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British Museum Director Resigns Amid Scandal Over Stolen Artifacts

Hartwig Fischer announced on Friday he would step down as director of the British Museum after seven years at the helm of the London historical institution. The resignation is connected to Fischer's poor handling of revelations that artifacts had been stolen from the museum.

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"Over the last few days I have been reviewing in detail the events around the thefts from the British Museum and the investigation into them. It is evident that the British Museum did not respond as comprehensively as it should have in response to the warnings in 2021, and to the problem that has now fully emerged. The responsibility for that failure must ultimately rest with the director," he said in a statement.

He also offered an apology to antiques dealer Ittai Gradel for dismissing his claims and saying there was "no evidence to substantiate the allegations" that objects stolen from the museum were being sold on eBay.

"The situation facing the Museum is of the utmost seriousness. I sincerely believe it will come through this moment and emerge stronger, but sadly I have come to the conclusion that my presence is proving a distraction," Fischer continued.

"That is the last thing I would want. Over the last seven years I have been privileged to work with some of the most talented and dedicated public servants. The British Museum is an amazing institution, and it has been the honor of my life to lead it."

Fischer's resignation comes after revelations in 2021 that several treasures held by the museum had been stolen and sold online. After Gradel made the discovery and warned the museum, he accused Fischer of "sweeping it all under the carpet" in a subsequent investigation.

The stolen items dated from the 15th Century BC to the 19th Century AD and included gold, jewelry, and gems made of semi-precious stones, most of which were kept in a storeroom, not on the museum floor. More than 1,500 items are missing and none have been recovered as of yet.

Gradel told UK media earlier this month that he had "suffered horribly" after the British Museum "refused to listen" to his warnings for two years. Fortunately, Gradel's persistence paid off.

Last week, the popular London historical attraction fired several staff in connection with the thefts, although no charges have been levied against anyone for the thefts.

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Former CIA Analyst: Sarkozy Can Say 'I Told You So' on Ukraine This Winter as Europeans Freeze

A former top US intel analyst told Sputnik that while those in the Western halls of power might object to Sarkozy's frank assessment of their proxy war in Ukraine, soon the wisdom of his words would be proven as they are forced to choose between peaceful coexistence with Russia or supplying Kiev with tactical nuclear weapons as Europeans freeze.

Former French President Nicolas Sarkozy recently attracted ire from Western ideologues for pointing out that Europe and Russia will have to live together after the present conflict in Ukraine is over and that the only way to end that conflict is to recognize that Moscow has legitimate security concerns and red lines.

Radio Sputnik spoke about the situation with Ray McGovern, who served as a CIA analyst for 27 years, during which his duties included chairing the National Intelligence Estimates and preparing the President's Daily Brief. In January of 2003, he co-created Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

"I think he's a little late to the party talking about that, but better late than never. You'll recall that what [former US Defense Secretary] Donald Rumsfeld called pejoratively 'Old Europe', like France and Germany, they wouldn't cooperate with the attack on Iraq because they didn't believe there were any weapons of mass destruction there. Can you believe that? Well, it turns out they had it right. So 'Old Europe' may come to the fore again. And Sarkozy is just the first hint of this," he told The Critical Hour hosts Garland Nixon and Wilmer Leon.

"It's going to be a very long, cold winter in Europe, 'Old Europe', as well as 'New Europe' - the New Europe being Poland - all the ones that are militating for a real, real battle with Russia, the Baltic states, for example. And when people kind of realize because they feel cold - in other words, they feel something physical to all this - they're going to ask: 'well, why is it that we don't have cheap Russian gas anymore?' 'Why is it that the sanctions are hurting us more than they're hurting the Russians?' 'Why is it that we can't even sell much to Russia anymore?' They're going to ask these questions, and Sarkozy is going to be the wise man. He's going to say, 'well, I told you so', and maybe, just maybe, these politicians that are really pretty, pretty unknowledgeable - political hacks is what we're going to call them - that are now in charge in Berlin and in Paris, may be on their way out," McGovern said. "I think that may happen as soon as it gets cold."

"Truth be told, Ukraine can't last another week without extensive US financial support. Congress is beginning to wake up now. It's going to be an election year. There are strict limits as to how much more support Congress is going to appropriate for Ukraine. Isn't \$115 billion enough? And what did it buy? A bunch of destroyed Western equipment and an offensive that petered out - the celebrated counteroffensive by Ukrainian forces. It's going to come to a hard reality in the West. And you know, just as with Vietnam - just as with Nicaragua, for God's sake - once the Congress wakes up and listens to the people and then the people say, 'well, you know, couldn't this money, couldn't these billions be spent to help our schools, to pay our teachers, to keep people out of poverty?' That's going to be an election-year issue. So I don't think Zelensky is very long for this world or it remains to be seen how they get rid of him," McGovern said.

The former CIA analyst turned to a particular statement by Sarkozy in which he said that the two sides should engage in discussion “to see at least if we can get out of it other than by annihilating either Ukraine or Russia.”

McGovern called it a “poor choice of words,” but noted that doing just that has always been the goal of Western support for Ukraine since the 2014 Euromaidan coup that brought the present ultra-nationalist government into power.

“He or she who would annihilate Russia will be in turn, quickly annihilated,” McGovern pointed out. “So there is a degree of unreality here. Now, you’re quite right in pointing out that by stressing the Russian aspect of this thing, it all comes home to roost. And you don’t have to look any farther than that our defense secretary [Lloyd] Austin remarked several months ago that the name of the game here is to weaken Russia. As a matter of fact, what he said was, ‘we’re going to move heaven and earth to weaken Russia through this.’”

“And now we have other people saying, ‘yeah, well, the Ukrainians still have some young kids and some old guys like me, we’ll throw them into battle and see what happens’. That’s awfully cynical. And worse still, we have headlines that are saying, ‘you know, it looks like the Ukrainians are getting a little cowardly, they’re showing casualty averseness, they are averse to casualties’. My God. I mean, is it 300,000, conservatively estimated? Isn’t that enough? There have got to be more casualties? You know, they’re proving the truth of the early adage that ‘we’re going to fight this thing till the last Ukrainian,’” McGovern said.

The hosts asked McGovern about a recent article in which he suggested that US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan might resort to “mini-nukes” like the low-yield tactical nuclear warheads the US has developed in recent years if all other attempts to defeat Russia by arming Ukraine with conventional weapons fail.

“What we have here is a really ridiculous situation where they decided on [giving Ukraine] cluster bombs. My God, 111 countries in this world came out against cluster bombs many years ago. So what’s next? Nukes? No. Mini-nukes? Would Sullivan and Blinken and [Undersecretary of State Victoria] Nuland opt for mini-nukes rather than to lose?”

“My point here is they have a personal stake in this. And that is that the election is coming up, and there’s a lot of evidence that not only Hunter Biden, but his dad too, were deep into bribery and graft. Okay. Blinken started this campaign where 51 intelligence managers said, ‘[the story about] Hunter’s laptop smells of Russian disinformation. All the earmarks of a Russian [op]’. Okay, so who did that? Blinken did that and it’s provable. Now, how about Sullivan? He’s responsible for the whole Russiagate thing. In other words: the DNC hack? There was none - and it’s provable now by sworn testimony. So all four of these guys have to worry about,” McGovern said, suggesting an incoming Republican administration might seek to prosecute them.

“Now, this is not something I joke about. This is a real personal thing now. These guys have a personal incentive to make sure they don’t lose so badly in Ukraine that they lose the election and suffer the fate of what I think an incoming Republican president, whatever his name is, will wage on them.”

McGovern noted that there are some speculation and rumors that one reason Biden has pushed so hard to keep Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky’s government alive is that Kiev has some kind of damning dirt on the Bidens, especially concerning Hunter’s time on the board of

Burisma, a gas company that did business in Ukraine and which was investigated by the Ukrainian government.

"I certainly wouldn't rule it out. I mean, unless they burned all the information as soon as Zelensky came in, the records on Burisma and all that skullduggery that was going on there, they must indicate what our Congress is now unveiling. And that is, you know, all kinds of bribery took place. And, you know, you don't give a guy like Hunter Biden a job on the board of Burisma and pay millions of dollars unless you're getting something for it."

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Academic: Pacific Drills by US, Allies Seek to Reassert Bygone 'Glory Days of Cold War'

US posturing in the Indo-Pacific region is based on attempts to revive a late-20th-century logic that is extremely dangerous in the present climate, a political scientist told Sputnik. Would-be US allies in the region should be wary of joining such a project.

The United States and several of its allies in the Western Pacific have been holding a slew of large military drills in recent days, just after Biden assembled several of them to lay the foundations of yet another anti-China bloc.

The US, Japan, Australia and the Philippines assembled a large fleet of assault ships in the South China Sea for drills this week, including Japan's aviation destroyer JS Izumo, an aircraft carrier in all but name, Australia's amphibious assault ship HMAS Canberra, the Philippines' landing platform dock BRP Davao del Sur. Absent from the group was the USS Ronald Reagan aircraft carrier, which returned to port in Japan after conducting separate drills with many of the ships assembled for these exercises.

Meanwhile, South Korea has held its [biggest nationwide defense drills](#) in six years amid the annual Ulchi Freedom Shield exercises with the US, and US and Australian troops drilled in the Malabar exercises off Australia's east coast.

Last week, US President Joe Biden hosted the leaders of Japan and South Korea at Camp David outside Washington, DC, in an [attempt to lay the groundwork](#) for a new effort to isolate China.

Joe Siracusa, a political scientist and the dean of Global Futures at Curtin University, told Sputnik these kinds of maneuvers were borne of the "glory days of the Cold War," but clearly haven't been applicable in the modern world for decades.

"I've been writing about and talking about the trilateral meeting at Camp David. These kinds of exercises are important, and it reinforces the idea that America's trying to create a NATO-like shield in that part of the world as a deterrent to the Chinese. Now, deterrence is an objective. How you get there is called 'containment'. And so these military exercises - that is the Australian-Japanese exercises, the American-South Korean exercises - are all supposed to mesh together to produce sort of this monolithic approach to dealing with China," he explained. "My argument here is - and I've been a student of these things for over 50 years - is that deterrence, as it developed during the Cold War, never seemed to work perfectly after the Cold War. I mean, deterrence never stopped the North Koreans from doing what they were doing. It

never stopped the North Vietnamese to do what they were doing. In fact, it never stopped Russia from doing what it was doing in the 60s, 70s and 80s. And in other words, there's a great deal of investment and time and energy in this thing called 'deterrence' on the road to containment."

"Now, America's got bases all over the world. It's got all kinds of physical presence in South Korea and in Japan, though Japan doesn't want to see technically, legally, publicly American nuclear material coming into their bases. And they're quite sensitive about that kind of thing. I couldn't tell you why exactly, because the Japanese fought their own war in the Second World War, and they are too sensitive about anybody."

"In other words, we've got all these smaller alliances, and America encourages the Australians to work with the Japanese not as a substitute, but to reinforce their interoperability and maybe even one day their interchangeability," he noted.

"Australia is the southern flank of America's policy in the Pacific; Japan and South Korea are the northern flank. Whatever cooperation goes on there is part of creating this sort of monolithic approach to China. Now, will China take the bait? Well, at the end of the day, these alliances mean almost nothing, depending on who's in Washington. So you can have alliances, but you don't have leadership in Washington. None of it makes any sense. And if you get someone like Donald Trump coming back in 2024, this kind of effort is wasted," he noted, adding that the trilateral summit last week was supposed to "institutionalize" that cooperation.

Siracusa said he was concerned that in the coming years, nations like the US, China and Russia would be in direct danger of crossing each others' red lines - something extremely dangerous when the parties are all armed with nuclear weapons.

"So, America and Russia are going to have to learn how to do some things together," he said.

"America and China are going to have to learn how to do some things together."

"And these exercises are designed to send signals to China, particularly. I mean, people in America think that China and Russia are in bed together and Russia is now playing second fiddle to Chinese superpower status. That's nonsense. None of that is true. Absolutely, China has its own interests. Russia has its own interests as, indeed, NATO nations and America has its own interests. This idea that we're all on the same page, that's a bit of a stretch of the imagination."

"These particular exercises are designed to give weight to the American concept of containment. In the glory days of the Cold War it might have worked. It doesn't work now and it hasn't worked for the last 10 years. So in a way, if something doesn't work, it tends to be more provocative than defensive. So now we have to be very careful about who's red lines we cross in the South and the East China Sea."

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Scientists Suggest Orcas Not 'Attacking' Boats But 'Playing' as a Kind of Whale 'Cultural Fad'

A number of incidents have caught the attention of the media in recent months in which boats have suffered damage or even sunk during encounters with orcas. While these have been

almost invariably reported as “attacks,” scientists are urging the public not to demonize the whales.

A group of more than 30 marine scientists around the world have [signed an open letter](#) denouncing the media treatment of orcas in recent months, warning it could lead to hatred and violence toward the intelligent creatures akin to that which befell sharks after the release of the 1975 thriller film “Jaws.”

“We urge the media and public to avoid projecting narratives on to these animals. In the absence of further evidence, people should not assume they understand the animals’ motivations,” the scientists said, noting that wildlife should not be punished for exhibiting unusual behavior.

Since 2020, [dozens of incidents](#) involving Iberian orcas, a small population of orcas that live off the coast of Spain and Portugal and dine primarily on bluefin tuna, have resulted in the damaging or sinking of human vessels. They have included repeating head-to-hull contact and even bites being taken out of the boats. These have led to a [flurry of media reports](#) about “attacks” by “killer whales” - a popular name for orcas - and a [social media frenzy](#) suggesting the marine mammals are the latest part of mother nature to turn hostile to humanity.

A smaller left-wing subculture has also emerged suggesting the orcas [are potential allies](#) in the struggle of working people against the capitalist billionaire class.

“We are concerned that factual errors related to these interactions are being repeated in the media,” the scientists wrote. “We believe this narrative inappropriately projects human motivations on to these whales and we are concerned that perpetuating it will lead to punitive responses by mariners or managers.”

“Science cannot yet explain why the Iberian orcas are doing this, although we repeat that it is more likely related to play/socializing than aggression. However, it is unfounded and potentially harmful to the animals to claim it is for revenge for past wrongs or to promote some other melodramatic storyline.”

Indeed, it should be noted that a wild orca has not injured a human since 1972 and has never killed one of us. They are among the most intelligent creatures on the planet, one of a handful of species able to pass the mirror test demonstrating self-awareness. Each group of orcas develops its own distinct culture, dialect and hunting techniques.

Orcas are also massive creatures. Mature whales can measure 20 to 26 feet in length and weigh more than 6 tons each. Even newborn calves are nearly 8 feet long and weigh roughly 400 pounds just after birth.

Since these attacks have only concerned the tiny group of Iberian orcas, the scientists suggested the incidents could be a cultural phenomenon among the whales akin to a “fad.” Robert Pitman, a marine ecologist for the Marine Mammal Institute at Oregon State University who signed the letter, told UK media that Orcas “are intelligent, social creatures – they like diversions. My guess is this is just a passing fad, and they will lose interest if people don’t find a way to discourage them first.”

Here’s hoping the orcas don’t discover TikTok, or we could be in real trouble.

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Report: US 'Classified Forecast' Predicts Ukraine Counteroffensive Will Fail

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky confirmed the Ukraine counteroffensive had begun in early June. After a month of no significant advances, Zelensky was spurned at the NATO summit in Vilnius, leaving without a path to join NATO.

After more than two months of heavy losses and with very little to show for it, US media is reporting on a “classified forecast” from Washington that predicts Ukraine is unlikely to meet its goals in its counteroffensive.

Citing people “familiar with the document,” media reported that the classified document focuses on Ukraine’s goal of reaching Melitopol, which it says is a principal objective of Ukraine.

One reason cited for Ukraine’s failure is the Russian minefields, which have destroyed large numbers of armored vehicles and tanks. Russian forces have also been using distance mining equipment, quickly erasing what little gains are made in the minefields by Ukrainian forces. Melitopol is a major hub with two major highways and a railroad used to move Russian forces. If Ukraine managed to capture it, it would sever Russia’s land bridge to Crimea and split the Russian forces in the southern region of the conflict.

However, Ukraine has failed to capture the settlement Rabotino, their first major step on the road to Melitopol. In the fields east of Rabotino, Ukrainian forces suffered heavy losses, including large numbers of Western armored vehicles, giving it the nickname “Bradley Square” because of the large number of Bradley Fighting Vehicles that have been destroyed and abandoned in that area.

Ukraine recently deployed its 82nd Brigade from its reserves, said to be one of the last major fighting units available to Kiev. It includes some of the most advanced weapons provided to Ukraine from its Western benefactors, including Stryker and Marder Armored Personnel Carriers and Challenger 2 tanks. Already, Strykers have been destroyed east of Rabotino.

Between Rabotino and Melitopol sits nearly 50 miles of thick Russian defenses, and fortified settlements and cities.

The Ukraine counteroffensive largely never got off the ground. In the weeks leading up to it, significant forces attacked Russian positions but were consistently repelled leading to heavy losses for Ukraine, including Western equipment. Eventually, Ukraine admitted the counteroffensive had started but the losses continued to pile up.

Other fronts have likewise been tough on the Ukrainians. In Artemovsk, Ukraine has been putting a large portion of its best units but has failed to even reach the city. After weeks of fierce fighting and heavy casualties, they managed to enter the southern outskirts of nearby settlement Kleshcheyevka in late July, but have since been pushed out, essentially blocking any attempts to retake the city.

US media also claimed joint US, British and Ukrainian war games predicted Ukraine would suffer heavy casualties but hoped Ukrainian forces would be able to prevail regardless, effectively backing up a classified document leaked on Discord earlier this year that stated Ukraine was unprepared to take on Russian defenses.

However, it also backs up a report by Pulitzer-Prize-winning journalist Seymour Hersh who reported a US intelligence official told him the CIA informed Secretary of State Antony Blinken

that the Ukraine counteroffensive is unlikely to succeed. The official also said Blinken now realizes Ukraine cannot win the conflict.

Hersh further added that the official told him US President Joe Biden's national security adviser Jake Sullivan planned for the Jeddah Peace Summit to be a victory celebration for NATO nations. Instead, Hersh says it was a sparsely-attended event filled with most countries asking for food after the end of the grain deal.

Still, Hersh anticipates Biden will likely present a strong face to the American public even as "the end" nears. Earlier this week, the president asked Congress for an additional \$24 billion in funding for Ukraine, tying it to both border security funding and disaster relief in an attempt to entice Congress amid rapidly declining support for additional aid to Ukraine from the American public.

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Tens of Thousands Forced to Evacuate as Wildfires Rage Across Canada's Northwest

Nearly 34 million acres have burned in Canadian wildfires this year, an area larger than Nicaragua, easily topping any year in recorded history. Every province in Canada and parts of Alaska have been affected.

Hundreds of fires in Canada's Northwest Territories have led to the evacuation of the capital Yellowknife and other areas as the country battles the worst wildfire season in its recorded history.

At present, there are 230 fires raging in the sparsely populated Northwest Territories, and other areas have already been evacuated, affecting 60% of the territory's roughly 45,000 residents. "Residents living along the Ingraham Trail, in Dettah, Kam Lake, Grace Lake and Engle Business District are currently at highest risk and should evacuate as soon as possible. Other residents have until noon on Friday, August 18, 2023 to evacuate," Northwest Territories officials said in a Wednesday release.

One wildfire west of Yellowknife has already burned approximately 407,000 acres and is moving toward Yellowknife and the main highway in the area. Officials warned that residents may face significant smoke and air hazards while evacuating the area.

One Canadian resident told US media [the experience](#) was the most frightening of her life. "We hit a patch where we couldn't see any of the lines on the road. That lasted 45 minutes," Nadia Byrne told the outlet. "We had our N95s on and could barely breathe and our chest and lungs hurt."

Residents in the community of N'dilo have also been told to evacuate with officials adding that those who cannot leave by car can request an air evacuation.

A state of emergency has been declared for the entire territory, allowing officials to deploy resources without delay and the Canadian Armed Forces have been mobilized to support firefighters.

Meanwhile, there are over 360 fires ablaze in neighboring British Columbia, with more expected in the coming days due to high-pressure air that is expected to cause dry winds, high temperatures and lightning strikes, which have been the primary igniter of new fires.

A video of the town of Fort Smith, on the border of the Northwest Territories and Alberta, showing the sky a disturbing color of red has since gone viral. It was a scene reminiscent of footage in June of New York City's sky turning orange from smoke from the Canadian wildfires. That month, smoke blanketed much of the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic areas of the United States, with the smoke cloud later reaching the shores of Europe.

The wildfires are again affecting the air quality in the United States. An air quality alert has been issued through Monday for the entirety of Wisconsin, with conditions expected to get as bad as "red" or "unhealthy."

Minnesota initially issued a statewide air quality alert for Thursday and Friday, but that has been lifted for the southern regions of the state. Northern regions remain on alert and air quality is expected to reach "orange" or "unhealthy for sensitive groups" in the Twin Cities and other areas.

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Infamous Fyre Festival to Return Next Year After Disastrous Initial Launch

The infamous Fyre Music Festival in 2017 resulted in competing documentaries on Netflix and Hulu and with its founder receiving a six-year prison sentence.

If you missed out on paying thousands for a FEMA tent and cheese sandwiches in 2017, you may get another chance: Fyre Festival II has been announced and 100 pre-sale tickets have already sold out, according to the event's website.

Billy McFarland, the founder and organizer of the infamous Fyre music festival that became a viral disaster and the source of two hit documentaries, said in an Instagram post that he plans to try again by launching Fyre Fest II, which will take place somewhere in "The Caribbean" near the end of 2024.

McFarland says he developed the "50-page" plan during a seven-month stint in solitary confinement. He also contends he found other ways to profit off the Fyre Fest fiasco, claiming he is working with "one of the biggest and best TV companies" to produce a documentary titled "After the Fyre" and a production company to create "Fyre: The Broadway Musical."

"I wrote out this 50-page plan of how I would take this overall interest and demand in Fyre and how I would take my ability to bring people from around the world together to make the impossible happen," McFarland explained.

"We spoke to people as far away as the Middle East and South America. Ultimately, we decided that Fyre Festival II was coming back to The Caribbean," he said without giving details on exactly where in The Caribbean the event would take place. Last year, the Bahamas Ministry of Tourism said it would not endorse or approve of any event "associated with [McFarland]."

The presale tickets were listed at \$499 on the event's website, with prices increasing at different dates. The "last chance" presale tickets, listed as "coming soon" will go for \$7,999, according to the website. The site also has a variety of merchandise available for sale.

In 2017, McFarland and several A-list celebrities promoted the Fyre Music Festival, which was touted as the ultimate luxury music festival taking place on the Bahamian island of Exuma. Ticket holders were promised a star-studded lineup, including Blink-182, Pusha T and Lil Yachty. Rapper Ja Rule was also an investor and heavily promoted the event, along with A-list celebrities, social media influencers and models.

Instead of luxury villas and the "best in food, art, music and adventure," attendees were greeted with FEMA tents, chaos, and virtually every musical act canceling or declining to show. Images of "cheese sandwiches" went viral online and the event's advertised catering company said it was not serving the event.

There were also reports of looting and tents being burned. In the end, the event cost investors millions of dollars and resulted in no less than eight lawsuits. McFarland was sentenced to six years in prison on wire fraud charges and ordered to pay \$26 million in restitution. He was released early to a halfway house in 2022.

McFarland said at the time that he planned to "put together a team of good people for a solid plan to make amends and pay."

One class-action lawsuit brought by ticket holders resulted in a judgment of \$7,720 each, but after the estate's bankruptcy trustee was only able to recover \$1.4 million, much of which was spent on attorney fees. Plaintiffs in the case only received roughly \$280, a far cry from the \$1,200 to \$100,000 ticket price.

Gregory Messer, who oversaw the bankruptcy proceedings, complained that McFarland "provided no cooperation" in recovering funds and noted he kept "essentially no books and records" that would help him identify those who benefited from the scheme.

In an October 2020 podcast interview McFarland gave from prison, he admitted to having regrets about the event, and that he "knowingly lied to raise money for the festival." He was also found guilty of selling fraudulent tickets to the Met Gala, Burning Man and Coachella while out on bail on the Fyre Festival case.

The presiding judge said McFarland's "fraud, like a circle, had no ending," adding that she did not doubt that if he got out early, "he will be on to the next scam."

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India Shares New Images of Moon's South Pole After Historic Chandrayaan-3 Landing

Three other countries have successfully landed spacecraft on the moon: Russia, the United States and China. However, recent landmark accomplishment also marks India as the first country to land a spacecraft on the moon's south pole, an area that has become increasingly interesting for scientists.

As India becomes the fourth country to successfully land a spacecraft on the moon, the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) on Wednesday shared new images on X (formerly Twitter) documenting the Chandrayaan-3's Vikram lander touching down on the lunar surface. The first set of four images shared by the ISRO were taken as the lander approached the surface, with the agency later sharing an image from the lander on the surface.

"The communication link is established between the Ch-3 Lander and MOX-ISTRAC, Bengaluru," ISRO said [in a post](#) on X. "Chandrayaan-3 chose a relatively flat region on the lunar surface," the agency added in a later post.

Many suspect the rocks at the moon's poles may hold frozen water that could be used to support a permanent human settlement. The Chandrayaan-3 is also equipped with a small rover that will explore the area until it runs out of batteries; the ISRO does not expect it to last through the lunar's two-week night.

The space agency on Tuesday released images of the far side of the moon while it searched for a suitable landing spot.

The Chandrayaan-3 was India's second recent attempt to land on the moon. Its first, the Chandrayaan-2, crashed into the lunar surface in September 2019 due to a software glitch. The Chandrayaan-1 also crashed into the lunar surface but that was intentional.

Earlier this week, Russia attempted to land its Luna-25 ship near the south pole of the moon; however, the craft unexpectedly crashed. In May, a private Japanese company also accidentally crashed a lunar lander due to a software glitch.

Russia intends to launch a new spate of lunar missions in the near-future, with officials noting the Luna-25 crash provided "invaluable experience."

Russia's space agency Roscosmos congratulated India on the successful moon landing.

"The Roscosmos State Corporation congratulates Indian colleagues on the successful moon landing of the Chandrayaan-3 spacecraft. Exploration of the moon is important for all mankind, in the future it may become a platform for deep space exploration," the agency said in a statement.

On Friday, the Japanese Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) will attempt to become the fifth nation to land a spacecraft on the moon, though the landing spot for that craft will be in a crater next to the equator on the near side of the moon.

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North Korea's Second Attempt at Launching Military Satellite Proves Unsuccessful

The launch comes amid increasing tensions on the Korean peninsula, with the US and South Korea running joint military drills in the area and North Korea increasing its missile tests. North Korea's second attempt to launch a military satellite failed after an issue occurred during the rocket's third phase, state media revealed.

The failed launch, which was also confirmed by the South Korean military, took off from the North Phyongan Province around dawn on Thursday local time. The launch of the Malligyong-1 satellite was carried on a new type of carrier rocket, the Chollima-1.

"The flights of the first and second stages of the rocket were normal, but the launch failed due to an error in the emergency blasting system during the third-stage flight," North Korean state media reported, adding that the North's National Aerospace Development Administration (NADA) would investigate, something the agency said would not be "a big problem."

This was the second attempt by the North to launch a military reconnaissance satellite, often referred to as a spy satellite, in recent months. In May, an attempt failed after what NADA described as an "abnormal starting" of the second-stage engine.

South Korea has managed to salvage parts of that rocket but said it had no military value.

Vowing to continue launch efforts, North Korea's aerospace agency underscored it will try again in October.

Earlier [reports](#) released by both Japanese and South Korean authorities indicated the launch triggered momentary evacuation orders in Japan as the projectile flew towards the Pacific Ocean. Japan subsequently issued a protest against the incident.

The launch comes shortly after Japan, the United States and South Korea held a trilateral meeting in the United States where they reaffirmed their commitment to "strengthening trilateral responses to [Democratic People's Republic of Korea] threats," including ballistic missiles.

The attempt by North Korea to launch the military satellite also came during joint exercises between the South and the US called Operation Ulchi Freedom Shield, the largest exercises involving the two countries since the ceasefire that ended hostilities during the Korean War.

North Korea has repeatedly condemned the exercises, calling them a rehearsal for invasion.

A US State Department spokesperson told Sputnik the launch attempt violated United Nations Security Council resolutions.

"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. "Any DPRK launch that uses ballistic missile technology, which would include SLVs used to launch a satellite into space, violates multiple UN Security Council resolutions."

Military observers have noted that North Korea is likely developing a military reconnaissance satellite to help narrow the gap in intelligence gathering between it and South Korea and the US.

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Astronomers Spot Young Star Emitting Gamma-Rays, Giving Clues to Early Solar Systems

T. Tauri stars are newly formed and are known for their periodic and random fluctuations in brightness. Less than 10 million years old, they do not yet have nuclear fusion occurring in their core. The first discovered, also named T. Tauri, was found in the Taurus constellation.

Scientists from Argentina and Spain have found observable evidence of a young star emitting gamma radiation for the very first time.

The astronomers used the Fermi satellite telescope, which sees the universe in gamma-rays and observed a T. Tauri star emitting blasts of gamma radiation, which they note is the “most energetic region of the electromagnetic spectrum.”

T. Tauri stars are still in the process of being formed, and have a relatively low mass and disk of gas and dust orbiting around them, which can act as a birthing ground for planets. The celestial beings are also extremely volatile.

“This observational evidence is essential for understanding the origin of sources that have previously remained unknown for more than a decade, which is unquestionably a step forward in astronomy,” study lead and astronomer at the Universidad Nacional de La Plata, Agostina Filócomo said in a statement. “It is also critical to comprehend the processes that occur during the early phases of star formation: if a T Tauri star produces gamma-ray radiation, it will affect the gas conditions of the protoplanetary disk and, consequently, the evolution of planet formation.”

The Fermi satellite telescope used in the study has been continuously searching space since it launched in 2008. However, around 30% of the gamma-rays detected by the telescope have not been attributed to a source yet, including the rays now attributed to the young star observed in the study.

The team noted three unidentified gamma sources that were observed in a region of space called NGC 2071, where at least 58 T. Tauri stars have been discovered. The study claims that no other sources of gamma radiation are thought to be in the area.

The study authors say one possible explanation is that gamma-rays are produced sporadically when T. Tauri stars create “megaflares.”

Similar to our sun’s solar flares but exponentially larger and more powerful, they are formed when magnetic energy gets stored in the star’s atmosphere and then released in a powerful blast of electromagnetic energy.

The authors hypothesize it may also explain the origin of other previously unknown gamma-ray sources, as well as provide clues into the early formation of solar systems.

“The discovery of this phenomenon serves to understand how not only the sun but also our home planet, Earth, were formed and evolved,” Filócomo said.

The study was published on Wednesday in the [Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society](#).

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Fed Official Warns More US Interest Rate Hikes May Be Coming

The US Federal Reserve has increased interest rates 11 times in the last financial cycle in an attempt to curb inflation. However, despite the tightening of the lending market, inflation has remained stubbornly above the US central bank’s goal.

A top US Federal Reserve official has warned that interest rates may need to rise higher, even as the Fed has already raised interest rates at a historic pace over the past year and a half.

Susan Collins, the president of the Boston Fed, said in [an interview](#) with US media on Thursday that she was surprised by the US economy's resilience, noting a still-tight labor market and strong consumer spending, despite the Fed's previous increases.

"I am not yet seeing the slowing that I think is going to be part of what we need for that sustainable trajectory to get back to 2% [inflation] in a reasonable amount of time," Collins said, referring to the Fed's long-standing goal of 2% year-over-year (YoY) inflation.

Collins also told the outlet that she has not made a decision on a rate hike ahead of the upcoming September Federal Reserve Policy meeting but stressed that the central bank needs to be patient as it weighs financial policies.

She added that it is possible that the Fed has reached a level that could "hold for some time," but stressed that did "not imply [...] that there is not a very real possibility that we will need to make additional increments."

In July, inflation for all items YoY was at 3.2% with food items being particularly expensive, rising 4.9% since this time last year.

The economy is still showing signs of strength, despite the consistent Fed rate hikes, which have raised rates from near zero in March 2022 to 5.25-5.5% at present.

Federal Reserve officials are expected to engage in a heated debate on whether more interest rate hikes are needed to further cool the economy.

Using interest rate hikes to fight inflation is built on the principle that consumer spending needs to be restrained to keep demand in line with supply. If Fed loans to banks are at a higher rate, that cost is passed onto consumer loans in the form of auto loans, credit cards and mortgages. Already, [mortgage rates](#) have hit their highest point in the past 20 years, according to Freddie Mac.

There are other methods governments can use to tame inflation. In 1971, US President Richard Nixon instituted a price and wage freeze with some initial success (later attempts in 1973 were less successful). More recently, US Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) proposed a 90% windfall tax on corporations to fight price gouging.

An [analysis](#) by the Institute for New Economic Thinking found corporate profit margins rose 42% from the first quarter of 2020 to the second quarter of 2022, while the price of producing those goods only rose 16%.

This indicates wage increases are not eating into corporate profits and are not a significant cause of price increases, but instead that companies took advantage of small inflation gains to justify price increases far above what was necessary. A windfall tax would discourage companies from such price gouging.

While rate hikes are generally effective at reducing general consumer spending, they are less effective at limiting spending by wealthy consumers who buy goods using credit far less often. According to the same study, 40% of the increased demand comes from the top 1% of consumers and 75% comes from the top 10%.

The wealthiest Americans profited handsomely from the quantitative easing the government instituted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, money that they are now busy spending. Increasing taxes on the rich, rather than interest rates, could be a more effective method of reducing consumer spending from that financial group.

However, these methods of fighting inflation are not in the hands of the Federal Reserve. Congress is in charge of federal tax rates and the executive branch would need to authorize any price or wage controls.

The next Federal Reserve policy meeting is scheduled for September 19-20. The last meeting, held in July, saw a 25 basis point (0.25%) increase in interest rates.

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Shocking Footage Captures Moment Plane Collided With Helicopter in St. Barts

Saint Barthelemy Island, commonly called St. Barts, is an overseas collectivity of France. With an area of less than 10 square miles, its small but busy airport is consistently listed as one of the most dangerous airports in the world. Its landing runway is just over 640 meters long. An Air Antilles plane collided with a helicopter while landing at St. Barts airport in the Caribbean, shocking onlookers and injuring one person.

No fatalities were reported in the crash, which involved seven people and the injury was reported as minor.

The crash involved a five-year-old DHC-6 Twin Otter turboprop plane capable of carrying 19 passengers. It was scheduled to depart Pointe-a-Pitre towards St. Barts at 10:40 a.m. local time, a 143-mile flight.

Around 11:42 a.m. local time, the plane landed on runway 28 and according to flight tracking data, successfully touched down on the correct section of the runway. Due to currently unknown issues, the plane then drifted left off of the runway, over a grassy patch and then onto the apron where it struck the helicopter.

Both vehicles suffered significant damage, with the plane losing a wing and the helicopter being pushed on its side. No one was in the helicopter at the time of the crash.

St. Barts' Gustaf III Airport is known for its dangerous take-offs and landings, with runway 10 being particularly notorious because it requires the pilot to perform a quick dip right before landing to avoid a nearby hill. However, runway 28, while still considered difficult, has far fewer accidents.

The plane was also already on the ground and there was only a minor crosswind at the time. The runway was temporarily closed to flights but has since reopened. The French civil aviation authority, the Directorate General for Civil Aviation, has opened an investigation into the crash. According to airline and travel blog [One Mile at a Time](#), Air Antilles is a well-regarded airline and has experience flying into and out of St. Barts' airport. However, it states the airline only has one plane capable of landing at St. Barts - the one involved in the crash. However, flights to St. Barts' are still advertised on the carrier's website.

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Indictments Against Trump Unlikely to Help Going Into General Election - Poll

Trump has been indicted four times since leaving office: In New York, for alleged falsifying of business records related to hush money payments; in Georgia, for alleged attempts to overturn the election; in Florida, for his alleged mishandling of classified documents; and in Washington, DC, for his alleged role in the Capitol riot.

Former US President Donald Trump has been adamant that the various indictments against him have only boosted his chances in the upcoming 2024 presidential election. "Any time they file an indictment, we go way up in the polls," he said after being charged by the Department of Justice in a case that essentially accuses him of attempting to overturn the 2020 election.

But [a new poll](#) released Thursday indicates that may not be true - at least when it comes to the general election.

Trump holds a commanding lead in the Republican party and the poll indicates it is true that a large majority of Republicans believe Trump is not guilty of the crimes he is accused of, should he not stand trial before the general election and that the DOJ is not being fair to Trump.

Predictably, large majorities of Democrats feel the opposite on those same issues.

But what should concern the Trump campaign about this poll, are the responses from the ever-important Independent voting bloc.

Sixty-three percent of Independent voters feel Trump should stand trial before the election. More than half, 53% believe he is guilty in the DoJ's 2020 subversion case, and a slight majority, 51%, believe Trump should face prison time while only 14% of Independents believe he should face no penalty if convicted.

Trump has consistently called the investigations a witch hunt and has maintained his innocence. The Thursday poll indicates that among Independents, most aren't buying it. According to the poll, 64% of Independents say the Department of Justice has been fair in its indictment of Trump.

When combining all three political groups (Democrat, Republican and Independents), pro-Trump positions are in the minority overall in nearly every category.

Half of the country believes he should serve jail time if convicted, compared to just 16% who think he should face no punishment at all (16% felt probation was a suitable punishment and 12% stated that a financial-only punishment would be appropriate).

On the issue of when Trump should stand trial, a majority of all Americans, 51%, believe the trial should take place before the general election, compared to just 26% who think it should come after. Trump's legal team requested a 2026 trial date in the DC election interference case, which would in theory allow him to pardon himself if he returns to the White House. Prosecutors have asked for a January 2, 2024, date for the trial's start.

Trump is scheduled to be arraigned in the Georgia Election interference case the week of September 5. A hearing is scheduled in the DOJ election case for Monday, where a trial date is expected to be set.

The trial for the Manhattan hush-money case is scheduled for March 25, 2024, and the trial in the classified documents case is set for May 20, 2024.

The first Republican primary, the Iowa Caucus, will take place on January 15, 2024.

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Paper Straws Contain More 'Forever Chemicals' Than Plastic, Study Finds

Multiple states, including New York, California, New Jersey, Oregon, Vermont and Washington have banned plastic straws, in addition to several cities like Washington, DC, and Atlanta.

Multiple restaurant chains have also decided to stop using plastic straws voluntarily.

A new study has implied that plastic straws may not be as eco-friendly as previously thought and in some ways, they may be worse for the environment and consumers than their plastic counterparts.

The Thursday-published study examined straws made from different materials from 39 different brands and found that PFAS [Per- and Polyfluorinated Substances] chemicals, commonly called "forever chemicals" due to their extremely long half-life and ability to travel up the food chain, are more frequently found in so-called "eco-friendly" straws made out of paper and bamboo. Paper straws were the worst offenders, with PFAS being found in 90% of the straws tested during the study. Bamboo came in second with PFAS being found 80% of the time. Meanwhile, plastic straws were found to have PFAS 75% of the time. Next were glass straws, which had PFAS in 40% of the samples tested, whereas stainless steel straws performed best, with no PFAS being found in any of the samples.

The most common PFAS found was perfluorooctanoic acid, which has been banned in most countries but still finds its way into products sold in the United States, particularly in food packaging. The US is currently in a "phase-out" of PFAS instituted by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) which is scheduled to end in 2024. However, the agency estimates it may take another 18 months after that date to exhaust current stocks.

Also found in the straws were trifluoroacetic acid and trifluoromethanesulfonic acid, two chemicals that are water soluble, meaning chemicals would likely seep into drinks.

"The presence of PFAS in paper and bamboo straws shows they are not necessarily biodegradable," warned Thimo Groffen, the study's author in a statement.

It is not clear how the PFAS ended up in the straws, but PFAS have been used to repel water in products since the 1940s and were found in every brand, suggesting their addition may have been intentional.

Because of PFAS' durability, other possible explanations include that they were in the soil the plants were grown in or in the water used during the manufacturing process.

"Straws made from plant-based materials, such as paper and bamboo, are often advertised as being more sustainable and eco-friendly than those made from plastic," Goffen said "However, the presence of PFAS in these straws means that's not necessarily true."

Goffen suggested the so-called "eco-friendly" straws could be an environmental "paper tiger" and suggested consumers avoid them. "We did not detect any PFAS in stainless-steel straws, so I would advise consumers to use this type of straw — or just avoid using straws at all," he said.

However, it is worth pointing out that the primary reason for banning plastic straws was not to prevent PFAS from entering the environment, or even stop plastic in general from entering the environment.

There are specific issues with plastic straws that make them a focus of environmental groups, with the most obvious being that recycling them is very difficult.

However, on some level that is true of all plastic, especially the polypropylene plastic favored by straw manufacturers, but straws in particular are too small and light to make it through the recycling sorting machine. Often, they are put into the trash or contaminate other plastic recycling efforts.

The larger reason is that straws are typically mistaken for food by marine life and their unique shape can result in animals choking or otherwise being harmed by them. In 2015, an image of a sea turtle with a straw stuck in its nostril went viral and gave a large boost to the anti-straw movement.

Still, it is indisputable that plastic straws are only a small part of the plastics polluting our oceans: Of the 8 million tons of plastic that enters our oceans every year, only 0.025% of it comes from plastic straws, according to a 2018 study. The Thursday study also shows it may not be beneficial for consumer health either.

The study was [published](#) in the Journal of Food Additives & Contaminants.

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Mug Shot Mania - Cartoon

After his fourth indictment, former US President Trump posed for his first mug shot after saying Georgia prosecutors insisted he give one for the record. In the previous cases, prosecutors agreed with his defense team that the booking photo was unnecessary because the former president and reality TV show host is easily recognizable.

As the first mug shot of a former American president, the image instantly became a symbol for both supporters and detractors of Trump. Liberals have been cheering the image as a symbol of justice being served regardless of an individual's status, while conservatives have been posting it, along with their own doctored mug shots, as a symbol of martyrdom and support for the former president.

The Trump campaign has already started selling merchandise with Trump's mugshot on it, including shirts, signed posters, coffee mugs and drink koozies.

Some stores have decided to profit off of Trump's mug shot regardless of political persuasion, with one Etsy store selling merchandise with the photo including both "Not Guilty" and "Guilty AF" tag lines.

Former US President George W. Bush once claimed to be a "uniter, not a divider" but it appears that one thing that has united everyone is America's first presidential mug shot.

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Shooting in Jacksonville, FL Leaves Three Dead

A gunman in Jacksonville, Florida killed three people on Saturday after he entered a Dollar General with a gun and body armor in a racially motivated attack, police say.

"This shooting was racially motivated and he hated Black people," Jacksonville Sheriff T.K. Waters said at a news conference. All three victims of the shooting were black, two men and one woman.

The shooting, which occurred around 1 p.m. was one of several [mass-shooting events in America this weekend](#). The sheriff said the gunman, a White man in his 20s who has not yet been identified, left behind several manifestos.

The suspect reportedly told his father to check his computer before the act. The father found the manifestos, which were described by authorities as a "disgusting ideology of hate" and outlined his motives for the attack.

By the time he managed to alert authorities, the attack had already begun.

The shooting occurred near Edward Waters University, a historically Black University. University officials said the gunman was seen on campus shortly before the shooting but was turned away after refusing to identify himself.

He then reportedly went to a nearby Dollar General where he committed the shooting. At a press conference Waters showed pictures of the weapons used during the crime, including a handgun and an AR-15 rifle with a swastika painted on it. Investigators said he also wore a tactical vest and a mask. They believe he acted alone.

"We have opened a federal civil rights investigation, and we will pursue this incident as a hate crime," said Sherri Onks, special agent in charge of the FBI's Jacksonville office.

Earlier on Saturday, a shooting at a parade in Boston, Massachusetts left at least seven injured. There have been at least 470 mass shootings in the United States so far in 2023, according to the Gun Violence Archives.

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Former Price is Right Host Bob Barker, Dead at 99

Barker was known for his optimistic energy, quick wit and charming demeanor. He taped The Price is Right five times a week, even in his later years as his age exceeded 80.

Bob Barker, the longtime host of the Price is Right died on Saturday, he was 99.

"It is with profound sadness that we announce that the World's Greatest MC who ever lived, Bob Barker, has left us," Barker's publicist, Roger Neal, said in a statement, adding that he died of natural causes in his Hollywood Hills home.

The Price is Right became America's longest-running game show in the 1990s, a legacy that continues today with host Drew Carey. Barker became an American television staple after he took over the hosting role for the show in 1972. Barker remained in that role until 2007, becoming the longest-running game show host in the process, a record that stood until Wheel of Fortune host Pat Sajak broke it in 2019.

A favorite of kids staying home sick from school everywhere, the show has often been called one of the last islands of "wholesome" television still available.

Born in 1923, Barker grew up on an Indian Reservation in South Dakota, where his mother worked as a teacher. His father died years earlier after an accident working as a power line foreman. He is survived by his half-brother, Kent Valandra, and long-time friend and fellow animal rights activist Nancy Burnet, who is serving as the executor of his estate; she had been caring for him in his later years.

Barker left college to serve in the Navy during World War II, but the war ended while he was awaiting his first combat assignment. Barker returned to college and received a degree in economics.

After college, Barker worked as a radio host before landing a job as the host of another game show, Truth or Consequences. He held that job for 18 years, already a long time for a game show host, but a short stint compared to his tenure at Price.

His tenure at Price was also marked with extraordinary consistency. It has often been said that when he stopped dyeing his hair, it was the biggest change in decades for the show. Barker was also known for his animal rights advocacy, signing off every episode reminding his viewers to "help control the pet population. Have your pets spayed or neutered."

In a statement about his death, PETA President Ingrid Newkirk listed Barker's other contributions to the animal rights movement.

"He joined PETA in urging families to stay away from SeaWorld, demanded the closure of cruel bear pits masquerading as tourist attractions, implored Hollywood to take action to protect animals used in film and TV, and, as a Navy veteran, called for the end of military medical drills on live animals. His generous donation allowed PETA to open its West Coast headquarters, the Bob Barker Building, in 2012, and it stands as a testament to his legacy and profound commitment to making the world a kinder place."

Barker also resigned as the host of the Miss America and Miss Universe pageants after a dispute with producers over the use of fur coats.

The lone black mark on Barker's career was when he was sued by Dian Parkinson, a former presenter and model on Price referred to as one of "Barker's Beauties" sued Barker for alleged sexual harassment.

Barker would admit that the two had an affair but insisted it was consensual, the lawsuit was eventually dropped.

"Bob Barker was a television legend who was very committed to the Hollywood community as well as being a huge proponent of animal welfare," said Walk of Fame producer Ana Martinez while inviting fans to leave flowers on his star. "He will be missed."

Barker also dabbled in Hollywood, occasionally playing himself in cameo appearances, most famously in 1994's Happy Gilmore. His role there became iconic after Barker and Adam Sandler's character shared the screen for over four minutes, culminating in a fight scene with the then 70-year-old Barker coming out on top.

But Barker will forever be best known for his role on Price. “Very sad day for the Price Is Right family, and animal lovers all over the world,” current Price host Drew Carey said in an X post. “There hasn’t been a day on set that I didn’t think of Bob Barker and thank him. I will carry his memory in my heart forever.”

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Raimondo Says US, China Agreed on Measures to Boost, Ensure Open Communications

WASHINGTON, August 28 (Sputnik) – US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said on Monday that she and her counterpart, the Chinese Minister of Commerce Wang Wentao, have agreed on measures to step up and ensure open lines of communications between both countries.

Earlier today, media reported that Raimondo had arrived in China on a four-day visit aimed at establishing cooperation between Washington and Beijing in the fields of business and tourism. “U.S. Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo today met with Minister of Commerce of the People’s Republic of China Wang Wentao to advance U.S. commercial and strategic interests ... Secretary Raimondo emphasized the importance of ensuing open lines of communications between the United States and China and took concrete steps to deliver on that goal,” the meetings readout said.

According to the readout, Raimondo and Wang agreed to establish new working groups tasked with solving bilateral commercial issues, and a consultation mechanism made of US and Chinese government officials as well as representatives of the private sector to find solutions to trade and investment matters.

The working groups are to meet twice a year at a Vice Minister level, the readout said, adding that the US will be hosting the first meeting on early 2024.

Furthermore, Raimondo and Wang concurred on the necessity of launching an export control enforcement information exchange, the readout pursued, aimed at reducing misunderstanding of US national security policies.

The first in-person meeting of the platform is set to take place on August 29 at the Ministry of Commerce in Beijing, at the Assistant Secretary level.

Raimondo and Wang will be holding regular Secretary-Minister level communications on commercial and economic matters, the readout said, adding that they agreed on meeting in person at least once a year.

The Secretary further discussed opportunities to increase economic exchanges in areas aligning with US interests and values, the readout said, while underscoring the necessity of “leveling the playing field” for US workers and business in China.

Raimondo reinforced her administration commitment to duly act in the protection of US national security.

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Ramaswamy Promises to Accept Russia's Control Over Crimea if It Distances From China

WASHINGTON, August 28 (Sputnik) – US billionaire and political candidate Vivek Ramaswamy, promised to accept Russia's control over Crimea and block Ukraine's bid for NATO membership if Moscow will sever its military alliance with China,

“I will accept Russian control of the occupied territories and pledge to block Ukraine's candidacy for NATO in exchange for Russia exiting its military alliance with China. I will end sanctions and bring Russia back into the world market,” Ramaswamy said on Monday in an article published in The American Conservative.

The businessman, who is participating in the Republican presidential race, noted that in this way, he would elevate Russia as a “strategic check” on China's designs in East Asia.

Ramaswamy called Moscow and Beijing two of America's “great power rivals,” working collectively in a way that threatens the US. “We must admit our mistakes, recognize our time, and adopt a revised strategic vision for our day aligned with reality rather than wistfully wishing the immediate post-Cold War order back into existence,” he said.

He also promised to declare economic independence from China.

Ramaswamy promised to stop Beijing's industrial espionage. He also pledged to stimulate US business to move supply chains away from China and rebase them in allied markets, particularly in the Western hemisphere, by using trade deals with countries there.

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PREVIEW - Next Hearing in Trump 2020 Election Case to Take Place in Washington on Monday

WASHINGTON, August 28 (Sputnik) - The next court hearing in the case of former President Donald Trump concerning allegations that he attempted to overturn the 2020 presidential election will take place in Washington on Monday.

The hearing is scheduled for 10:00 a.m. EST (2:00 p.m. GMT) and will be held before US District Judge Tanya Chutkan to determine the trial date.

On August 24, Trump surrendered to the authorities in the state of Georgia in the fourth indictment against him, after being charged for his alleged role in the events at the US capitol on January 6, 2021, for falsifying business documents and for illegal possession of classified materials, among other charges.

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

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

On August 11, Chutkan rejected a request by prosecutors for a broad order to prevent Trump from disclosing evidence in the January 6 case, saying she would instead issue a protective

order covering "sensitive" information.

Before issuing the order, Chutkan emphasized that she intends to keep politics out of the case and Trump's ongoing political campaign would not influence her decision.

Chutkan also said that while Trump has a First Amendment right to free speech, this right is not absolute.

Earlier this month, prosecutors requested the trial start in March 2024 while Trump's attorneys have instead asked that the trial begin in April 2026.

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

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State Dept. Says Letter Circulating From Niger Ordering Departure of US Envoy False

(Fixes typo in para 3, adds background)

WASHINGTON, August 26 (Sputnik) - A State Department spokesperson told Sputnik that a letter circulating online of Niger's foreign ministry calling for the departure of US Ambassador Kathleen FitzGibbon is false.

Earlier on Friday, AFP reported that Niger's military rulers have given the US ambassador 48 hours to leave the country. The military rulers of Niger reportedly also demanded that the French, German and Nigerian envoys leave the country within 48 hours.

"The Nigerien Ministry of Foreign Affairs has communicated to the United States of America that the images of letters circulating on the internet calling for the departure of certain American diplomatic personnel were not issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs," the spokesperson said on Friday. "No such request has been made to the US government."

A coup took place in Niger on July 26. President Mohamed Bazoum was ousted and detained by his own guard, led by Gen. Abdourahamane Tchiani. Following the coup, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) suspended all cooperation with Niger and threatened invasion if the putschists do not reinstate Bazoum.

Earlier this week, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said an invasion of Niger will not be beneficial for any of the parties involved. Such a move, on the contrary, would be devastating and destructive for many countries and an immense number of people, the top Russian diplomat added.

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US Congressman Says Seeking Impeachment of US Defense Chief for Afghanistan Withdrawal

WASHINGTON, August 26 (Sputnik) - US Congressman Cory Mills said in a statement that he introduced articles of impeachment against Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin for his handling of the United States' withdrawal from Afghanistan two years ago.

"High-level officials in this administration blatantly ignored intel that Americans and our allied partners in Kabul would be left behind in harm's way unless the US corrected course in our withdrawal. As a result, nearly 200 people, including 13 American servicemembers, were murdered at Abbey Gate in Kabul, Afghanistan two years ago," the statement said on Friday. "Because of this clear dereliction of duty, today I am introducing articles of impeachment for Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin."

Saturday marks the two-year anniversary of the attack, during which time no Biden administration official has been held accountable for the incident, the statement said.

Mills said Congress must take "real action" to address the Biden administration's "complete failure."

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Two Republican Lawmakers Draft Letter Opposing More US Funding to Assist Ukraine

WASHINGTON, August 26 (Sputnik) - US Senator J.D. Vance and Congressman Chip Roy drafted a letter they intend to send to the Office of Management and Budget to oppose President Joe Biden's request of an additional \$24 billion in aid to Ukraine next year, according to a copy of the document obtained by Politico.

Politico reported on Friday that a spokesperson for Vance's office confirmed the letter is

authentic.

"What is our [US] strategy and what is the president's exit plan? It would be an absurd abdication of congressional responsibility to grant this request without knowing the answers to these questions. For these reasons, and others, we oppose the additional expenditure for the war in Ukraine, included in your supplemental request," the draft letter states.

The letter is dated September 5 and it is unclear whether other lawmakers will cosign it as well. The lawmakers, both Republicans, urge Biden in the letter to be much more transparent and clear about his strategy in Ukraine and how the significant US funds are being used in that country.

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US Should Respond to North Korea's Legitimate Concerns, Not Accuse China - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, August 26 (Sputnik) - The United States should not make baseless accusations against China and Russia regarding their stances on the Korean Peninsula but should provide specific proposals, Chinese Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Geng Shuang said.

"The US Representative made groundless accusations against China and Russia's positions on peninsula issues," Geng said on Friday. "What these countries should really do is not use the [UN Security] Council platform to intensify tension and escalate the situation, but come up with practical actions and concrete proposals to respond to DPRK's [North Korea's] legitimate concerns."

Geng spoke during a session of the UN Security Council, which addressed the situation regarding North Korea.

The Chinese diplomat also said the United States and its allies should make efforts to relaunch dialogue with North Korea.

US Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield, however, disagreed with China's position and responded at the end of the UN Security Council session.

"We reject the disingenuous claims by Russia and China that the United States is acting in a hostile manner," Thomas-Greenfield said.

On Wednesday, South Korean media reported that North Korea made a second attempt to launch a spy satellite, but the attempt failed. The report added that North Korea intends to make another launch attempt in October.

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US Military Panel Rules Guantanamo Detainee Unfit to Face Trial in 9/11 Case - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 26 (Sputnik) - A US military board concluded that Guantanamo Bay detainee Ramzi bin al-Shibh is unfit to face trial for conspiring in the September 11, 2001, terror attacks on the United States, the New York Times reported, citing court documents.

The report said on Friday that the military board found Bin al-Shibh was mentally ill, which makes him unfit to face trial or potentially plead guilty in his case.

The Defense Department did not immediately respond to Sputnik's request for comment on the matter.

Last week, a US military judge rejected a confession from a man accused of plotting the bombing on the USS Cole in Yemen in October 2000.

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US Measures on China Not Dictated by Trade, Aim to Protect Dominance in Pacific - Experts

WASHINGTON, August 26 (Sputnik) - Recent Biden administration restrictions to impede China's advances in different domains are not dictated by its economic interests, but instead stem from an effort to maintain US dominance in the Western Pacific, experts told Sputnik.

The Biden administration has recently exacerbated tensions with Beijing through both economic sanctions and escalation of US involvement in the Asia-Pacific region. Earlier this month, Biden signed an executive order that restricts US companies from investing in Chinese artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities and technologies - including semiconductors and quantum computing.

The trilateral summit in Camp David last week between the leaders of the US, Japan, and South Korea raised suspicions of the establishment of a Western-aligned military and political bloc in the region. The Biden administration claiming NATO alignment was not a top priority of the talks did little to placate Beijing.

China in reaction warned that exclusionary blocs in the Asia-Pacific will be met with vigilance and opposition from regional countries.

"This increasing alignment between Russia and China to push the United States out of the dominant position in the western Pacific and replace it with Chinese leadership underlies this wave of new sanctions against China to restrict military, relevant strategic technology, especially in areas of computers and telecommunications," Georgia Tech International Affairs Professor John Garver told Sputnik.

Garver said China has benefited from the free flow of foreign, Western, and US capital since 1978, when China opened, and especially since it joined the World Trade Organization in 2001.

And now, Garver added, the US wants to restrict the flow of Western technology and Western capital to prevent it from contributing to the development of Chinese military capabilities.

Garver pointed out, however, that US industry is divided on the matter. China is a huge and growing market for large US corporations, which they are very reluctant to give up, he added.

RESISTANCE AND BLOW BACK

The CEOs of major US microchip companies in recent weeks have urged the Biden administration to refrain from imposing drastic measures on China. Some even warned that new

restrictions may harm US leadership in the semiconductor industry.

China has retaliated to Biden's restrictions with new export controls on minerals like gallium, essential to the manufacture of microchips, and considered a critical mineral by the US Energy Department.

US historian and foreign analyst Jeremy Kuzmarov views Biden's latest restrictions as a high-stakes gamble that could backfire.

"I think Biden's move is significant and very risky because China is becoming an economic and technological powerhouse and by decoupling from it, the US may fall behind it, which it looks to be already doing," Kuzmarov said.

The United States, Kuzmarov said, is hoping to establish a formidable anti-China bloc and expedited economic productivity in Taiwan and domestic industries, but those could potentially be significant negative economic trade offs for trying to isolate China.

The US and many allies are also at risk if China should decide to move on Taiwan, where one single firm - the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) - makes more than 50% of the world's semiconductors.

Former US diplomat Steve Young told Sputnik it would be a "disaster" if China occupied Taiwan given the world's dependence on TSMC, not to mention it could spark World War III.

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US Musician Referenced in Republican Debate Says Wrote Hit Song About 'Those People'

WASHINGTON, August 26 (Sputnik) - US musician Oliver Anthony said in a statement he finds humorous the fact that the Republican Party primary debate earlier this week featured a question about his hit song "Rich Men North of Richmond," despite the tune being critical of politicians like those on the stage.

"It was funny seeing my song in the presidential debate, because it's like, I wrote that song about those people," Anthony said on Friday. "So, for them to have to sit there and listen to that, that cracks me up."

The debate opened with a question about Anthony's song, which features lyrics about the average Americans' relationship with the so-called elites in Washington.

The country song launched Anthony to the top of the music charts, largely driven by interest among conservatives but also others as well.

However, Anthony said it was aggravating to see news pundits try to identify with him.

The song has nothing to do with President Joe Biden, Anthony said, adding that the problems Americans face are much bigger than a single official.

The diversity of people who have positively responded to the song terrifies those about whom it was written, Anthony added.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, August 26 (Sputnik) -

NIGER DEVELOPMENTS

- * The Niger Foreign Ministry on Friday asked French ambassador Sylvain Itte to leave the country within 48 hours.
- * Burkinabe Foreign Minister Olivia Rouamba and her Malian counterpart, Abdoulaye Diop, confirmed in a joint communique following their visit to Niamey that military intervention against Niger will be considered a declaration of war against their countries.

GLOBAL ENERGY MARKETS

- * Gas futures in Europe have increased by 9.4% to over \$390 per 1,000 cubic meters, according to data from the London-based ICE exchange on Friday.
- * The Russian Energy Ministry has submitted proposals to the government on criteria for creating a list of oil product exporters, Energy Minister Nikolai Shulginov said.

US ECONOMY

- * The Federal Reserve is prepared to raise interest rates if that is appropriate and intends to hold its financial policy at a restrictive level until confident that inflation is sustainably low, Chairman Jerome Powell said on Friday.
- * The Federal Reserve is attentive to indications that the United States' economy is not cooling as expected, Powell said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

- * As many as 73 Ukrainian drones have been shot down and suppressed by means of electronic warfare during the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Friday.
- * Ships of the Russian Navy attacked a port infrastructure facility used by the troops of Ukraine with cruise missiles overnight, the Russian Defense Ministry said.
- * Russia has thwarted Kiev's attempt to attack using an airplane-type drone, which was destroyed by Russia's air defense over the Belgorod Region, the Defense Ministry said.

PRIGOZHIN'S DEATH

- * There are many speculations in Western states regarding the crash of the airplane said to be carrying private military company Wagner Group leader Yevgeny Prigozhin, and all of them are absolute lies, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Friday.
- * Ten bodies have been found at the site of fatal crash of the plane carrying Prigozhin in Russia's Tver Region, the Investigative Committee said.
- * Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said that Prigozhin had never asked him for security guarantees.

F-18 JET CRASHES IN US

* A US F-18 military jet crashed near Marine Corps Air Station Miramar in San Diego on Friday, according to ABC News.

* US military confirmed that the jet crashed near Marine Corps Air Station Miramar in San Diego.

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Biden Says His Admin. Trying to 'Nail Down Precisely' What Happened to Prigozhin's Plane

WASHINGTON, August 25 (Sputnik) - The United States is working to find out precisely what happened to a plane carrying Wagner Group private military company (PMC) leader Yevgeny Prigozhin and nine others who died in a crash in the Tver region of Russia earlier this week, US President Joe Biden said on Friday.

"I'm not at liberty to speak to that [accident] precisely. But as you know because you and I have talked about this, I find no surprise. We're trying to nail down precisely but I don't have anything to say," Biden told reporters.

Earlier on Friday, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said that he was aware of the preparation of an assassination attempt on Prigozhin and informed the Kremlin about it.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov refuted speculations about Prigozhin's death alleging that Russian President Vladimir Putin was behind it as an "absolute lie."

On Wednesday, 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. Federal Air Transport Agency Rosaviatsia said that Prigozhin was in the plane. An investigation into the accident is underway.

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North Korea's Satellite Launch is Exercise of Right to Self Defense - Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, August 25 (Sputnik) - North Korea is exercising its right to self-defense with its latest satellite launch attempt earlier this week, North Korean Ambassador to the United Nations Kim Song said on Friday.

"Our launch of the reconnaissance satellite is an exercise of the right to self-defense," Kim said during a UN Security Council meeting on Pyongyang's latest satellite launch attempt.

North Korea's goal is to build its self-defense capability, Kim said.

Kim said the satellite launch did not cause any harm to the security of its neighboring country.

North Korea's state-run Central News Agency reported earlier this week that the country's second attempt to launch a spy satellite had failed, adding that in October, a third attempt will be made.

On Wednesday, the office of Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said that North Korea had

launched a "suspected ballistic missile." The NHK broadcaster later reported that the missile passed over Japan and its fragments fell in the Yellow Sea, the East China Sea as well as in several other parts of the Pacific Ocean.

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Former Ukrainian Prosecutor General Shokin Says Believes Bidens Received Bribes

WASHINGTON, August 25 (Sputnik) - Former Ukrainian Prosecutor General Viktor Shokin said on Friday that he personally believes Biden family members received bribes from sources in Ukraine to help shut down his corruption investigations.

"My firm personal conviction is that yes, this was the case, they [the Bidens] were being bribed," Shokin said during an interview with Fox News.

Shokin said Biden held up a billion dollars in funding for Ukraine during the time he was US vice president in order to pressure the government in Kiev to fire him.

Shokin also characterized the situation regarding the Bidens' actions as a case of corruption.

The statement comes amid investigations by US House lawmakers into alleged criminal activity by the Biden family, including for foreign bribery and influence peddling.

President Joe Biden and his son, Hunter, allegedly received millions of dollars from Ukrainian energy company Burisma to help shut down Shokin's corruption probes.

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Oil Rebounds Before Ending Week Down Again On Signs Of More US Rate Hikes

NEW YORK, August 25 (Sputnik) - Crude prices fell for a second consecutive week after a two-day rally failed to bridge the gap from a sell-off earlier in the week, amid signs as well that the Federal Reserve was readying to raise interest rates further to bring US inflation under control.

New York-traded West Texas Intermediate, or WTI, crude settled Friday's trade up 78 cents, or 1%, at \$79.83 per barrel. Despite a two-day rebound, WTI remained below the key \$80 per barrel mark. The US crude benchmark also finished the week down 1.7%, after shedding 2.3% last week. Prior to that, it rose for seven straight weeks in a rally that lifted WTI by nearly 20%.

London-traded Brent crude settled up \$1.12, or 1.3%, at \$84.48 per barrel. Compared with WTI, Brent's current week loss was far more modest at just 0.4%, adding to the previous week's 2.3% drop. Before that, the global crude benchmark also rose for seven weeks in a row, rising by a total of 18%.

The Fed chief made clear that U.S. rates will follow inflationary pressure. "We are prepared to raise rates further if appropriate, and intend to hold policy at a restrictive level until we are confident that inflation is moving sustainably down toward our objective," Powell said.

Inflation hit four-decade highs of more than 9% per annum in June 2022 due to trillions of dollars of federal relief spending following the 2020 coronavirus outbreak. The Fed responded with its most aggressive rate hikes in 20 years, going from a base rate of just 0.25% in March 2022 to 5.5%.

While pandemic-related spending is over and price growth has since stabilized at 3% per annum, a robust labor market has allowed Americans to continue spending, preventing the Fed from achieving its target for inflation.

Weekly jobless claims have continued to decline in the United States, with unemployment hitting more than 50-year lows, while average hourly earnings haven't contracted in a single month since April 2021.

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US Convened UNSC Meeting in Hypocritical Attempt to Step Up Pressure on N.Korea - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, August 25 (Sputnik) - The United States and its allies organized on Friday the UN Security Council meeting on North Korea to increase pressure on Pyongyang and to cover up their own escalatory actions in the region, the Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said.

"Clearly, the convening of today's meeting is a cynical, hypocritical attempt by the US and its allies to step up pressure on Pyongyang and to detract attention from the reckless escalatory actions of Washington, and its allies in the region," Nebenzia said.

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Enhanced Cooperation With US in Northeast Asia Could Lead to Nukes in Region - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, August 25 (Sputnik) - Enhanced security cooperation between the United States, Japan and South Korea in Northeast Asia could lead to the deployment of nuclear weapons in the region, Russian Ambassador to the UN Vasily Nebenzia said on Friday.

"Also of concern are contradictory messages from US allies in Northeast Asia – from Tokyo and Seoul – about so-called enhanced cooperation with Washington in the nuclear sphere. This can certainly be interpreted as allowing for the deployment of US nuclear weapons on their territory and the development of their own nuclear weapons," Nebenzia said during a UN Security Council meeting.

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

CAE Wins Simulator Contract to Support US Army HADES Intelligence System - Statement

WASHINGTON, August 25 (Sputnik) - The technology company CAE has won a contract to build a flight simulator to prepare for Bombardier Global aircraft support for the US Army's Intelligence's HADES detection system, a press release said on Friday.

"CAE Defense & Security has been awarded a contract from Leidos on the Department of Defense's Sentinel task order for a dedicated Full Flight Simulator (FFS) in the Bombardier Global 6000/6500 configuration at the Dothan Training Center to support the High Accuracy Detection and Exploitation System (HADES)," the release said.

Under the terms of the contract, CAE will build and deliver 7000XR simulators to support the US Army Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) Task Force and the Intelligence and Security Command requirement to provide timely and accurate intelligence to tactical, operational and strategic commanders, the release said.

"The Bombardier Global 6000/6500 aircraft was selected as the new manned aerial intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance platform to meet current and emerging requirements," the release added.

The platform supports the critical needs of speed, range, endurance-at-range and altitude to overcome the physical challenges without sacrificing the unique quality and capability of collection that airborne ISR provides, according to the release.

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US Sentences Pakistani Doctor to 18 Years of Prison For Attempting to Support IS- DOJ

WASHINGTON, August 25 (Sputnik) - The United States has sentenced a Pakistani doctor, who used to work in a US hospital, to 18 years of prison for an attempt to provide material support to the Islamic State (banned in Russia) terrorist group, the US Department of Justice announced in a release on Friday.

"A Rochester man was sentenced today to 218 months in prison, more than 18 years, followed by five years of supervised release for attempting to provide material support to a foreign terrorist organization," the release said.

The DOJ explained in the release that the 31-year-old Muhammad Masood, a licensed medical doctor in Pakistan, used to work as a research coordinator at a medical clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, under an H-1B visa.

"Between January 2020 and March 2020, Masood used an encrypted messaging application to facilitate his travel overseas to join a terrorist organization," the release said. "Masood made multiple statements about his desire to join the Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIS), and he pledged his allegiance to the designated terrorist organization and its leader. Masood also expressed his desire to conduct "lone wolf" terrorist attacks in the United States."

In February 2020, the DOJ went on to say, Masood bought a plane ticket from Chicago to

Amman, and from there he planned to travel to Syria, but his plans changed in March because Jordan closed its borders over the coronavirus pandemic.

"Masood then agreed to fly from Minneapolis to Los Angeles to meet up with an individual who he believed would assist him with travel via cargo ship to deliver him to ISIS territory," the release said. "On March 19, 2020, Masood traveled from Rochester to Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport (MSP) to board a flight bound for Los Angeles, California. Upon arrival at MSP, Masood checked in for his flight and was subsequently arrested by the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force."

The DOJ noted that Masood pleaded guilty in August of last year to attempting to provide material support to IS.

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US Offers N. Korea Opportunity to Engage in Diplomacy Without Preconditions - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, August 25 (Sputnik) - US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield on Friday offered her North Korean counterpart Kim Song the opportunity to engage in diplomacy without preconditions on any topic of concern.

"We have repeatedly urged the DPRK [North Korea] to engage in dialogue and, ambassador, I offer that to you today that we are prepared to engage in diplomacy," Thomas-Greenfield said during a meeting of the UN Security Council. "We have made clear we have no preconditions for engagement and are prepared to discuss any topic of concern to your government."

Thomas-Greenfield said the United States remains committed to diplomacy publicly and privately at senior levels.

She noted that North Korea has left the proposals unanswered and called on using the UN Security Council's collective voice to counter nuclear proliferation and denounce Pyongyang over its allegedly unlawful behavior.

On Wednesday, South Korean media reported that North Korea made a second attempt to launch a spy satellite which failed, adding that Pyongyang intends to make another attempt in October.

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Justice Dept. Weighing Charges Against Sen. Menendez in Public-Corruption Probe – Reports

WASHINGTON, August 25 (Sputnik) – US prosecutors are weighing possible charges against Senator Robert Menendez in a public corruption investigation dating back to 2019, The Wall Street Journal reported on Friday citing people in the know.

The multiyear probe by the US attorney's office for the Southern District of New York scrutinized the New Jersey's Democratic senator's dealings with foreign actors and whether he or his wife,

Nadine Arslanian, received any gifts for political favors, the report said.

As part of the investigation, prosecutors have examined a lucrative deal between a New Jersey businessman and Egyptian officials for certifying halal meat exports. It is alleged the businessman became the sole certifier of halal meat exported from the United States to Egypt the next year following the meeting with Egyptian officials hosted by Menendez in his office in 2018, according to the report.

Menendez's lawyers are expected to meet with prosecutors in the coming weeks ahead of a final decision on the charges, the report added.

The report does not say whether Arslanian will become a co-defendant in a possible case against her husband.

"As stated previously, the senator remains confident this matter will be successfully resolved," the report cited a spokeswoman for Menendez as saying.

In 2019, federal investigators looking for possible undisclosed foreign lobbying in the United States and other violations executed search warrants at the home and office of Wael Hana, an associate of Arslanian, who owns the only company allowed to certify halal meat exported to Egypt.

In 2015, the Justice Department indicted Menendez on bribery, fraud, and making false statements charges. It was alleged that the US senator was receiving valuable gifts from a close friend and ophthalmologist, Solomon Melgen, for advocating his business interests. But in 2018, the Justice Department dropped the charges following a court motion to acquit Menendez and co-defendant Salomon Melgen on seven of the 18 charges they faced.

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2 F-16s Intercept Civilian Plane Violating Airspace in Lake Tahoe - NORAD

WASHINGTON, August 25 (Sputnik) - Two US F-16 fighter jets intercepted a civilian aircraft that violated a temporary airspace restriction in Lake Tahoe, North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) said on Friday.

A temporary airspace restriction has been put in Lake Tahoe as President Joe Biden spends some vacation time there with the first lady Jill Biden.

"Two NORAD F-16 fighter aircraft and a US Coast Guard MH-65 Dolphin responded to a civilian aircraft that violated a Temporary Flight Restriction (TFR) area near Lake Tahoe, Nevada, this morning," NORAD said in a press release. "The civilian aircraft violated the TFR at about 7:50 a.m. PT and was escorted out of the area."

During the incident, the fighter jets dispensed flares to gain attention from the pilot on the civilian aircraft, the release said.

The flares were employed with the highest regard for safety of the civilian aircraft and people on the ground, the release said, noting that the flares burn out quickly and there is no danger to people on the ground when dispensed.

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US Senator Says Ukraine Urgently Needs Long-Range Missiles Following Zelenskyy Meeting

WASHINGTON, August 25 (Sputnik) - US Senator Lindsey Graham said on Friday that Ukraine urgently needs long-range Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMS) for use in the conflict with Russia, despite concerns that delivery of such weapons could escalate tensions. "It is imperative that America continues to support Ukraine's military. Specifically, the need for long range artillery - ATACMS - is urgent," Graham said in a statement after meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Ukraine.

The regime in Kiev and some members of the US Congress have been urging the Biden administration to approve the delivery of ATACMS to Ukraine.

Earlier this month, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba promised to only use the weapons inside Ukrainian territory if Kiev's Western allies provided them.

Graham said in the statement that the United States should also take control of the F-16 fighter jets transfer program to hasten their delivery to Ukraine by European allies.

The senator urged fellow lawmakers to continue supporting Ukraine's military as a means to counter Russia, characterizing the move as a "great return on investment."

Ukraine continues to make progress on multiple fronts as part of their counteroffensive despite slow deliveries of de-mining equipment and essential weapons, the statement said.

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US Pilot in F/A-18 Crash in San Diego Confirmed Dead – Marines Corps

WASHINGTON, August 25 (Sputnik) – The United States Marine Corps in a press release on Friday confirmed the death of a F/A-18 fighter jet pilot in a crash in San Diego, California that took place earlier in the day.

"Search and rescue recovered the U.S. Marine Corps pilot who has been confirmed deceased at the site. The pilot was the only person aboard the aircraft. With a heavy heart, our condolences go to the Marine's family during this time," the press release said.

Earlier in the day, Marine Corps Air Station Miramar in San Diego said that a McDonnell Douglas F/A-18 Hornet aircraft crashed near the station late Thursday with no damage to property on the ground reported.

The investigation into the circumstances of the crash has begun, the Marines said.

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Louisiana Authorities Order Evacuation Due to Fire at Marathon Petroleum Refinery

WASHINGTON, August 25 (Sputnik) - The authorities in the US state of Louisiana on Friday ordered a mandatory evacuation for residents living near the Marathon Petroleum Garyville refinery due to fire at the facility.

"As a precautionary measure, St. John Parish President Jaclyn Hotard has issued an emergency declaration and is issuing a mandatory evacuation for all residents within a two-mile radius of the part closest to Marathon Petroleum Garyville refinery," the authorities said in a statement.

Shelter is being provided to all residents who have been evacuated, the statement said.

Marathon Petroleum tried to reassure the public by saying that special crews are responding to a leak of the liquid naphtha, which can be used as fuel, according to US media.

The release and the fire are contained within the refinery's property and there have been no injuries, the reports said.

Several local schools have been evacuated while others remain under orders to shelter in place, the reports added.

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United Auto Workers Union Authorizes Strike at Detroit 3 Automakers if Negotiations Fail

WASHINGTON, August 25 (Sputnik) - United Auto Workers Union (UAW) President Shawn Fain announced on Friday that UAW members voted to authorize strikes if ongoing negotiations with automakers fail.

"Our goal is not to strike. I want to make that very clear. Our goal is to bargain good agreements for our members," Fain said. "But all we've tried to do with this is prepare everybody in the event that we have to take action to get a fair and just contract."

UAW said that 97% of workers had approved the decision although votes are still being counted. The vote is part of UAW's strike authorization protocol, which is a tenet of its constitution.

The authorization to strike focuses on the so-called "Detroit Three" - General Motors, Ford and Stellantis. The negotiations concern wage increases, restoration of pensions and a reduction in the work week from 40 hours to 32 hours.

"The Big Three is our strike target. And whether or not there's a strike - it's up to Ford, General Motors and Stellantis, because they know what our priorities are. We've been clear," Fain added.

It is unclear at present what form the potential strikes could take, but targeted work stoppages and organizing a national strike are possible albeit costly avenues.

During negotiations in 2019, the UAW authorized a strike against General Motors that lasted 40 days and cost the automaker more than 3.6 billion in earnings and reduced production by 300,000 vehicles.

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Federal Reserve to Keep Hiking Interest Rates as US Economy Not Cooling - Powell

WASHINGTON, August 25 (Sputnik) - The Federal Reserve will keep raising interest rates as long as it is needed to bring inflation back to its long-term target of 2% per year given that the US economy is not cooling as was initially thought, Chairman Jerome Powell said on Friday.

"It is the Fed's job to bring inflation down to our 2% goal, and we will do so," Powell said, opening the US central bank's annual symposium in Jackson Hole, Wyoming.

The symposium is said to be one of the most-watched events for clues on decisions concerning the US interest rates.

Powell said the Fed is "prepared to raise rates further if appropriate and intend to hold policy at a restrictive level until we are confident that inflation is moving sustainably down toward our objective."

Inflation hit four-decade highs of more than 9% per year in June 2022 due to trillions of dollars of federal relief spending following the 2020 coronavirus outbreak. The Fed responded with its most aggressive interest rate hikes in 20 years, going from a base rate of just 0.25% in March 2022 to 5.5%.

While pandemic-related spending has ended and price growth has since stabilized at 3% per year, a robust labor market has allowed Americans to continue spending, preventing the Fed from achieving its target for inflation.

Weekly jobless claims have continued to decline in the United States, with unemployment hitting more than 50-year lows, while average hourly earnings have not contracted in a single month since April 2021.

"We are attentive to signs that the economy may not be cooling as expected," Powell said, adding that the second quarter GDP growth of 2.4% was well beyond the 2% expansion in the first quarter and 2.1% for all of 2022.

"Additional evidence of persistently above-trend growth could put further progress on inflation at risk and could warrant further tightening of monetary policy," Powell added.

Despite the tough talk, the Fed has maintained that its rate decisions will be driven by data.

The US central bank's policy-makers, led by Powell, will make their next decision on interest rates on September 20 and the indication thus far is that the central bank will skip a rate hike for a second time in three months due to mixed economic data.

"Given how far we have come, at upcoming meetings we are in a position to proceed carefully as we assess the incoming data and the evolving outlook and risks," Powell said, underscoring the economists' concerns. "At upcoming meetings, we will assess our progress based on the totality of the data and the evolving outlook and risks. Based on this assessment, we will proceed carefully as we decide whether to tighten further or, instead, to hold the policy rate constant and await further data."

While most money market traders expect a pause at the Fed's September 20 decision on interest rates, there is still a 43% probability among them that the central bank will opt for an

increase at its November policy meeting.

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Canada Joins US in Dispute With Mexico Over Ban of GMO Corn in Tortillas – Global Affairs

WASHINGTON, August 25 (Sputnik) – Ottawa will be joining the US in its trade row with the Mexican government over the latter's decision to ban genetically modified (GMO) corn in the production of tortillas and other types of dough, Global Affairs Canada (GAC) said on Friday.

On February 13, Mexico issued a decree to ban the use of genetically modified corn for human consumption and for animal feed, while allowing some GMO corn for industrial use.

"Canada will participate as a third party in the dispute settlement proceedings initiated by the United States under the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA) regarding the use of genetically engineered corn in tortillas and dough," the ministry's statement said.

The Canadian government considers that the measures taken by Mexico lack scientific support and could potentially end up disrupting North American trade and its markets, the statement said, further adding that Ottawa shares US concerns about their Mexican counterpart's noncompliance with their obligations under the CUSMA's Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures Chapter.

Canada remains committed to ensuring stability and resilience for the country's farmers and the agricultural sector, GAC said.

In early June, the US requested dispute settlement consultations with Mexico under CUSMA in response to Mexican biotechnology policies regarding genetically modified corn.

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US Urges Using Sanctions, All Tools to Stop Conflict-Related Sexual Violence - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, August 25 (Sputnik) - The United States urges the international community to use all measures, including United Nations sanctions, to prevent sexual violence in conflict zones, US Ambassador to the world body Linda Thomas-Greenfield said on Friday.

"We must use all multilateral tools available to us, including UN sanctions, to prevent these acts of violence given how destructive conflict-related sexual violence is for victims and communities and how destabilizing it is for societies," Thomas-Greenfield said during a meeting of the UN Security Council.

Thomas-Greenfield emphasized that the United States is committed to promoting justice and accountability for all acts of conflict-related sexual violence.

In addition, the US ambassador urged all countries to increase funding for UN agencies and partners working to provide comprehensive services for survivors.

"These programs can make a significant impact on the lives of survivors, and they must be funded," Thomas-Greenfield said.

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US Split on Whether Ignoring Racial Discrimination, Making it Bigger Problem - Poll

WASHINGTON, August 25 (Sputnik) - Adults in the United States are divided over whether society is more impacted by people ignoring racial discrimination or seeing it where it does not really exist, a new Pew Research Center poll revealed on Friday.

The poll asked respondents whether the bigger problem in the United States is people not seeing racial discrimination where it does exist or seeing racial discrimination where it does not exist.

A majority of respondents, 53%, believe that the bigger problem is people not seeing racial discrimination, the poll said.

Forty-five percent (45%) believe that the bigger problem is seeing discrimination where it does not really exist, the poll said.

The figures have grown closer in recent years, having moved from 57% and 42%, respectively, the poll noted.

Nearly two-thirds of Republican and Republican-leaning respondents believe that seeing discrimination where it does not exist is a bigger problem, while 80% of Democratic voters believe that not seeing discrimination is the bigger problem, the poll said.

Moreover, a majority of white respondents, 54%, believe that seeing non-existent discrimination is the bigger problem, while 88% of black respondents believe that not seeing real discrimination is bigger, the poll added.

The poll surveyed 5,073 adults in the United States between April 10-16. The poll maintains a margin of error of plus-or-minus 1.7 percentage points with a 95% confidence level for the total sample.

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West, Allies Use Extremists For Geopolitical Goals as Seen in Ukraine - UN Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, August 25 (Sputnik) - Western countries and their allies use extremists and terrorists for their political goals, as we can observe in Ukraine, the Russian Deputy Permanent Representative Nadezhda Zabolotskaya said on Friday.

"The West's use of terrorists and extremists for their geopolitical purposes is also something we can see in Ukraine," Zabolotskaya told the Security Council.

The US and its European satellites have been fueling neo-Nazis who overthrew the legitimate government in 2014, she added.

In mid-August, the Guardian reported that members of a neo-Nazi group have infiltrated US military circles in the state of California.

The Clockwork Crew group was co-founded in 2021 by Lance Corporal Mohammed Wadaa, who is based at the Marine Corps Camp Pendleton near the Californian city of San Diego. It has a dedicated membership of a dozen current and former military personnel.

The US military command is becoming increasingly concerned with radicalization among its active service members and veterans, which is reportedly having an impact on discipline. US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin admitted in a 2021 speech to the military that radicals were threatening the army as an institution.

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Powell Says US Federal Reserve 'Attentive' to Signs Economy Not Cooling as Expected

WASHINGTON, August 25 (Sputnik) - The US Federal Reserve is attentive to indications that the United States' economy is not cooling as expected, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said on Friday.

"We are attentive to signs that the economy may not be cooling as expected," Powell said during remarks at the Jackson Hole Symposium.

US gross domestic product has come in above expectations, and consumer spending is also robust, Powell said.

Further evidence of persistent above-trend growth could endanger progress on inflation and warrant tightening of monetary policy, Powell added.

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US Fed Prepared to Raise Rates, Intends to Hold Policy at Restrictive Level - Powell

WASHINGTON, August 25 (Sputnik) – The Federal Reserve is prepared to raise its rates if appropriate and intends to hold its financial policy at a restrictive level until confident the inflation is sustainably low, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said on Friday.

"It is the Fed's job to bring inflation down to our 2% goal and we will do so," Powell said in a speech during an event at Jackson Hole. "We are prepared to raise rates further if appropriate, and intend to hold policy at a restrictive level until we are confident that inflation is moving sustainably down toward our objective."

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Maui County Releases List of 388 People Still Missing Due To Wildfires

WASHINGTON, August 25 (Sputnik) –Hawaii’s County of Maui released on Friday a list of 388 people still missing as a result of devastating wildfires on the island.

“The County of Maui on Thursday released a validated list of the names of 388 individuals who have been reported unaccounted for following the Lahaina wildfire disaster on August 8, 2023,” the statement said.

The names are being provided to the public to help identify anyone who can be accounted for, it added.

County’s police chief John Pelletier expressed confidence that the publication would help with the investigation and make the search for missing people easier. “We also know that once those names come out, it can and will cause pain for folks whose loved ones are listed. This is not an easy thing to do, but we want to make sure that we are doing everything we can to make this investigation as complete and thorough as possible,” he said.

As of August 24, the authorities found safe and well 1,732 individuals who had originally been reported as unaccounted for, the statement added.

The wildfires in Hawaii broke out due to dry and hot weather which was exacerbated by strong winds brought by Hurricane Dora. The fire destroyed several settlements, including the popular tourist town of Lahaina. The authorities were forced to block roads and suspend public transport. Hundreds of locals were evacuated from the area.