Trump said. "I thought the election was a rigged election. A stolen election."

The Fulton County Sheriff's Office released a mugshot of Trump that was widely circulated on social media.

After being released on bail, Trump is expected to leave Atlanta until at least the first court

hearing in September. In total, as part of the case, he was charged with 13 counts related to pressure on local officials in an attempt to change in his favor the lost 2020 presidential election in the state.

This marks the fourth arrest for the ex-president after Washington, New York and Miami, where Trump appeared in court on charges related to the January 6 riots, falsifying business documents, and illegal possession of classified materials, among others

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Trump After Georgia Arrest Says 'I Did Nothing Wrong,' Has Right to Challenge Vote

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Trump Arrested, Booked And Released By Fulton County, Georgia Authorities - Jail Record

ATLANTA, August 25 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump has officially been booked into Fulton County Jail on 13 charges related to his alleged role in an election meddling scheme in the state of Georgia, jail records revealed.

The jail records showed that Trump was booked and released Thursday evening.

After being released on bail, Trump is expected to leave Atlanta until at least the first court hearing in September. In total, as part of the case, he was charged with 13 counts related to pressure on local officials in an attempt to change in his favor the lost 2020 presidential election in the state.

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Trump Arrives at Fulton County Jail in Atlanta for Arrests on Election Meddling Charges

ATLANTA, August 25 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump arrived at Fulton County Jail and surrendered in connection to 13 criminal charges over his alleged role in attempting to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election in the state of Georgia, a Sputnik correspondent reported.

A Sputnik correspondent on Thursday reported seeing Trump's convoy of black SUVs being escorted by local law enforcement.

Upon the president's arrival, a formal arrest procedure awaits: a search, photographing and fingerprinting.

After being released on bail, Trump is expected to leave Atlanta until at least the first court hearing in September. In total, as part of the case, he was charged with 13 counts related to pressure on local officials in an attempt to change in his favor the lost 2020 presidential election in the state.

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US Lawmaker Says Fulton County DA Should Focus on Tackling Crime in Atlanta, Not Trump

ATLANTA, August 25 (Sputnik) - US Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene, of the state of Georgia, told reporters that Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis should focus on cracking down on high crime rates in Atlanta instead of going after former President Donald Trump.

Trump landed in Georgia and is expected to surrender to authorities at the Fulton County Jail Thursday evening in connection to 13 criminal charges he faces for his alleged role in attempting to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election in the state.

"This is something that is shocking to me. Fulton County has some of the worst crime in the country. It has the same murder rate as Chicago. There's children who are sold for sex slavery in our state... most of it happens in the city of Atlanta, but this District Attorney is using her position to go after president Trump instead of arresting and locking up child sex traffickers in our state, murders, rapists, gang members," Greene said on Thursday evening outside the Fulton County Jail.

Greene is a major Trump ally and was at the jailhouse to show her support for the former US president.

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Biden, Zelenskyy Discuss Start of F-16 Training for Ukrainian Pilots - White House

WASHINGTON, August 25 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden in a telephone call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy discussed the commencement of training for Ukrainian pilots on F-16s and an assurance of expedited delivery of the fighter jets to Ukraine from other countries, the White House said in a press release.

"President Biden and President Zelenskyy discussed the commencement of training of Ukrainian fighter pilots and assurance of expedited approval for other nations to transfer their F-16s to Ukraine upon completion of training to increase Ukraine's defensive capabilities," the release said on Thursday.

Earlier in the day, Pentagon Press Secretary Brig. Gen. Patrick Ryder said the United States will start training Ukrainian pilots on F-16 aircraft in October after their English language training in September.

Denmark and the Netherlands will start the transfer of F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine within the upcoming months, not weeks following the appropriate training of pilots in the United States, Ryder added.

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First Republican Debate for 2024 Election Draws 12.8Mln Viewers - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 25 (Sputnik) - The first Republican debate held on Wednesday night for the 2024 presidential race attracted more than 12.8 million viewers, Reuters reported citing the Nielsen ratings agency.

The report said on Thursday that the total is a combination of the 11.1 million people who viewed the debate on Fox News and the 1.7 million people who watched it on Fox Business Network.

The first Republican primary debate in 2015 on Fox News had 24 million viewers, which was the record set for former President Donald Trump's first appearance on the debate stage.

Eight Republican Party candidates took the stage on Wednesday night during the first primary debate of the 2024 US presidential election cycle, but Trump skipped it amid his lead in the polls.

Although Trump did not participate in the debate, talk show host Tucker Carlson released his interview with the former US president at the same time as the prime-time debate.

Trump's interview with Carlson was posted on X, formerly known as Twitter, and garnered 74 million views in less than an hour, according to the platform's data. As of Thursday evening, the interview has nearly 240 million views.

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US Navy Boosts Lockheed Market Missile Development Contract by \$315.9Mln - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 25 (Sputnik) - Lockheed Martin Space has won an almost \$316 million US Navy contract extension to design and build equipment for missile flight test demonstrations and deployment, the Defense Department announced.

"Lockheed Martin Space [of] Littleton, Colorado is awarded a \$315,944,035 ... modification contract for the design, development, build and integration of equipment for missile flight test demonstrations and fielding," the Defense Department said in a press release on Thursday.

Almost three quarters of the work on the contract will be performed in Littleton (74%) with 14% in Massachusetts and 8% in Connecticut, the release said.

Work on the project is expected to take about a year and a half and is scheduled to be completed on February 25, 2025, the release added.

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Indictments Only Garner More Support for Trump, Backers Outside Atlanta Jail Say

ATLANTA, August 25 (Sputnik), Lenka White - Criminal indictments have only garnered even more support for former US President Donald Trump, his supporters told Sputnik outside the Fulton County jail.

Trump is expected to arrive at the Fulton County jail in Atlanta on Thursday where he will be arrested over alleged attempts to reverse the 2020 election results in Georgia.

All of his supporters in front of the Atlanta jail said the indictment has not changed their opinion about Trump in the slightest.

On the contrary - they became even more passionate about standing up for him, calling the probes against him a "witch hunt." Some even suggested the indictments will make Trump's arguments clearer.

"Yes, definitely," Daniel Demoura, a translator in Washington DC, said when asked if the indictments boosted support for Trump. "This just made me understand even more on that [he] is the big target... Trump is going to show some information that is going to scare them away. And I believe it's just gonna make the people understand even more, that the elections were actually stolen."

One supporter, Tommy Johnson, who called himself "Trumpican," said he is neither a Republican nor a Democrat.

"I want to see him come back and win for a third time. But this time, I don't want him in the White House for four years. I want him to be king of America. It's the only way to fix this country," Johnson said.

Johnson called it a "free advertising" for Trump.

There was also about a dozen African American protesters, wearing t-shirts with logos "Blacks for Trump."

"For me it's simple. I am a businessman and the Republican Party promotes my interests," Alan, one of the African Americans, told Sputnik. "It is clear this is all political. They waited about

two years."

The upcoming arrest will be the fourth for the ex-president after Washington, New York and Miami, where Trump appeared in court on charges related to the January 6 riots, falsifying business documents, and illegal possession of classified materials, among others.

Unlike the previous three cases, on the day of the "surrender" to the authorities, Trump will not appear in court. The first hearing in this case is scheduled for the week of September 5, and the arrest itself takes place in prison, not in the courthouse.

Upon the president's arrival, a formal arrest procedure awaits: a search, photographing and fingerprinting.

After being released on bail, Trump is expected to leave Atlanta until at least the first court hearing in September. In total, as part of the case, he was charged with 13 counts related to pressure on local officials in an attempt to change in his favor the lost 2020 presidential election in the state.

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Pentagon Says US Awarded Lockheed Martin \$2.77Bln Contract for Cargo Helicopters

WASHINGTON, August 25 (Sputnik) - The US Defense Department announced that it has awarded Lockheed Martin a \$2.77 billion contract to procure 35 cargo helicopters for the United States and Israel.

"Sikorsky Aircraft Corp., a Lockheed Martin Co.... is awarded a \$2,774,583,756 fixed-price incentive, firm-fixed-price modification to a previously awarded contract . This modification adds scope for Lots 7 and 8 block buy contract for a combined quantity of 35 CH-53K full-rate production aircraft," the Defense Department said in a statement on Thursday.

Eight of the helicopters will go to Israel and 27 to the US Marine Corps, the statement said.

The contract is expected to be completed in December 2027, the statement added.

CH-53K helicopters will serve as the "critical land and sea based logistics connector" for the US Marine Corps, according to the statement.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, August 25 (Sputnik) -

BRICS SUMMIT

* BRICS countries call for strengthening of disarmament and non-proliferation, including in the field of biological and chemical weapons, according to the final declaration of the Johannesburg summit released on Thursday.

- * BRICS members stand for the use of national currencies in international trade as well as financial settlements within the association, the final declaration said.
- * BRICS stands for a world order that is truly balanced and takes into account the interests of many countries, preserving the diversity of peoples, Russian President Vladimir Putin said.
- * Egypt highly appreciates the invitation of the country to join BRICS and looks forward to further cooperation, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Sisi said.
- * All the participants of BRICS have agreed that the name of the group will not change after new countries join it, as this will demonstrate continuity, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said.

PRIGOZHIN'S DEATH

- * Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Thursday that he knew Wagner Group chief Yevgeny Prigozhin for a long time and described him as a talented person of difficult fate.
- * The private military company Wagner Group has made a significant contribution to fight against Nazism in Ukraine, Putin said.
- * Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov called for paying attention to facts and not to Western media reports when asked about the private plane crash in the Tver Region in which Prigozhin died.
- * The United States assesses that a surface-to-air missile was not used to down a plane likely carrying Prigozhin over Russia, Pentagon Press Secretary Pat Ryder said.

SITUATION IN NIGER

- * BRICS countries have expressed their concern over the current situation in Niger, according to the final declaration of the Johannesburg summit released on Thursday.
- * A possible military invasion in Niger, planned by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) that has not recognized the recent coup in the country, will not be beneficial for any of the parties involved, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said.
- * The withdrawal of peacekeepers from the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) may be slowed down in light of the coup in Niger due to the country being a repatriation route, Associate Spokesperson for the Secretary-General Florencia Soto Nino said.

WESTERN MILITARY AID FOR UKRAINE

- * The United States will start training Ukrainian pilots on F-16 aircraft in October after their English language training in September, Pentagon spokesperson Pat Ryder said on Thursday.
- * Ukraine currently lacks the necessary infrastructure and training to operate United States-provided F-16 fighter jets, Ryder said.
- * Germany has supplied Ukraine with missiles for US Patriot air defense systems for the first time, according to an updated list of the German government.

TRUMP COURT CASE

- * Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis is requesting that a trial against former US President Donald Trump and 18 co-defendants start on October 23, 2023, according to a court document filed Thursday.

* House Republicans launched a probe on Thursday into the motivations of Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis for indicting Trump, according to a letter addressed to her.

* Former President Donald Trump said on Thursday he will surrender to authorities in Atlanta, Georgia, at 7:30 p.m. (11:30 GMT) in connection to his alleged role in an election interference scheme.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* Russian President Vladimir Putin is holding a meeting with Denis Pushilin, the acting head of the Donetsk People's Republic, on Thursday, who said that the situation in the region remains tense.

* The Ukrainian military's attempt to cross to the left bank of the Dnipro river has been foiled, Acting Kherson Region Governor Vladimir Saldo said, adding that two boats with eight militants have been destroyed.

* The United Nations is concerned about Ukrainian strikes on towns deep inside Russia and near its border with Ukraine, UN Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo said.

BLACK SEA GRAIN INITIATIVE

* China expects all parties to work through dialogue and consultation to resume grain and fertilizer exports from both Russia and Ukraine, Chinese Ambassador to the United Nations Zhang Jun said on Thursday.

* The United Nations is working to resolve the remaining issues with respect to the export of Russian grain and fertilizer to the world market to resume the grain exports agreement, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said.

* Russia sees no signs that Western countries are ready to fulfill their obligations for the resumption of the grain agreement, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said.

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Oil Prices Up Cautiously After 3-Day Loss as Markets Remain on Edge Ahead of Powell Speech

NEW YORK, August 24 (Sputnik) - Oil prices finished higher on Thursday for the first time in four days, though they remained down on the week, as markets were on edge ahead of a speech by Federal Reserve Chair Jay Powell likely to hint at more US rate hikes.

New York-traded West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude settled Thursday's trade up 16 cents, or 0.2%, at \$79.05 per barrel - remaining below the key \$80 mark for a second straight day.

WTI sank to a one-month low at \$77.59 earlier in the day. The US crude benchmark is down almost 3% week-to-date, after losing 2.3% last week. Prior to that, it rose seven weeks in a row, spurred by Saudi-Russian production cuts that lifted WTI by nearly 20%.

London-traded Brent crude settled Thursday's business up 15 cents, or 0.2%, at \$83.36 per

barrel. The global crude benchmark is down about 1.5% on the week, extending last week's 2.3% drop. Before that, Brent gained 18% over a seven-week stretch.

"Oil prices have come off in the last few days after a powerful rally since late June and then some very choppy trading this month," Craig Erlam, analyst at online trading platform OANDA, said. "As yet, price action looks okay but a break below \$81-\$82 in Brent and things may look less good. That would constitute a break of recent technical support and perhaps either signal or be the catalyst for something deeper."

Markets braced for the likelihood of the Powell delivering a hawkish speech at Jackson Hole, Wyoming, on Friday that would further boost the dollar and Treasury yields as the central bank continues its battle against inflation, which it hopes to bring down to its long-term target of 2% from a current 3%. A stronger dollar typically raises commodity costs for investors holding other currencies.

Global factory activity was also uneventful in August, data showed Wednesday as Japan reported shrinking factory activity for a third straight month while the eurozone registered a sharper-than-expected decline and Britain looked set to report weaker economic growth in the current quarter.

US business activity, meanwhile, approached a stagnation point, with growth at its weakest since February. Labor market conditions remained tight despite the Fed's aggressive rate hikes. From a base of just 0.25% in March 2020, the central bank has added 5.25% percentage points to rates and could have one or two more upward adjustments before the year is out.

On the supply side of oil, Saudi Arabia appeared set to extend its monthly production cut of one million barrels per day to October - in what would be a third such month of cuts.

While the Saudi action, combined with Russian cuts, had initially sent crude prices into a bull frenzy, growing oil supply around the world of late had offset some of the market fervor.

The Energy Information Administration (EIA) on Wednesday projected that US crude output reached 12.8 million barrels per day last month. That was the agency's highest estimate for US production since the record 13.1 million barrels produced daily before the coronavirus outbreak in March 2020.

Over the past three weeks, the EIA has raised its estimate for US oil production by 100,000 barrels each week, under a new reporting methodology that accounts for oil potentially flowing from active oil wells compared with those that are drilled but uncompleted.

Adding to global supplies, Iran said its crude output will reach 3.4 million barrels daily by end-September despite US sanctions remaining in force. Its crude oil, if the South American nation moves toward a free and fair presidential election, a media report said.

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Trump's Motorcade Departs New Jersey en Route to Atlanta Ahead of His Surrender – Reports

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump's motorcade left his club residence in New Jersey and headed to the airport, from where he will fly to Atlanta, Georgia in order to surrender to state authorities in the election interference case, according to

a CNN broadcast on Thursday.

Trump 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.

On Wednesday, three of Trump's election lawyers, Rudy Giuliani, Sidney Powell, and Jenna Ellis, surrendered in the same criminal case but were also released on bail.

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Fulton County DA Proposes October 23, 2023 Trial Date for Trump, 18 Co-Defendants - Filing

(Update: adds Trump team response in paras 5-7)

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) - Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis is requesting that a trial against former US President Donald Trump and 18 co-defendants start on October 23, 2023, according to a court document filed Thursday.

"The State of Georgia... respectfully requests that this Court specially set a trial in this case to commence for all 19 defendants on October 23, 2023," the filing said.

Earlier this month, prosecutors requested a trial start in March 2024 to resolve charges linked to alleged efforts to overturn the 2020 US presidential election results. Trump's attorneys have instead asked that the trial begin in April 2026.

Trump is facing criminal charges while also pursuing the Republican Party nomination for the 2024 presidential election.

Later on Thursday, Trump's legal team filed a response in opposition to the motion to set the trial for October. Trump requested the court set a scheduling conference to discuss the matter.

The filing also notified the court of Trump's intention to sever his case from any other co-defendant seeking a speedy trial, including Kenneth Chesebro. On Wednesday, Chesebro filed a motion requesting speedy trial.

The Sixth Amendment of the US Constitution guarantees defendants the right to a speedy and public trial.

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Dozens of People Are Gathering Ahead of Trump's Arrival at Fulton County Jail

ATLANTA, August 24, (Sputnik) Lenka White - Dozens of people are waiting for Donald Trump to turn himself in at the Fulton County jail on charges of interfering in the elections in Georgia, a Sputnik correspondent reports from Atlanta.

Many of those standing in front of the jail are supporters of the former president, holding banners and flags in his support, and wearing clothes and hats with the name of the former head of state.

In addition to supporters, there are also a few opponents of Trump on the ground, who periodically engage in verbal skirmishes with their opponents. One of the opponents said that she was present at Trump's indictment in New York and is now in Georgia to promote her stance against the former president.

The atmosphere seems quiet and organized, those present express hope that violence can be avoided.

The prison area has been surrounded by local police and also by security guards from the jail itself. Many streets leading to the jail are closed off and it is impossible to get in front of the prison on a vehicle. Helicopters periodically circle in the airspace above the prison. Moreover, the internet connection is non-existent or of very poor quality in the area surrounding the jail.

Meanwhile, Atlanta's downtown area is quiet, with one police car standing in the center's main park. Local residents told Sputnik's correspondent that they are aware of Trump's visit but do not express any strong emotions about the event.

The authorities allowed people who came, including the numerous media representatives present, to stay in allocated areas of the territory near the prison parking lot. At the same time, with the exception of numerous law enforcement officers, no inspection activities were organized on the spot to check people for possible firearms or other dangerous items.

Former US President Donald Trump will report to the Fulton County Jail in Atlanta on Thursday to surrender to authorities and be arrested on charges of interfering in elections in the US state of Georgia.

The upcoming arrest will be the fourth for the ex-president after Washington, New York, and Miami, where Trump appeared in court on charges of reviewing the results of the 2020 presidential election, illegal possession of classified materials, and falsifying business documents when processing payments for concealing compromising information.

Unlike the previous three cases, on the day of the "surrender" to the authorities, Trump will not appear in court. The first hearing in this case is scheduled for the week of September 5, and the arrest itself takes place in a prison, not in the courthouse.

Trump is expected to undergo a formal arrest procedure that includes a search, mugshot, and fingerprinting. After being released on bail, Trump is expected to leave Atlanta until at least the first court hearing in September.

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US Military Must Enhance Incentives to Attract Gen-Z Recruits - Ex-Pentagon Analyst

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) - The US military will continue to suffer from recruiting shortages, especially among the Generation Z demographic, unless it offers better salaries and other incentives, former Defense Department analyst and retired US Air Force Lieutenant Colonel, Karen Kwiatkowski, told Sputnik.

The US Army, Navy, and Air Force are likely to miss recruiting goals for the second year in a row just as Pentagon data shows the number of young Americans interested in joining the military shrinking.

"Given the US military's current dubious track record of winning wars and helping average Americans, it will have to pay and reward recruits in a way that draws out more qualified recruits... [and] targeted bonuses based on competence will need to be offered and enhanced," Kwiatkowski said.

Amid the waning popularity of the military, she added, US leadership must recognize that Gen-Z, those 25 and under, need to be offered real added value or they will find better options. Many of them who pay attention to the US military notice that service senior leadership is less competent, more elitist, and less trustworthy than it was in previous decades, Kwiatkowski said. Not to mention, most Americans, including many veterans, are not impressed with the Pentagon's history of failure in conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, and elsewhere, the former Defense Department official said.

And spending hundreds of billions to spark a war with nuclear powers halfway around the world, without public explanation, she added, will make it a challenge to recruit the traditional American teenager.

Kwiatkowski, commenting on reports the Pentagon may let military test applicants use calculators, said making the entrance exams easier to take will only cause bigger problems.

"We see another lowering of intelligence and comprehension standards, which will in turn contribute to a weaker military - one that is more difficult to be a part of, and to lead," she said.

Kwiatkowski suggested the Army and the other services themselves do not really know how many recruits they really need in part because the Pentagon is running a jobs program rather than defending the nation.

"Pentagon bureaucrats operate much as the Soviet Union and Communist China did in the past - using unrealistic bureaucratic 'five-year plans' that may temporarily serve the leadership, but not the core mission. Perhaps the recruiting targets themselves are far too high for the real defense that is being accomplished," Kwiatkowski said.

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UPDATE - F-16 Training for Ukrainian Pilots to Begin in October in Tucson, Arizona – Pentagon

(Updates with additional details, background in paras 5-7)

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) - The United States will start training Ukrainian pilots on F-16 aircraft in October after their English language training in September, Pentagon spokesperson Pat Ryder said on Thursday.

"The United States will soon begin training Ukrainians to fly and maintain F-16 fighter aircraft in support of the international effort to develop and strengthen Ukraine's long-term defenses," Ryder said. "Following English language training for pilots in September, F-16 flying training is expected to begin in October at Morris Air National Guard Base in Tucson, Arizona, facilitated by the Air National Guard's 100 and 62nd wing."

Ryder went on to say that the Pentagon is anticipating that all the pilots coming to the United States will require some level of additional English language instruction to fly these aircraft.

"We will remain in close consultation with the Danes, the Dutch, and other allies to ensure US

training complements the broader coalition training," he added.

According to Ryder, the Pentagon foresaw in advance that the training capacity of Denmark and the Netherlands would be exhausted quite quickly and therefore decided to conduct training in the United States instead of Europe.

Earlier in the day, Norwegian media reported that the country will become the third provider of F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine. Later in the day, Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store confirmed that the government intended to deliver jets to Ukraine.

On Monday, Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said that Denmark would send 19 F-16s to Kiev, while Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that the Netherlands had pledged to supply another 42. During a meeting with Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis in Athens, Zelenskyy also said that Greece had offered to train Ukrainian pilots to fly F-16 fighter jets.

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Pentagon Says Ukraine Lacks Infrastructure to Operate US F-16 Fighter Jets

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) - Ukraine currently lacks the necessary infrastructure and training to operate United States-provided F-16 fighter jets, Pentagon Press Secretary Pat Ryder said on Thursday.

"The short answer is no," Ryder said during a press briefing, when asked whether Ukraine has the necessary infrastructure to operate F-16s.

Ukraine also lacks the training to maintain and sustain F-16 operations, Ryder said. The US will ensure at the appropriate time that Ukraine has the ground equipment needed to operate the fighter jets from Ukrainian airfields, Ryder added.

Earlier on Thursday, Ryder announced that the US will begin training Ukrainians to fly and maintain F-16s, following English-language lessons.

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Wagner Forces Now Not a 'Significant Factor' in Ukraine Conflict - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) - The Wagner group is no longer a significant factor in the Ukraine conflict, Pentagon spokesperson Pat Ryder said on Thursday.

"The Wagner forces essentially were Russia's most effective combat forces on the battlefield," Ryder said, adding that after the mutiny attempt, most were removed from the battlefield and some relocated to Belarus. "For all intents and purposes, their combat effectiveness has been diminished and they are no longer a significant factor when it comes to the conflict inside Ukraine."

On Wednesday, the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations said an Embraer Legacy private airplane en route from Moscow to St. Petersburg crashed in Russia's Tver Region, killing all ten

people on board. The Russian Federal Air Transport Agency confirmed late on Wednesday that Wagner Group chief Yevgeny Prigozhin was among the passengers on board the flight.

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Ukraine to Get F-16s From European Allies Within Months, Not Weeks – Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) – Denmark and the Netherlands will start the transfer of F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine within the upcoming months, not weeks following the appropriate training of pilots in the United States, Pentagon spokesperson Pat Ryder said on Thursday.

“I don't want to speculate on when F-16 aircraft will be delivered other than you've heard us say that when training is complete, the Europeans are looking to provide F-16 aircraft and the United States will support that effort through the third-party transfer process. So, we are talking months, not weeks, obviously,” Ryder said during a press briefing.

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F-16 Training For Ukrainian Pilots To Begin In October In Tucson, Arizona - Pentagon

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"The United States will soon begin training Ukrainians to fly and maintain F 16 fighter aircraft in support of the international effort to develop and strengthen Ukraine's long-term defenses," Ryder said. "Following English language training for pilots in September, F- 16 flying training is expected to begin in October at Morris Air National Guard Base in Tucson, Arizona, facilitated by the Air National Guard's 100 and 62nd wing."

Ryder went on to say that they are anticipating that all the pilots coming to the United States will require some level of additional English language instruction required to fly these aircraft.

"We will remain in close consultation with the Danes, the Dutch and other allies to ensure us training complements the broader coalition training," he added.

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Trump Says He Will Surrender in Atlanta, Georgia at 7:30 p.m. ET (11:30 GMT)

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump said on Thursday he will surrender to authorities in Atlanta, Georgia, at 7:30 p.m. (11:30 GMT) in connection to his

alleged role in an election interference scheme.

"I have to start getting ready to head down to Atlanta, Georgia, where Murder and other Violent Crimes have reached levels never seen before, to get ARRESTED by a Radical Left, Lowlife District Attorney, Fani Willis, for A PERFECT PHONE CALL, and having the audacity to challenge a RIGGED & STOLEN ELECTION. THE EVIDENCE IS IRREFUTABLE! ARREST TIME: 7:30 P.M.," Trump said in a statement.

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G7 Foreign Ministers Condemn DPRK's Launch Using Ballistic Missile Technology

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) – Foreign Ministers of the G7 countries, in a joint statement on Friday, condemned in the strongest terms North Korea's launch using ballistic missile technology.

"We, the G7 Foreign Ministers of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and the High Representative of the European Union, condemn in the strongest terms North Korea's launch using ballistic missile technology conducted on August 24, 2023. This launch is a clear, flagrant violation of multiple United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCRs) and poses a grave threat to regional and international peace and stability," the statement said.

The ministers accused Pyongyang of intensifying escalatory actions through a record number of ballistic missile launches despite multiple calls from the international community. Such behavior only confirms DPRK's determination to develop nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities, they added.

"We once again reiterate our demand that North Korea abandon its nuclear weapons, existing nuclear programs, and any other weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programs in a complete, verifiable, and irreversible manner and fully comply with all obligations under the relevant UNSCRs," the statement said, calling on North Korea to engage in meaningful diplomacy without preconditions.

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Pentagon Says Prigozhin Likely Killed in Plane Crash, No Evidence Missile Used

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) - The United States assesses that a surface-to-air missile was not used to down a plane likely carrying private military company Wagner Group founder Evgeny Prigozhin over Russia, Pentagon Press Secretary Pat Ryder said on Thursday.

"Our initial assessment is that it's likely Prigozhin was killed," Ryder said during a press briefing, when asked about the incident. "We don't have any information to indicate right now the press reporting stating that there was some type of surface-to-air missile that took down the plane. We

assess that information to be inaccurate.”

On Wednesday, a plane on which Prigozhin was listed as a passenger crashed in Russia's Tver region, killing everyone on board.

The US is continuing to assess the situation, Ryder added.

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Justice Department Sues SpaceX, Accuses Company of Discriminatory Hiring Decisions - DOJ

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) - The Justice Department filed a lawsuit against SpaceX, the American spacecraft manufacturer and satellite communications company based in California, for the company's alleged discriminatory hiring practices, court documents showed on Thursday.

The suit alleges that SpaceX discouraged asylees and refugees from applying for positions and refused to consider these people for employment on the basis of their citizenship status, which the DOJ argues is in violation of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA).

"Asylees and refugees have overcome many obstacles in their lives, and unlawful employment discrimination based on their citizenship status should not be one of them," wrote Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke of the DOJ's civil rights division.

The suit alleges that an investigation into the company's operations revealed SpaceX also wrongly said in job postings and public statements that it could only hire US Citizens and lawful permanent residents, citing export control laws and federal regulations.

One such public statement is a 2020 tweet from CEO Elon Musk asserting that in order to be employed at SpaceX one must have at least a green card under US law, a statement the DOJ alleges was untrue.

The Justice Department maintains that asylees and refugees are as employable by SpaceX as US citizens and permanent residents under the International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR), which governs the kinds of manufacturing and exporting SpaceX is involved in.

The suit follows public concern over CEO Elon Musk's security clearance amid reports of the tech billionaire's use of the drug ketamine.

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US State Dept. on BRICS Expansion: Countries Free to Choose With Whom to Associate

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) - The United States believes that countries are free to choose partners and groupings with whom to associate and will continue to develop bilateral and multilateral relations, a US State Department spokesperson said on Thursday.

"The United States reiterates its belief that countries may choose the partners and groupings with whom they will associate. We will continue to work with our partners and allies in bilateral,

regional, and multilateral fora to strengthen our shared prosperity and uphold global peace and security," the spokesperson said in a statement.

Earlier on Thursday, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Ethiopia, Argentina and Egypt were invited to join BRICS amid the group's ongoing summit.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said that the admission of the six new members to BRICS is the first phase in the process of the group's expansion.

BRICS unites the world's largest developing economies - Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

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Russia's Sovereign Assets in US, France, Germany to Remain Frozen - White House

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) - Russia's sovereign assets in the United States, France, Germany and the United Kingdom will remain frozen until Moscow pays for damage to Ukraine amid its special military operation there, the White House said on Thursday.

"National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan convened the Quint national security advisors of France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom at the White House today," the White House said in a press release. "The national security advisors stressed that Russia's sovereign assets in their nations' jurisdictions will remain immobilized until Russia pays for the damage it has caused to Ukraine, and examined further ways to hold Russia accountable for the destruction."

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Land Routes Can Never Provide Grain Tonnage Available Through Black Sea - US Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, August 23 (Sputnik) - Existing land routes for grain deliveries can never match the capacity that was available via the United Nations-brokered grain exports agreement, formally known as the Black Sea Initiative, US Ambassador to the world body Linda Thomas-Greenfield said on Thursday.

"Land routes have already been used but they can never provide the tonnage, the capacity that was available through the Black Sea," Thomas-Greenfield said.

Earlier on Thursday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres that Russia will return to the Black Sea Initiative if all obligations toward Moscow under the agreement are met.

Moscow announced in July that it would not renew the Black Sea Initiative because the portions of the agreement pertaining to Russia were not implemented.

The agreement stipulates Russian food and fertilizer exports would be exempted from Western

sanctions but the restrictions were never lifted.

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Ottawa Announces Appointment of New Ambassador to Ukraine - Global Affairs Canada

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) - Ottawa has appointed Nataalka Cmoc to replace Larisa Galadza as its ambassador to Ukraine, Global Affairs Canada said in a statement on Thursday.

"I would like to express my most sincere thanks to Larisa Galadza, who has done a tremendous job in building and fostering an excellent relationship with Ukraine over the last four years, and I would like to congratulate Nataalka Cmoc, who will continue this important work over the coming years," Foreign Affairs Minister Melanie Joly said in the statement.

The appointment of Cmoc, a career expert on Ukraine with deep ties to the Ukrainian community in Canada, reflects Ottawa's commitment to its important relationship with Kiev, the statement said.

Cmoc will serve as Canada's eyes and ears in Ukraine as Ottawa continues to support the country's war effort against Russia's special military operation, the statement said.

Cmoc holds a Master's degree in Forensic Anthropology from the University of Toronto. She worked as counselor for technical cooperation at the US embassy to Ukraine in the period 2011-2013, and later joined Canada's Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force in 2014 when she was tasked with establishing the first security programming in Ukraine, the statement added.

Cmoc also served as director general in the Science and Parliamentary Infrastructure Branch at Public Services and Procurement Canada since 2020, according to the statement.

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Fulton County DA Proposes October 23, 2023 Trial Date for Trump, 18 Co-Defendants - Filing

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) - Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis is requesting that a trial against former US President Donald Trump and 18 co-defendants start on October 23, 2023, according to a court document filed Thursday.

"The State of Georgia... respectfully requests that this Court specially set a trial in this case to commence for all 19 defendants on October 23, 2023," the filing said.

Earlier this month, prosecutors requested a trial start in March 2024 to resolve charges linked to alleged efforts to overturn the 2020 US presidential election results. Trump's attorneys have instead asked the trial begin in April 2026.

Trump is facing criminal charges while also pursuing the Republican Party nomination for the 2024 presidential election.

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UN Peacekeepers Withdrawal From Mali May Be Slowed by Niger Coup - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, August 24 (Sputnik) - The withdrawal of peacekeepers from the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) may be slowed down in light of the coup in Niger due to the country being a repatriation route, Associate Spokesperson for the Secretary-General Florencia Soto Nino said on Thursday.

"We know that this could have a significant impact on the withdrawal process, in the sense that Niger is one of the routes for repatriating personnel and equipment, and obviously when a country's borders are shut down, we can't do that," Nino said during a press briefing.

The situation in Niger might oblige the UN mission to find alternate evacuation routes, something that would undeniably pose several complications to its withdrawal from Mali, Nino said.

Nino declined to comment on the possible implications the death of private military company Wagner Group chief Yevgeny Prigozhin on MINUSMA's repatriation process.

On June 30, the UN Security Council unanimously voted to end MINUSMA and fully withdraw by the end of 2023.

The decision came after the Malian government asked the United Nations to urgently withdraw its mission from the country. The government said MINUSMA's ten-year presence in Mali failed to adequately respond to the security situation there and contributed to the escalating tensions.

Earlier in August, MINUSMA announced that it would expedite its withdrawal from Mali due to the worsening security situation there.

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US Imposes Sanctions on 11 People, 1 Entity in Russia - Treasury

(Updates with more details in paras 5-8)

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed sanctions on 11 individuals in Russia, the US Treasury Department said on Thursday.

Sanctions have also been imposed on the International Children's Center Artek, the Treasury Department said in a notice.

The US government designated the Prime Minister of the Chechen Republic Muslim Khuchiev and the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Chechen Republic Mansur Soltaev, the notice said.

In addition, sanctions have also been imposed on Aymani Kadyrova, the mother of Ramzan Kadyrov, the notice said.

The State Department issued a statement announcing visa restrictions for the 11 individuals.

The State Department said in the statement that Artek was designated for direct or indirect engagement in activities that "undermine the peace, security, political stability, or territorial

integrity" of the United States, its allies or its partners.

In addition, the Akhmat Kadyrov Foundation was sanctioned for alleged involvement in the "re-education" of Ukrainian children in camps outside of Grozny, the statement said.

Imposing sanctions leads to freezing all assets of designated people and entities under US control. US persons are prohibited from conducting any transactions with them, the statement added.

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Russian Envoy to UN Says Ukrainian-Language Speech to Security Council Violates Rules

UNITED NATIONS, August 24 (Sputnik) - Russian Ambassador to the UN Vasily Nebenzia said on Thursday that a Ukrainian-language speech delivered to the UN Security Council was a political gesture that violated the organization's rules.

During the meeting, Ukrainian activist Mykola Kuleba delivered a speech to the council in the Ukrainian language, for which an official translation could not be provided.

"I wish to draw attention to the fact that today we have borne witness to an egregious violation of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council by the United States' presidency," Nebenzia said during a UN Security Council meeting. "This was a political gesture."

The council's rules require that statements be delivered in one of the official languages of the organization, Nebenzia said. The briefer speaks "perfectly well" in English and Russian, Nebenzia added.

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Chinese Envoy to UN Says Cluster Munitions Could Lead to Humanitarian Disasters in Ukraine

UNITED NATIONS, August 24 (Sputnik) - The use of cluster munitions in Ukraine could result in humanitarian disasters in the country, Chinese Ambassador to the United Nations Zhang Jun said on Thursday.

"The irresponsible transfer and use of cluster munitions could easily give rise to humanitarian disasters," Zhang said during a UN Security Council meeting on the conflict in Ukraine.

Earlier this month, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said that the organization stands firmly against the use of cluster munitions anywhere in the world.

The United States decided to supply Ukraine with cluster munitions despite criticism of the weapon by countries around the world. Ukraine has provided the US with information indicating the proper use of cluster munitions so far, the Pentagon said last week.

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

China Warns Against 'Adding Fuel' to Ukraine Conflict by Supplying Weapons – UN Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, August 24 (Sputnik) – Chinese Ambassador to the United Nations Zhang Jun said on Thursday that countries should avoid “adding fuel” to the ongoing Ukrainian conflict by sending weapons to the battlefield and imposing unilateral sanctions.

“What should be avoided is to add fuel to fire, to continue supplying weapons to the battlefield, to escalate unilateral sanctions, and to take any action that could cause the war to spiral out of control,” Zhang said during a UN Security Council meeting on Ukraine.

Zhang underscored that the Ukrainian crisis has once again demonstrated that the practices of the Cold War mentality of provoking bloc confrontation and seeking absolute security do not work.

The Chinese envoy also discouraged countries from following Cold War logic when seeking a final settlement of the Ukrainian crisis, saying this would bring endless instability to the region.

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China Expects All Parties to Work for Early Resumption of Grain Deal – UN Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, August 24 (Sputnik) – China expects all parties to work through dialogue and consultation to resume grain and fertilizer exports from both Russia and Ukraine, Chinese Ambassador to the United Nations Zhang Jun said on Thursday.

“The Black Sea Grain Initiative should not be easily abandoned. We expect all parties to strive for the early resumption of the grain and fertilizer exports from Russia and Ukraine through dialogue and consultation,” Zhang said during a UN Security Council meeting on Ukraine.

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US Imposes Sanctions on 11 People, 1 Entity in Russia - Treasury

(Updates with more details in paras 3, 4)

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed sanctions on 11 individuals in Russia, the US Treasury Department said on Thursday.

Sanctions have also been imposed on the International Children Center Artek, the Treasury Department said in a notice.

The US government designated the Prime Minister of the Chechen Republic Muslim Khuchiev and the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Chechen Republic Mansur Soltaev, the notice said.

In addition, sanctions have also been imposed on Aymani Kadyrova, the mother of Ramzan Kadyrov, the notice said.

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US House Republicans Launch Probe into Fulton County District Attorney – Letter

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) – House Republicans launched a probe on Thursday into the motivations of Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis for indicting former US President Donald Trump, according to a letter addressed to her.

“Your indictment and prosecution implicate substantial federal interests, and the circumstances surrounding your actions raise serious concerns about whether they are politically motivated,” the letter from the House Committee on the Judiciary Chairman Jim Jordan stated.

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US Renews Export Controls On Russian National Accused of Supplying US Tech to Russia, DPRK

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) – The United States has renewed its export restrictions on a Russian national accused of supplying US-made technology to Russia and North Korea, Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Export Enforcement Matthew Axelrod said in a notice in the Federal Register.

The measures target Russian national Ilya Balakaev and his company Radiotester LLC. The Justice Department in February charged Balakaev with five federal counts related to alleged smuggling of devices commonly used in counterintelligence operations.

“I find that renewal of this order is necessary in the public interest to prevent an imminent violation of the Regulations,” Axelrod said in a notice set to be published in the federal register on Friday. “This Order is effective immediately and shall remain in effect for 180 days.”

The US denied export privileges of Balakaev and Radiotester on February 24, 2023, the same day that the Justice Department unsealed its indictment against the businessman.

Axelrod said a Commerce Department investigation had uncovered the existence of an “illicit procurement network” conspiring to violate US export control laws by “unlawfully procuring and shipping” controlled counterintelligence items to Russia and North Korea.

The order restricts Balakaev and Radiotester from participating in transactions involving any commodity, software or technology exported or to be exported from the United States that is subject to the US Export Administration Regulations (EAR).

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US Imposes Sanctions On 11 People, 1 Entity in Russia – Treasury Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) – The United States imposed sanctions on 11 individuals in Russia, the Department of the Treasury said on Thursday.

Restrictions were also imposed against the International Children Center Artek, the notice added.

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UN Says Concerned About Ukrainian Attacks on Russian Border Towns

UNITED NATIONS, August 24 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is concerned about Ukrainian strikes on towns deep inside Russia and near its border with Ukraine, UN Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo said on Thursday.

"We are also concerned about the possible impact on civilians of the shelling of Russian border communities and drone attacks deep inside Russia, including Moscow," DiCarlo said during a UN Security Council meeting.

Attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure are indefensible and prohibited under international law, DiCarlo said.

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World Becoming Multipolar, Strong Multilateral Institutions Needed for Stability– Guterres

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) - The world is becoming multipolar and this is a "good thing," but it is not enough without global governance institutions that could bring the world community together to combat the challenges it faces, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Thursday.

"The world is becoming multipolar and that is a good thing, but the experience of the past shows that multipolarity is not enough. You need to have some global governance institutions, multilateral institutions to be able to bring together the international community in addressing these challenges," Guterres said during a press briefing on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in South Africa.

According to Guterres, the world is currently facing a host of "enormous" challenges, including climate change, a cost-of-living crisis, and a dramatic increase in poverty, hunger, and inequality around the globe.

Earlier in the day, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Ethiopia, Argentina, and Egypt were invited to join BRICS by its leaders. Commenting on the organization's decision to include members, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov noted that the expanded BRICS will become one of the key pillars of the future fair multipolar world order based on United Nations principles.

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Trump Changes Lead Counsel in Georgia Criminal Case – Court Filing

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) – Former US President Donald Trump changed his lead counsel in his Georgia criminal case on Thursday, according to a court filing.

“Steven H. Sadow hereby enters his appearance as lead counsel of record for Donald John Trump,” the filing stated.

The change was announced just hours before Trump was expected to be arraigned at the Fulton County Jail.

Trump and 18 co-defendants face 41 criminal counts related to their attempts to overturn the 2020 presidential election in Georgia.

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About 90 Democratic Lawmakers Urge Biden to Do More to Address Student Debt – Letter

WASHINGTON, August 24 (Sputnik) – Eighty-seven Democratic members of Congress urged US President Joe Biden to use all tools at his disposal to address the pressing issue of student debt relief as millions of Americans are unable to pay a total of more than \$1.6 trillion owed, according to a letter published by NBC on Thursday.

“Although the Supreme Court has chosen to stand in the way of your initial student debt relief plan, we recognize that as President of the United States, you have additional tools to provide relief,” the letter said. “We urge you to continually find ways to use your authority to bring down student debt, address the rising cost of college, and make postsecondary education affordable for all students who choose that path.”

The lawmakers said in the letter that they remain “gravely concerned” about the Education Department's projections that without additional relief, student debt delinquencies and defaults will spike once repayment resumes in October following a more than three-and-a-half-year pause on loans and interest payments due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Borrowers have already waited nearly a year for the relief you announced in August 2022, and critics of your plan to help 43 million Americans are likely to renew their attacks with regard to your rule-making announcement. We urge you to reject their bad-faith, partisan attempts to delay relief and carry out your efforts to help borrowers as quickly as possible,” the letter reads. In June, the US Supreme Court struck down Biden's plan to discharge \$10,000-\$20,000 in

eligible borrowers' debt through the Higher Education Relief Opportunities for Students (HEROES) Act of 2003, a move that was projected to cost approximately \$430 billion, according to a Congressional Budget Office estimate. Responding to the ruling, Biden said he would pursue other paths to provide student debt relief to as many borrowers as possible as quickly as possible.

On Tuesday, the Biden Administration launched a new more affordable student loan repayment program that will cut in half undergraduate loan payments and save borrowers about \$1,000 a year.