

9/21/23 Thursday

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No Man's Land: Shocking Report Reveals 'Depressing' Conditions in US Military Barracks

An investigation released by the nonpartisan US Government Accountability Office revealed "poor living conditions" in barracks that "undermine quality of life and readiness."

\$831 billion was set aside for the US military for 2024, but little of that money is going toward improving housing for American service members. That's the apparent conclusion of [a new report](#) from the US Government Accountability Office released on Tuesday.

Mold, pests, and security concerns were among the problems documented in an investigation that blasted on-base living conditions. The 118-page report, entitled "Poor Living Conditions Undermine Quality of Life and Readiness," investigated military installations throughout the country, including in California, Texas, and the Washington, DC, area. The findings were often grim.

"We observed and military service members and officials told us that living conditions in some barracks pose potentially serious risks to health and safety and that not all barracks meet minimum privacy and configuration standards," note the investigators.

Photos throughout the report revealed physical deterioration in the housing, including broken air conditioners, missing locks and black mold. Plumbing issues were a recurring problem with sewage overflow as leaking methane and outbreaks of Legionnaires' Disease were also documented. "Barracks managers... told us they sometimes have to take additional time to conduct needed maintenance work themselves," read the report.

A lack of time to investigate problems and perform maintenance was a commonly-cited problem, according to the investigators. "Barracks managers at installations across all military services told us they do not have enough time to meet performance objectives of the position, especially to conduct sufficient follow-up related to work orders. For example, a full-time barracks manager at one installation told us fulfilling all assigned responsibilities is a challenge due to the high volume of maintenance work orders."

Inadequate security was documented in several barracks, and the report also touched on the crisis of sexual assault in the military: three out of the 12 groups of service members interviewed agreed barrack conditions made rape and other crimes more likely.

Mental health in general was judged to be negatively affected by the poor conditions by all 12 groups. Troops reported service members coping with anxiety, depression, and substance abuse. One case of soldiers being made to clean a room after a fellow soldier's suicide was documented.

Overall, family housing was judged favorably by the majority of service members, while dormitory-style shared housing was seen as dissatisfactory. The difference in housing type is determined by rank: there is a large gulf between the conditions enjoyed by higher-rank members who have served in the military for multiple years and those experienced by lower-rank troops.

It's not the first time the condition of services for military members and veterans has been met with scrutiny: poor maintenance at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center created a major scandal during the waning days of the George W. Bush administration. In 2008, [a soldier died](#) after being electrocuted by an improperly-installed shower built by a private construction firm. Military contractor KBR reported [\\$6.5 billion](#) in revenue in 2022. Lockheed Martin reported [\\$65.9 billion](#). Halliburton reported [\\$20.2 billion](#).

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Private Equity 'Thrown Under Bus' by Fed's 'Higher for Longer' US Fiscal Policy

The US central bank is engaged in an effort to reorganize US capital using fiscal policy, directing it away from the financial class and spend-happy bureaucrats and toward industrial leaders and Main Street, in line with international expectations, a financial and geopolitical analyst told Sputnik.

At its first meeting in two months on Wednesday, the Federal Reserve's Open Market Committee (FOMC) declined to raise interest rates, despite an increase in the inflation rate. Chairman Jerome Powell said there were many influencing economic factors in their decision, adding that another small rate hike was likely before the end of the year, and that it would likely remain substantially high for at least another year afterward.

"Powell did exactly what I expected him to do. He didn't raise rates and he cut a very hawkish jib at the podium," financial and geopolitical analyst Tom Luongo told Sputnik on Thursday.

"The FOMC didn't raise rates because they didn't need to. The announced oil production cuts by Russia and Saudi Arabia created a big rally in oil prices, which ensures there will be another round of inflation in the West beyond the Fed's control."

Luongo said that OPEC "did Powell's job for him" by [causing an uptick in inflation](#), helping justify his "higher for longer" position of keeping interest rates at record-high levels. He noted that "only a select group of commentators and myself" believed Powell would [keep his word](#), noting that thanks to the FOMC's updated "dot plot," bond traders have been "shocked out of their complacency" and denial.

"Now the bond markets believe it. And that means further normalization of the yield curve, putting tremendous pressure on the ECB [European Central Bank] and other foreign central banks hoping for a reprieve because of falling headline inflation," he explained.

"Because of the moves in oil, [ECB President] Christine Lagarde's [panicked rate hike from last week](#), and Thursday's employment data, Powell knew he could spend the entire press conference sticking to his mantra about serving the Fed's dual mandate of 'full employment and stable prices,'" Luongo said, noting that "in Fed speak, 'stable prices' equals a 2% inflation target."

"Powell knows he can't really affect oil prices with demand-side tools - he said as much directly in the press conference. So because of this, and the fact that the US economy is in better shape than even he expected at this point, he remains open to further rate hikes to curb credit demand

and force a reorganization of capital internally from the financial class back to the industrial class,” Luongo explained.

“In effect, he kept telling the ‘2 and 20 carried interest’ guys in private equity that there are no dollars for them,” Luongo said, referring to [a common mantra](#) among hedge fund managers about desired investment fee structures.

“The money is going back to Main St. through reinvestment in savings at higher rates to raise their purchasing power,” he added.

Luongo said Powell’s “main obstacle” is deficit spending by the federal government “running up the bill as far as they can,” which he said was being driven by US President Joe Biden and other “vandals in DC” pursuing their own interests or the interests of multinational corporations.

“They have much of the GOP complicit in this scheme and that’s what the guys like [Florida Republican Representative] Matt Gaetz are trying to stop,” Luongo asserted.

Gaetz is part of a [small-but-vocal dissident GOP faction](#) that has used the GOP’s narrow majority in the House since January to assert itself as the “kingmaker” among the House Republican Caucus, compelling House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) to satisfy them lest he lose his leadership of the chamber.

“He did the hard work this summer,” Luongo said of Powell. “By raising interest rates in July, he left himself optionality in September. He was clear that he expects one more hike this year and is still open to another one in Q1 2024. Slowing rate hikes here gives banks a little more time to repair their balance sheets and force them to jettison underwater commercial real estate loans. Powell continues to throw private equity under the bus.”

“He is also forcing Congress to face the music on their egregious spending. The dirtiest secret in Washington is that we could cut the budget between 25% and 40%, reducing the waste, fraud and, frankly, welfare for useless bureaucrats and no one would see a drop in functionality of efficiency. Everyone knows it. Powell can’t say any of this but that’s exactly what he’s targeting.”

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Analyst: Canada’s India Spat Part of ‘Carrot-and-Stick’ Effort to Bring New Delhi Back into US Orbit

Canada would never create such a rift with a US partner as it has with India without some kind of direction from Washington, an expert told Sputnik. Analysts should be wary of accepting the spat at face value, as it’s likely part of an effort to intimidate India into being more cooperative with the West.

Relations between Canada and India have [continued to sour](#) after Ottawa accused the government of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi of a “link” with the murder of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a Canadian citizen who headed an Indian secessionist group known as the Khalistan Tiger Force (KTF), in British Columbia earlier this year.

New Delhi has denied any involvement in Nijjar’s death, calling Canada’s accusations “absurd and motivated” by a political agenda. Modi has previously appealed to Canadian Prime Minister

Justin Trudeau to block activities by Indian separatist groups on Canadian soil, saying they posed a threat to Indian-Canadians.

The two nations are [both partners](#) of the United States, with Canada being part of the NATO alliance and the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing community, and India being part of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) anti-China grouping. However, New Delhi has also remained political, military, and [economic partners with Russia](#) amid US attempts to isolate Moscow, especially since the beginning of the conflict in Ukraine last year.

Writer and activist KJ Noh told Sputnik on Wednesday that it was likely Canada was being used by Washington as a bludgeon to try and force India back into line.

"I think it's significant in that, you know, Modi is clearly being tarred in the mainstream press. But the cynical part of me sees this as a carrot-and-stick approach to India. That is to say, the US is very, very unhappy with India because it refuses to align with the US, it's keeping its neutrality, it's still importing fuel from Russia," Noh told Radio Sputnik's [The Critical Hour](#).

"And, of course, you know, that weakened the Quad formation. And they also want to see if they can use India to disrupt BRICS," he added.

"And so this is part, in my opinion, of wielding the stick against Modi. They have the carrot, which is all the research and industrial collaboration or military production, which [Assistant US Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs] Eli Ratner has boasted about from the rooftops. And at the same time, they also want to do a squeeze on him and tell him: 'if you don't come along, there's a lot of human rights stuff that we can throw at you.'"

"And I think that as far as Canada is concerned: remember, Canada is the US' poodle," Noh noted. "It does not do anything without the US telling it what to do, how to do it, when to end, exactly what to say...They broke every rule in their book. So Canada is clearly not interested in human rights, and it's certainly highly unlikely that this attack dog/poodle would suddenly go off the leash and make these exorbitant claims unless there was not some kind of coordination happening."

"There's no way Trudeau would have done anything by himself. The man doesn't have an autonomous bone in his body. But realizing that these people are not your friends, they simply need to understand that being friends with the United States is deadly to them. As we've said many times, that Kissinger quote," Noh said, referring to former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's quip that the US doesn't have permanent friends or enemies, only interests.

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'Listen More, Lecture Less': NATO Must Accept Global Failure of Anti-Russia Diplomacy

In forming their foreign policy, Western leaders have acted like the Russian Federation is the Soviet Union - a catastrophic mistake that has fueled both strategic errors like the conflict in Ukraine and driven Russophobia at home, which only further distorts their vision, an expert told Sputnik.

In Poland, popular resentment against arming Ukraine and prolonging the conflict with Russia have manifested in political pressure from the country's right parties, causing Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki to [announce a halt in arms](#) shipments ahead of elections next month. In the United States, continuing weapons shipments and financing for Kiev have become a major factor in the [complex political jockeying](#) of the US Congress. Even the strongly pro-Ukraine Biden administration, which has pledged its undying support for Kiev, has backed off plans to integrate the former Soviet republic into the NATO alliance, instead suggesting an [Israel-like arrangement](#) with preferential sales of new weapons.

Matthew Gordon-Banks, a former British Conservative Member of Parliament and Senior Research Fellow at the UK Defense Academy, told Sputnik on Thursday that NATO's gamble on pressing its strategy to weaken Russia was based on false premises and as a result has totally failed, alienating much of the world.

"We had so very many opportunities to prevent conflict in Ukraine," Gordon-Banks said. "We must now, especially in the UK, seek to improve our diplomacy, improve our dialogue and quite simply 'listen more and lecture less.' The Global South has [frankly had enough](#). Good diplomacy requires not just the expression of your own country's views and policy but having a complete understanding of another country's views and concerns and for them to be noted; and then for policy makers not to ignore them."

"The refusal of Western leaders, especially the US, to entertain an alternative narrative regarding Ukraine has created more risk with each passing day. False or mistaken assumptions about why Russia is doing what it is doing carries an enormous risk of miscalculation on the part of the United States and its NATO allies. All too often, there is a failure to seek to understand and take on board how Russia and Russians see things."

"The wild talk of war with Russia, from some, takes no account that NATO is unlikely to win such a conflict," Gordon-Banks asserted.

He noted that despite Western sanctions, the Russian economy remains "robust," and that its "seemingly unlimited access" to natural resources, including energy resources and rare earth metals, will keep its global military position strong. As a consequence, the Russian defense industry has ramped up production to levels "the West cannot match," he said.

By contrast, "Ukraine is totally dependent on the West to provide money and weapons," Gordon-Banks said, noting that the Russian Armed Forces were "inflicting enormous casualties on Ukraine's military and decimating infrastructure critical to the Ukrainian military campaign." "Too many so-called 'key opinion-formers' have never even met a Russian or Chinese citizen, let alone have a real understanding of how they see things," the academic said. "This includes many so-called 'experts.'"

"This ignorance breeds Russophobia and a feeling of superiority not founded in reality. Even worse are those individuals and academics who know that they are daily lying in their statements, but feel unable to tell the truth."

"Ukraine has been a spectacular failure of US foreign policy. To some extent it is having an impact, especially [with the rise of BRICS](#), which may cut America off at the knees. Even on the military side, the type of ground in Ukraine was always going to lead to an artillery-based war, with much equipment unable to move in that terrain for many months of the year. Right from the start, the US ought to have known it had neither the shells required to supply Ukraine or the military-industrial complex to manufacture them in sufficient quantity.

"Each time British or NATO missiles, often guided by NATO personnel, hit the Russian heartland, it risks retaliation in a manner not currently part of the so-called special military operation," Gordon-Banks noted, adding that the Russians "genuinely believe they face an existential threat from the West," especially the United States.

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Earth-Sized Exoplanet 'Made Mainly of Iron' Likely Remnant Core of Much Larger World

Several successive missions aimed at scrutinizing nearby stars for signs of exoplanets orbiting them have yielded knowledge of a bewildering array of worlds. The latest entry into that catalog of the bizarre is Tahay, also known as Gliese 367b, which seems to be made of almost pure iron.

The discovery was explained in detail in [an article published recently](#) in the Astrophysical Journal Letters by a team led by Elisa Goffo, a Ph.D. student at the Physics Department of the University of Turin.

The planet was [first spotted in data](#) collected in 2021 by the Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS), which replaced NASA's Kepler mission in conducting all-sky surveys to look for exoplanets. It is an ultrashort-period planet that orbits its host star, a red dwarf named Añañuca, in just 7.7 hours, indicating it is extremely close to the star's surface.

That's not unusual when it comes to red dwarf stars, which are smaller than sun-sized stars, but when the astronomers looked closer using the High-Accuracy Radial Velocity Planet Searcher (HARPS) spectrograph at the European Southern Observatory, they saw something strange about the planet's size and mass - it's actually more dense than previously thought.

Tahay was found to have a radius of about 70% that of Earth's, while its mass is 63% that of Earth's, indicating a [much higher density](#), on par with that of iron, not rock. Earlier findings placed Tahay's mass and radius at 55% and 72% of Earth's, respectively.

"You could compare GJ 367b to an Earth-like planet with its rocky mantle stripped away," Goffo said in a news release.

"This could have important implications for the formation of GJ 367b," she said. "We believe that the planet might have formed like the Earth, with a dense core made mainly of iron, surrounded by a silicate-rich mantle."

So how did it arrive in its present state, with nothing left but a big ball of iron? A collision with another protoplanet during the star system's formation, when things are more chaotic, might have been the cause.

"A catastrophic event could have stripped away its rocky mantle, leaving the dense core of the planet naked," Goffo explained.

Two other possibilities also exist: Tahay could be the remnant core not of an Earth-like rocky world, but of a large gas giant like Neptune, the atmosphere of which was long blasted away by Añañuca's radiation. It could also have simply formed that way, in an unusually iron-rich part of the protostar's nebula - however, the scientists consider that the least likely explanation.

"Possible pathways may include the formation out of material significantly more iron-rich than thought to be normally present in protoplanetary disks. Although it is not clear if disks with such a large relative iron content specifically near the inner edge (where most of the material might be obtained from) exist," they wrote in the paper.

Indeed, [a 2020 study](#) couldn't explain the amount of iron in the planet Mercury, which is approximately 70% metallic and only slightly less dense than the Earth, but has just 5% of the mass of the Earth. Like Tahay, Mercury is the closest planet to its host star, although Tahay is 100 times closer to Añañuca than Mercury is to the sun.

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Trump Reportedly Refused to Wear COVID Mask Because It Ruined His Makeup

The former president did not mandate the use of a mask, and even eschewed the mask in some cases: downplaying its effectiveness, refusing to be photographed wearing one, and mocking then-former US Vice President Joe Biden for wearing them.

A new book is revealing the real reason as to why former US President Donald Trump refused to wear a mask: Trump was worried about his makeup, more specifically his bronzer, which would rub off on the masks he wore.

The revelation comes from Cassidy Hutchinson - a former White House aide and assistant to former Chief of Staff Mark Meadows, who is set to soon release a memoir detailing her time at the White House during the Trump administration.

In her book, Hutchinson describes a visit to the Honeywell facility in Phoenix, Arizona, where Trump was criticized for not wearing a mask during a tour of the grounds. The criticism came as the workers themselves were wearing face coverings, as well as producing masks.

The former president reportedly questioned whether or not he should wear a mask during the tour. It's said he put on a white mask, turned to staffers and asked for their opinion.

"I slowly shook my head. The president pulled the mask off and asked why I thought he should not wear it," Hutchinson wrote in her book. "I pointed at the straps of the N95 I was holding. When he looked at the straps of his mask, he saw they were covered in bronzer."

Trump, displeased with this information, asked, "Why did no one else tell me that?" before adding, "I'm not wearing this thing."

"The press would criticize him for not wearing a mask, not knowing that the depth of his vanity had caused him to reject masks — and then millions of his fans followed suit," Hutchinson reportedly [wrote](#).

Trump did not explain the true reason as to why he toured the facility sans mask. At the time, he told reporters he had consulted the company chief executive.

Hutchinson also writes in her book that Trump and Meadows had joked about the then-president having COVID-19 while they were on Air Force One. The flight took place just after the first debate with now-President Joe Biden in 2020.

During the flight, Trump speculated about his health and said his voice sounded “a little bit off” during a rally in Duluth, Minnesota. He then said he didn’t want the media to accuse him of having COVID-19, to which Meadows “laughed and promised him that we would handle it if it happened,” referring to Hutchinson. In his own book, Meadows reportedly wrote Trump had tested positive for COVID-19 three days prior to the debate, but disregarded it after another test came back negative.

Despite worsening symptoms, Trump carried out public events including the debate, as well as a reception for bereaved military families.

Hutchinson confirmed these claims in her novel, writing that Meadows and her were in a limo following the Air Force One plane ride. She asked if Trump had COVID-19, but Meadows did not respond.

“His silence answered every question I had,” Hutchinson wrote. “The virus had reached the highest echelons of power.”

Supporters of [Trump](#) followed his suit and became anti-maskers, people who, during the pandemic, were not only more unlikely to wear a mask but vehemently opposed to doing so. Trump eventually softened his tone on masks, but the damage had already been done: between March and November of 2020 an estimated [121,000](#) Americans had died, many of which could have been prevented by the use of mask, new reports have noted.

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US Book Bans Increasing as 2022 Recorded 33% Spike

The report found that targeted books were often authored by writers who were women, people of color, and/or LGBTQ+ individuals.

A [report](#) released by the free expression group PEN America shows there were 3,362 book ban attempts in K-12 schools across the US last year, a 33% jump from the year before.

The report, titled “Banned in the USA: The Mounting Pressure to Censor,” notes that attempts were not unsuccessful but details that students lost access to 1,557 unique book titles during that period.

By district, the most banned books of the 2022-2023 school year included: “Tricks” by Ellen Hopkins; “The Bluest Eye” by Toni Morrison; “Looking for Alaska” by John Green; “A Court of Mist and Fury” and “Empire of Storms” by Sarah J. Maas; “Gender Queer: A Memoir” by Maia Kobabe; “The Perks of Being a Wallflower” by Stephen Chbosky; “Thirteen Reasons Why” by Jay Asher; “Sold” by Patricia McCormick; “Crank” by Ellen Hopkins; and “Identical” by Ellen Hopkins.

“It’s disappointing to see such a steep rise in the banning and restriction of books. We should trust our teachers and librarians to do their jobs. If you have a worldview that can be undone by a book, I would submit that the problem is not with the book,” said Green, whose book was banned in 27 districts.

PEN notes that many of the banned books are mislabeled as “sexually explicit,” “harmful,” and “age inappropriate,” adding that bans “overwhelmingly” target books on race, racism, characters of colors, and LGBTQ+ characters.

Of the 3,362 books that were banned, PEN says 48% included themes or instances of violence and abuse, including instances of sexual assault: a theme which makes up 25% of all book banning instances. Some 42% covered topics on health such as mental health, bullying, suicide, substance abuse and sexual wellbeing and puberty. Another 29% of those books included instances or themes of grief and death.

“Amid a growing climate of censorship, school book bans continue to spread through coordinated campaigns by a vocal minority of groups and individual actors and, increasingly, as a result of pressure from state legislation,” PEN writes in their report.

The free expression group also found that nearly half (over 40%) of the book bans that took place occurred in school districts in Florida. Following Florida, there were 625 book bans in Texas, 333 bans in Missouri, 281 in Utah and 186 in Pennsylvania.

All states, except for Pennsylvania, are governed by Republicans. But PEN points out that book bans are occurring on a wider scale across the US, beyond conservative states or counties: at least 42% of states that are banning books voted Democrat in the 2020 presidential election. However, according to a May 2023 [Ipsos/NPR poll](#), 54% of Americans said they oppose book bans by school boards, and 69% oppose book bans by state lawmakers. But public schools have become particularly vulnerable following the pandemic and fear legal liability, as well as termination have kept their voices from being heard.

Eighty-seven percent of all the book bans took place in school districts that had a nearby chapter of a national advocacy group known to advocate for book censorship. PEN identified the most prominent book banning groups as: Moms for Liberty, Citizens Defending Freedom, and Parents’ Rights in Education.

The founder of Moms for Liberty, which was labeled as an extremist organization by the Southern Poverty Law Center, was present while Florida Governor Ron DeSantis signed the “Parental Rights in Education bill” penned as the “Don’t Say Gay” bill.

But young adult novels, PEN points out, are meant to help guide children into adulthood. The purpose of this genre of literature “is to create stories that mirror the real-life experiences of young people in navigating an increasingly complex world as they move from children to adults”. “YA has always been a ground for ideological struggles and social constructions of what sex ‘should look like’ for young adults. Emphasis on certain types of representations of sex and sexuality—such as losing your virginity, teen pregnancy, and sexual identity—ensures YA’s place as a space of exploration, and for figuring out our relationships to difficult topics,” write scholars Nic Hikton and Gabriel Duckels.

Educators Judith Franzak and Elizabeth Noll add: “[it is] important for readers of all ages to recognize the presence of violence in literature in order to gain a better understanding of it in their own world. ... If we can understand how we interpret violence, we are perhaps better equipped to resist violence in our midst.”

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Frustrated McCarthy Says GOP Hardliners Want to 'Burn the Whole Place Down' After Failed Vote

The Thursday events marked the second instance in which Republican infighting has raised questions about the House speaker's ability to maintain control of the lower chamber. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy sent House members home on [Thursday](#) for a three-day weekend despite failing to find a resolution that would help the government avoid a shutdown at the end of the month. Five GOP hardliners demanded additional spending cuts, blocking the debate on a key military funding bill.

After vowing to work through the weekend in order to find a solution to the crisis, those plans were canceled with members being told they would get "ample notice" if any votes are rescheduled. Failing to find a solution to the crisis, members are showing little faith in McCarthy's ability to avoid a government shutdown, which could begin in just 11 days. House Republicans have voiced their frustrations regarding intraparty fighting to the media. "We are very dysfunctional right now," Rep. Tim Burchett, (R-TN) said, before fuming that GOP leaders "obviously can't count" votes. He then compared McCarthy to his predecessor, Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) saying: "Speaker Pelosi, love her or hate her, she put something out there and they'd rally around it."

"This is painful. It gives me a headache. This is a very difficult series of missteps by our conference," US Rep. Steve [Womack](#) (R-AR) said. "If you can't do [the defense bill], what can you do?"

US Rep. Mike Lawler (R-NY), a moderate Republican, seethed that the bickering within his party was a "clown show." He added that Republicans will have to compromise if they want to get any work done in a government that is so heavily controlled by Democrats.

"For my colleagues, they have to come to a realization: If they are unable or unwilling to govern, others will. And in a divided government where you have Democrats controlling the Senate, a Democrat controlling the White House, there needs to be a realization that you're not going to get everything you want," he said.

"And just throwing a temper tantrum and stomping your feet, frankly not only is it wrong — it's pathetic," he added.

[McCarthy](#) also slammed his conservative colleagues for wanting to "burn the place down."

"It's frustrating in the sense that I don't understand how anyone votes against bringing the idea up and having the debate," he said. "This is a whole new concept of individuals that just want to burn the whole place down. That doesn't work."

The vote on Thursday failed 212 to 216, with five Republicans - Reps. Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia, Dan Bishop of North Carolina, Matt Rosendale of Montana and Andy Biggs and Eli Crane, both of Arizona - voting no. Rules Committee Chairman Tom Cole, Oklahoma, also participated in the vote.

Crane and Green originally voted for the rule earlier this week, but changed their vote on Thursday, catching fellow Republicans off-guard. Absences also affected the Thursday voting outcome.

Crane, a member of the House Freedom Caucus and a newcomer to Congress, said he is demanding lower spending levels and wants no more aid for Ukraine.

“[Constituents] understand there’s no appetite to quit spending money we don’t have, and they expect me to do whatever I can to stop it and to change how we do business up here,” he said. With the House stuck in a sort of paralysis, the new plan is for Republicans to try and complete work on individual, long-term spending bills, as their short-term funding bill did not have enough GOP votes amid hardliner opposition, according to one American news [source](#).

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Can't Get You Outta My Head - Cartoon

In perhaps the most impressive demonstration yet of the dedication of fans of the multi-billionaire tech magnate, people are signing up to allow Elon Musk’s neurotech startup to install experimental implants in their brains.

The website for Musk’s biotechnology company Neuralink announced Tuesday it was recruiting patients to participate in its first clinical human trial.

“Our brain-computer interface is fully implantable, cosmetically invisible, and designed to let you control a computer or mobile device anywhere you go,” promises the site for Neuralink, a device Musk says will restore capability to people with paralysis.

Musk has been working on the technology for a number of years but as of yet has only tested the chip on animals. His company generated negative headlines last year when efforts to enable a monkey to play Pong resulted in the death of the animal. [Some employees worry](#) the company is rushing the technology to market and violating animal welfare laws in the process.

If the promise of enabling Jedis in training to use ‘The Force’ weren’t appealing enough, Musk says the technology will evolve over time to restore various capabilities to the disabled. “In the future, we hope to restore capabilities such as vision, motor function, and speech, and eventually expand how we experience the world,” reads the Neuralink site.

However, the outspoken billionaire is known for sometimes making grand promises without following through. People who tested underground tunnels Musk proclaimed would solve traffic congestion [were unimpressed](#).

The tech magnate has teased his so-called ‘hyperloop technology’ for over a decade, although it has yet to materialize. Critics have theorized Musk, an automobile manufacturer, proposed the speculative technology in order to sap support among the US public for high-speed rail.

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Dead Heat: New Poll Shows Trump, Biden Tied in Voter Preferences for 2024 Election

White House advisers have urged Democrats to stay calm and carry on, insisting issues such as abortion and disapproval of former US President Donald Trump will ensure a victory for the Biden camp.

A new poll on Tuesday showed US President Joe Biden's modest lead over his predecessor Donald Trump had evaporated in the 2024 race for the White House.

The poll, released by YouGov and Yahoo News, showed the candidates tied with each of them winning the support of 44% of registered voters. The results mark a shift from a poll by the same firm the previous month that showed Biden with 47% support and Donald Trump with 41%.

A full 7% of registered voters said they were undecided while 4% said they would refuse to vote in a rerun of the 2020 election.

In addition to the horse race numbers, [a series of other findings](#) showed ominous signs for Biden amidst a tightening race. The president's job approval sunk to 38%, just above his record low of 35% in August 2022.

Meanwhile, only 27% of voters rated Biden as "fit to serve another term as president" while 77% said the octogenarian politician's age is a problem. Some 47% of Americans believe Biden and his family are corrupt, and only 34% approve of his handling of the country's economy.

But Biden advisers believe the state of the economy will be a key pillar of the president's reelection campaign, pointing to [record low unemployment](#) and easing inflation.

Strategists plan to sell Biden as the guardian of American democracy in the wake of Trump's challenging of the 2020 election results, and they believe voter engagement on the abortion issue after last year's [overturning of Roe v. Wade](#) will drive more progressives to the polls.

Trump seems to acknowledge his party's anti-abortion position may prove fatal for him next year. He recently appeared to strike a more moderate tone on the issue, calling Florida's recently-enacted six-week abortion ban "a terrible thing" in a [weekend interview](#) with US media.

The remark was met with criticism from various conservative figures.

"We don't take the ups and downs of individual polls to heart," a senior Biden adviser told media on Wednesday, insisting the president's political acumen is consistently underrated. "What will matter next year is when our voters are fully engaged."

The YouGov/Yahoo News poll comes amidst two other polls this week from Emerson and Morning Consult which also show a tied presidential contest. [One average of polls](#) from various firms showed Trump with a scant .5-percent lead over Biden in voter preference, confirming Americans are currently sharply divided between the two candidates.

But [surveys consistently show](#) both major-party contenders are regarded unfavorably by over half of the voting public. Unpopular candidates have been a persistent feature of US politics since the 2016 election, when polls showed both Trump and then-contender Hillary Clinton were viewed unfavorably by more than 50% of Americans.

Polling earlier this year showed about [half of voters](#) consider themselves to be political independents, dwarfing support for either of the two major parties. [Polling over the last two decades](#) shows 55% of Americans believe a third major party is needed, though the country's rigid two-party system continues to stymie the emergence of one.

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New Undersea Find Off Egyptian Coast Reveals Wealth of Ancient Pharaohs, Greeks

The mythical lost city of Atlantis still eludes archeologists, but new underwater discoveries have uncovered “treasures and secrets” serving as a link to vanished worlds.

The European Institute for Underwater Archaeology (IEASM) announced the discovery of several ancient Egyptian and Greek artifacts at a site underneath the Mediterranean Sea. French archaeologist Franck Goddio led the team which investigated a sunken temple to the god Amun. The temple was located off the Abu Qir Bay in Thonis-Heracleion, which for hundreds of years was an important Egyptian port before being swallowed by the ocean in a natural disaster.

The IEASM said the expedition uncovered various “precious objects” from what would’ve been the temple’s treasury, including “silver ritual instruments, gold jewelry and fragile alabaster containers for perfumes or unguents.”

“They bear witness to the wealth of this sanctuary and the piety of the former inhabitants of the port city.”

“It is extremely moving to discover such delicate objects, which survived intact despite the violence and magnitude of the cataclysm,” added Goddio, president and founder of the IEASM. Large stone blocks marked the site of the temple which would’ve occupied a spot near the port’s south canal. The city was first discovered by the IEASM in 2000 but the organization was only recently able to fully examine the site thanks to new exploratory technology allowing the team to see objects and chambers covered by “layers of clay several meters thick.” The Department of Underwater Archaeology of Egypt’s Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities aided in the effort. At the temple, pharaohs received “the titles of their power as universal kings from the supreme god of the ancient Egyptian pantheon,” according to the IEASM. The group said the temple was constructed during the 5th century BC before being lost to the sea during the mid-second century BC.

The significant find demonstrated the sacred ideals of the ancient Egyptians. However, nearby discoveries also shed light on Ancient Greek civilization, with a temple to Aphrodite being revealed east of the Egyptian site. There, bronze and ceramic jars and other artifacts were uncovered.

Greek weapons were also unearthed in the area, which archaeologists believe indicates the operation of mercenaries controlling access to the kingdom in the Nile River Delta. The Greeks would have brought their own religious traditions to the area after being allowed to settle there during the Egyptian Saïte dynasty from 664 until 525 BC.

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‘Absolutely Reckless’: US Navy Blasted for Destroying Evidence in Hawaii Water Poisoning Case

An attorney for 300 individuals suing the US Navy has claimed the naval service was aware of legal obligations to preserve evidence tied to the 2021 accident at a fuel storage facility in Hawaii that contaminated local water supplies, stressing the branch is “not an unsophisticated party.”

Lawyers for families seeking compensation for health issues caused by the 2021 Red Hill water crisis has sharply criticized Navy officials after it was revealed call logs and text messages were wiped from officers' cellphones.

The complaint was made in a Tuesday court filing that's part of an ongoing lawsuit being heard in the US District Court for Hawaii.

In the spring of 2022, data on the phone of Captain James "Gordie" Meyer, the former commander of Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command in Hawaii, was wiped during what was described as a "tech support incident." Captain Erik Spitzer, the former commander of Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam also had his phone wiped upon his retirement in June of that year.

"The Navy knew that it had to preserve evidence, and it also knew who the key players were," Kristina Baehr, a lawyer representing hundreds of individuals involved in the lawsuit, said in an interview with local media.

Along with attorneys Lyle Hosoda and Frederick Baker, Baehr is advocating an "adverse inference" from judges in the case, arguing the deletion of the messages itself constitutes evidence against the government defendants.

A 2021 mishap at the Navy's underground Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility in Halawa, Hawaii, led to jet fuel contaminating the Navy's Oahu water system. The incident affected running water for servicemen and members of the general public in thousands of nearby homes.

The lawsuit alleges dire consequences for people who drank and bathed in the contaminated water, including burns, seizures, rashes, lesions, migraines, thyroid and gastrointestinal disorders, neurological issues, and various neurobehavioral problems.

Some say they continue to suffer consequences from the pollution years later. Hundreds of residents were forced to abandon their homes and seek temporary housing while the Navy cleaned up the mess.

Recently, the US Environmental Protection Agency [solicited community feedback](#) as part of an oversight committee designed to address the disaster. Two prominent Native Hawaiian activists [were elected](#) to positions on the board late last week.

"We should have had this two years ago," said indigenous activist Healani Sonde Pale, criticizing the pace of the government's response to the incident. Indigenous Hawaiians have long criticized environmental practices in the state since the US' annexation of the island chain in 1898.

The US Navy's Pacific Fleet conducted an investigation of the incident which resulted in sharp criticism of its handling by Meyer, among other figures. In March 2022, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin ordered the Red Hill site to be permanently shut down.

Incidents such as the Red Hill water crisis and the 2014 water crisis in Flint, Michigan, have brought attention to the issue of contaminated water supplies in the United States. At least 12 people were killed in the incident in Flint, with tens of thousands being exposed to dangerous levels of lead.

A study released by the US Geological Survey in July estimated that [nearly half of US tap water](#) is tainted with so-called "forever chemicals." The health consequences of these substances are still being studied.

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US Deploys Drone Ships for First Time Near China

Remotely-operated vessels were sent to Japan for war games designed to increase US readiness in the region as China's rise creates tensions in the West.

Prototype unmanned ships arrived at a port near Tokyo, Japan, on Thursday to participate in naval exercises designed to test war and reconnaissance capabilities amidst worries over China's growing naval fleet.

The vessels arrived in Yokosuka as part of Integrated Battle Problem (IBP) 23.2, an exercise designed to test drone use in the region.

"One destroyer and two USVs [unmanned surface vessels] could replace three destroyers," [claimed](#) US Navy Commander Jeremiah Daley from aboard one of the ships, which is being tested with an onboard crew while in its prototype phase. "It's a force multiplier."

The ships form part of a 2018 initiative called Ghost Fleet Overlord designed to add drone capabilities to the US Navy. It's part of an effort to increase funding for the US Armed Forces as a whole as China's naval fleet has surpassed that of the United States in size.

China claims its fleet is designed for defensive purposes, and some analysts question whether it possesses the "blue-water navy" capabilities that allow US forces to project sustained power far from domestic shores.

Aerial drone use has been increasing for a number of years, with the US tapping on the technology more frequently in the Middle East as the country seeks to monitor Iran.

China's power is on the rise as the nation of 1.4 billion people surpassed the United States in purchasing power parity (PPP) nearly a decade ago. China's military hasn't seen significant action since the brief Sino-Vietnamese War more than 40 years ago, but tensions have been provoked with neighbors recently by the country's expansive claims in the South China Sea. Some worry the growing world power could [invade Taiwan militarily](#).

The territory of Taiwan was integrated into China in 1683. Kuomintang forces fled there after their loss in the Chinese Civil War which brought the Communist Party of China to power—US Presidents Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower raised the specter of nuclear force being used against the country if Mao Zedong's military crossed the Taiwan Strait to consolidate Communist control. Since then Taiwan has been self-governing, although China considers it a renegade province and opposes further moves towards independence for the island chain.

Annual US defense spending has been on the increase over the last decade, with China cited as a primary threat. The United States devotes more to military expenditures than [the next 10 countries combined](#).

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Meet Claudia Sheinbaum, the Nobel Laureate Set to Become Mexico's First Female President

Polling shows the Jewish candidate on track to win the Mexican presidency next year with 47% support, continuing left-wing Morena rule.

A recent survey shows progressive candidate Claudia Sheinbaum in pole position to win the Mexican presidency in 2024, becoming the first woman to occupy the National Palace.

The poll, published in the El País newspaper, shows Sheinbaum with the support of 47% of voters, well above her next-closest competitor Xóchitl Gálvez who leads a conservative coalition of parties with 30% support. The survey shows Sheinbaum consolidating sufficient support to win the election following [a brief controversy](#) around her party's nomination process earlier this month.

Sheinbaum's victory next year would represent a break with tradition in a number of ways. While becoming the country's first female leader, her background would also make her fairly unique: she's a Nobel Prize-winning scientist who before entering local government in Mexico City was an engineering professor at the National Autonomous University of Mexico.

She followed in the footsteps of her parents, themselves both academics, by studying physics at the university, which is known as a locus of left-wing organizing in the country. Her Nobel Prize-winning research, conducted in 2007 with members of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, focused on energy efficiency in buildings and transportation in Mexico.

If elected, Sheinbaum would also be the country's first Jewish president. Her fraternal grandparents hailed from Lithuania while her mother's family came from Bulgaria, immigrating to Mexico in the 1940s during the Holocaust.

Her ancestry became an issue in the highly-Catholic country when ex-President Vicente Fox disapprovingly referred to her as a "Bulgarian Jew," calling her opponent Gálvez "the only Mexican" in contention for the presidency. He apologized for the comment, while Sheinbaum's campaign [responded on the X platform](#) by declaring she is "more Mexican than mole!"

Sheinbaum would join former presidents Janet Jagan of Guyana, Ricardo Maduro of Honduras, and Pedro Pablo Kuczynski of Peru as Jewish leaders to hold their countries' highest office in Latin America (current Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro also claims Jewish ancestry).

Sheinbaum burnished her reputation in Mexico as a politician concerned with fighting crime and corruption during her time as mayor of the country's capital. During her presidential campaign she has promised to continue cash payments to poor Mexicans and further the country's energy independence from the United States.

Analysts speculate she would bring a more environmentalist focus to the office than her predecessor Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who currently enjoys an approval rating around 65%.

Her election to the presidency would burnish the feminist credentials of López Obrador's left-wing nationalist Morena party – the firebrand president has sometimes clashed with activists, once dismissing feminist critics as "conservatives." Feminists have urged the president to do more to fight violence against women in a region where cultural 'machismo' has long been identified as a concern.

Meanwhile, women's activists have achieved victories in Mexico's courts with the country's Supreme Court [voting to decriminalize abortion](#) throughout the country earlier this month.

Though sometimes displaying a curious sympathy for former US President Donald Trump, López Obrador's presidency has been marked by attempts to establish greater independence from the United States.

The populist leader has [sued gun manufacturers](#) in US courts and denounced his northern neighbor's [interventionist policies](#) in the region. Recently, he [urged Americans to vote against](#) Florida Governor Ron DeSantis in the upcoming Republican presidential primaries, criticizing his passing of anti-immigrant legislation.

López Obrador's 2018 election to the Mexican presidency was a watershed moment in a country where decades of political domination by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) caused Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa to refer to it as a "camouflaged dictatorship." In recent years, the party's lock on the presidency was broken with the election of Fox in 2000, but López Obrador's left-wing presidency is considered the first ideological break with the PRI's conservative governing ideology.

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Wooden Artifacts Suggest Human Ancestors Were Wittier Than We Thought

Archeologists uncovered interlocking pieces of pieces of wood in Africa that may suggest an ancient structure built by human ancestors.

Researchers published [an article](#) in the journal Nature on Wednesday detailing surprising findings that may help reshape our understanding of some of our earliest predecessors. The article, entitled "Evidence for the earliest structural use of wood at least 476,000 years ago," describes findings near Kalambo Falls in modern-day Zambia.

There, archeologists unearthed two large logs with carved grooves that allowed them to fit together. Luminescence dating suggests the object would've been constructed in the Early Stone Age.

The finding surprised researchers because Homo heidelbergensis, the human ancestor living at the time, was thought to be nomadic – a built structure suggests an entirely different kind of lifestyle. The finding also implies our species at the time was more intellectual than previously thought.

Hand axes, carving tools and other equipment found close by seemingly confirm the existence of a built wooden structure, perhaps serving as a walkway or a foundation for a shelter.

Previously, the oldest known wooden structure was thought to date back to 9000 BC.

Wooden artifacts are rare because the material is far less likely to be preserved over time than stone or other materials. Precise conditions at the archeological site ensured the structure was preserved under a high water table. The find suggests human ancestors at this period of history might have used wood as a building material far more than previously assumed.

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Nearly Half of Americans Identify as Religious - Poll

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) - Nearly half of Americans, 47%, identify as religious, according to a Gallup poll released Friday.

It marked a slight fall of three percentage points from 50% of respondents in 2002, while those who identified as "spiritual but not religious" remained steady at 33%. Two percent of Americans identified as both spiritual and religious, down from 4% in 2002.

Those who identified as neither religious nor spiritual increased to 18% from 11% in 2002.

Beliefs varied the most along partisan lines and age. Republicans were most likely to identify as religious (66%) compared to independents (44%) and Democrats (37%). Americans aged 65 and older were also most likely to identify as religious (57%), although all age groups showed clear decreases in religiosity, ranging from 5 to 13 percentage points, since the 1999 poll.

The latest poll was conducted in July.

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US Announces Launch of Economic, Financial Working Groups With China - Treasury

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) - The United States and China have launched economic and financial working groups to discuss policy matters and exchange information, the US Treasury Department said on Friday.

"Today, the United States and the People's Republic of China launched an Economic Working Group and a Financial Working Group under the direction of Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen and Vice Premier He Lifeng," the statement said.

The two working groups will be used for frank and substantive discussions on economic and financial policy matters, as well as an exchange of information on macroeconomic and financial developments, it added.

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US Awards \$1.2Bln to Enhance Space Force Systems - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) - The Aerospace Corporation has been awarded a contract worth more than \$1.2 billion to provide systems engineering and integration support to a US Space Force agency, the Department of Defense said in a press release.

"The Aerospace Corp., El Segundo, California, has been awarded a \$1,217,826,697... contract for systems engineering and integration support for the National Space Community," the release said on Thursday.

Space Systems Command, a US Space Force agency, at El Segundo, California is the contracting activity that will oversee the work, the Defense Department said. Work on the contract is expected to be completed by September of 2024, the release said.

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US Senators Introduce Bill to Sanction Azerbaijani Leaders, Aid Armenia

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) - Newly introduced bipartisan legislation in the US Senate calls for sanctioning top Azerbaijani officials, including President Ilham Aliyev, while authorizing military financing and humanitarian aid for Armenia.

The legislation comes in response to the recent escalation of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

"It [the bill] would also authorize foreign military financing for Armenia, develop a strategy to ensure the security of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh, and impose sanctions on the Aliyev regime for its actions against Armenians," Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Menendez's office said in a statement with the bill on Thursday.

The legislation includes provisions, such as the removal of waiver authority for section 907 of the Freedom Support Act, which effectively bans most forms of assistance to Azerbaijan, the statement said.

The legislation if passed would require the White House to impose sanctions on Aliyev and his cabinet, including the defense minister and foreign intelligence chief, according to text of the bill.

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US to Meet in Fall With Defense Industry, Kiev for Long-Term Security Talks - White House

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) - The United States will host a conference this fall between US and Ukrainian government officials, including US and Ukrainian defense industry leaders, to discuss enhancing Ukraine's long-term security through joint venture projects, the White House said in a press release.

"The United States government will host a conference this fall that brings together US defense industry, Ukrainian business leaders, and officials from both governments to explore options for joint ventures and co-production," the release said on Thursday.

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Pentagon to Spend \$1.7Trln to Buy 2,500 F-35s - Watchdog

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration and the Department of Defense remain committed to a \$1.7 trillion expenditure on buying a total of 2,500 F-35 Joint Strike Fighters for the US armed forces, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) said in a new report.

"In the coming decades, the Department of Defense plans to spend an estimated \$1.7 trillion on nearly 2,500 F-35s," the report stated on Thursday.

Most of the funds will go to operating, maintaining, and repairing the aircraft, the GAO acknowledged.

The F-35 aircraft now represents a growing portion of the Defense Department's tactical aviation fleet with about 450 of the aircraft fielded, the GAO said.

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Almost Half of US Fleet of F-35s Not Capable of Flying at Any Time - Watchdog

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) - Almost half the F-35 Joint Strike Fighters that are supposed to be operational are not capable of flying and it will cost \$1.3 trillion to keep them operational, the US Government Accountability Office (GAO) said in a new report.

"The F-35 fleet mission capable rate - the percentage of time the aircraft can perform one of its tasked missions - was about 55% in March 2023, far below program goals," the report said on Thursday.

The GAO called this level of operational readiness "unacceptably low."

"The program was behind schedule in establishing depot maintenance activities to conduct repairs. As a result, component repair times remained slow with over 10,000 waiting to be repaired - above desired levels," the report said.

Organizational-level maintenance has also been affected by a lack of technical data and training, the report added.

It will cost \$1.3 trillion to keep the full F-35 fleet operational and flying even if or when all the repair and maintenance bottlenecks as well as ongoing development problems with the aircraft's cannon, ejector seat, software and hardware are fixed, the report said.

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Bangladesh Hopes Moscow to Help Boost Number of Students Studying in Russia - Top Diplomat

UNITED NATIONS, September 22 (Sputnik) - Bangladesh hopes that Moscow will increase the number of students studying in Russia, Foreign Minister Abul Kalam Abdul Momen told Sputnik.

"So we do have possibilities and we are trying to come up with more opportunities. A lot of our students used to go to Russia... Nowadays, the number has reduced drastically," Abdul Momen said on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly. "I think Russia will help increase those numbers."

The UN General Assembly is one of the most important diplomatic events of the year, giving a venue for leaders from around the world to meet and address global issues.

The high-level General Debate will run from September 19-26.

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Bangladesh Having Difficulties Buying Russian Fertilizers, Trying to Resolve Issues - FM

UNITED NATIONS, September 22 (Sputnik) - Bangladesh is experiencing difficulties in buying Russian fertilizers because of the anti-Moscow sanctions but is working to sort out the issues, Bangladesh Foreign Minister Abul Kalam Abdul Momen told Sputnik.

"We buy fertilizers from Russia, but there is a difficulty because there have been so much of sanctions," Abdul Momen said. "We are trying to work out how to how to resolve this issue."

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Pentagon Says Ukraine Operations Will Continue Amid Potential Gov't Shutdown

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) - The Pentagon's efforts to assist Ukraine will not be affected by a potential US government shut down should lawmakers on Capitol Hill not reach a deal on a spending budget by the end of the month, Defense Department [DoD] spokesperson Chris Sherwood said in a statement to Sputnik.

Congress must pass some form of government funding, such as a temporary funding measure, standard appropriations bills, a series of minibuses or an omnibus, before the end of the month to avoid a shutdown.

"Operation Atlantic Resolve is an excepted activity under a government lapse in appropriations, which is consistent with DOD's Contingency Plan Guidance For Continuation Of Essential Operations In The Absence Of Available Appropriations," Sherwood said on Thursday.

Operation Atlantic Resolve is the name of the Pentagon's mission in response to Russia's special military operation in Ukraine.

Earlier in the day, White Hoses National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer both stressed that it is vital Congress approve additional funding for Ukraine.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy warned that Ukraine will be defeated by Russia if additional US assistance does not continue.

Biden is requesting from Congress approval for an additional \$24 billion to support Ukraine in

fiscal year 2024, but several US Republican lawmakers are hesitant to support it. Additional funding for Ukraine is not guaranteed to be included in a short-term spending bill if lawmakers fail to reach a deal on a full spending bill.

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US to Provide \$116Mln in Humanitarian Aid to Populations in Myanmar, Bangladesh - Blinken

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) - The United States will provide more than \$116 million in additional humanitarian assistance to vulnerable populations in Myanmar, Bangladesh and the region, including nearly \$75 million in funding to support Rohingya refugees, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.

"The United States will provide more than \$116 million in additional humanitarian assistance to support vulnerable populations in Burma, Bangladesh, and the region, including more than \$74 million to support Rohingya refugees and their host communities," Blinken said in a statement on Thursday.

The new funding will provide life-sustaining support to nearly 1 million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, and 540,000 members of Bangladeshi communities that host the refugees, the statement said.

In February 2021, the military seized power in Myanmar using a constitutional mechanism for transferring powers in an emergency situation. The military arrested government officials, having accused them of rigging the general election, and later appointed a new administration. The takeover sparked major civil unrest, resulting in armed resistance.

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New US Security Package for Ukraine Includes DPICM Cluster Munitions - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) - The new package of US military assistance for Ukraine includes a dual-purpose improved conventional munitions, also known as cluster munitions, the Defense Department said.

"This package includes additional capabilities to strengthen Ukraine's air defenses as it faces brutal aerial assaults from Russia, dual-purpose improved conventional munitions (DPICM) which are helping Ukraine on the battlefield," the Defense Department said in a press release on Thursday.

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New Security Aid for Ukraine Includes AIM-9M Missiles, Avenger Systems – Pentagon

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) – The new package of security assistance for Ukraine worth \$325 million includes AIM-9M missiles for air defense, Avenger air defense systems, and additional ammunition for HIMARS, the US Department of Defense said in a press release.

“The capabilities in this package, valued at up to \$325 million, include: AIM-9M missiles for air defense; Additional ammunition for High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS); Avenger air defense systems,” the press release said on Thursday.

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Blinken Says Approved \$128Mln in US Assistance to Ukraine, Providing \$197Mln in Old Aid

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement that he authorized the drawdown of \$128 million in US military equipment for Ukraine, which will be provided alongside \$197 million in previously authorized drawdowns.

“Following President Biden’s announcement of a new security assistance package for Ukraine... I am authorizing additional security assistance for Ukraine, which will provide \$128 million worth of US arms and equipment from Department of Defense stocks. The Department of Defense will also be providing \$197 million in arms and equipment under previously directed drawdowns,” the statement said on Thursday.

The package includes air defense, artillery and cluster munitions to aid Ukraine in its counteroffensive, the statement said.

The package comes amid a visit by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to Washington for meetings with US lawmakers and Biden administration officials.

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Biden Announces New Security Package for Ukraine That Includes Hawk Air Defense Battery

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden announced a new security package for Ukraine that will include the second Hawk air defense battery and monthly deliveries of additional weapons systems over the course of the winter.

"We're also focused on strengthening Ukraine's air defense capabilities to protect the critical infrastructure that provides heat and light during the coldest and darkest days of the year. That includes providing the second Hawk air defense battery, with steady deliveries of additional hawk and other systems each month through the winter and the new package of launchers and

interceptors," Biden said on Thursday.

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Biden Says US, Allies Will Continue Providing Weapons to Ukraine to Help Reclaim Its Land

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden announced that the United States and its allies will continue to provide security systems to Ukraine to support the country's progress in reclaiming its territory.

"Together with our allies and partners, we will continue to provide security systems to support Ukraine's progress in reclaiming its territory," Biden said on Friday.

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First US-Supplied Abrams Tanks to Arrive in Ukraine Next Week - Biden

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) - The first several US-supplied Abrams tanks will arrive in Ukraine next week, President Joe Biden said ahead of a high-level cabinet meeting with President Zelenskyy.

"Next week, the first US Abrams tanks will be delivered in Ukraine," Biden said on Thursday at the White House.

The United States has pledged to send Ukraine 31 Abrams tanks.

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Azerbaijan Foreign Minister Condemns Armenia's Appeal to UNSC on Nagorno-Karabakh

UNITED NATIONS, September 22 (Sputnik) - Armenia's appeal to the UN Security Council regarding Azerbaijan's recently undertaken counterterrorism measures in Nagorno-Karabakh infringe on the principles of the UN Charter, Azerbaijan Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov said.

Armenia appealed to the UN Security Council to condemn the targeting of civilian settlements in Nagorno-Karabakh; demand full compliance with international humanitarian law for the protection of civilians; deploy a UN mission to monitor the human rights and security situation; ensure unimpeded access of the UN agencies and other international organizations; and address the consequences of Azerbaijan's military actions.

"Armenia's request to the [UN Security] Council is related to the local counterterrorism measures taken by Azerbaijan within its sovereign territory in full compliance with international law including international humanitarian law," Bayramov said during a meeting at the UN

Security Council on the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh on Thursday.

Azerbaijan views this and other appeals to the UN Security Council to be violation of the UN Charter with respect to the "sovereignty and territorial integrity of states and non-interference with their internal affairs," Bayramov said.

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Malawi Needs A Lot More Assistance to Deal With Consequences of Cyclone Freddy - Minister

UNITED NATIONS, September 22 (Sputnik) - Malawi requires a lot more resources to deal with the consequences of the destruction caused by the cyclone Freddy, Minister of Natural Resources and Climate Change Michael Usi told Sputnik on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly.

"We are getting assistance, but it is not enough. Because the level of destruction that we have experienced in Malawi is so huge, that we need a lot more," Usi said. "IMF and World Bank they do assist Malawi, but the problem is so huge That we need more."

Usi also pointed out that the issue of climate change concerns the entire world and requires joint efforts from all.

The devastating tropical storm Cyclone Freddy earlier this year killed more than 1,000 people and displaced over half a million in Malawi.

During his speech to the UNGA on Thursday, Malawi's President Malawian Lazarus Chakwera called for action and decision on the part of the international community on climate financing and canceling debt for developing states.

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Azerbaijan Ready for Genuine Dialogue, Negotiations With Armenia - Foreign Minister

UNITED NATIONS, September 21 (Sputnik) - Azerbaijan Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov said on Thursday that Baku is ready for a genuine dialogue and negotiations with Armenia on the basis of equal and reciprocal respect.

"Azerbaijan once again reaffirms its readiness for a genuine dialogue and negotiations on the basis of equal and reciprocal respect for each other's legitimate interests. We once again extend our offer of a just fair and lasting peace to Armenia," Bayramov said during a UN Security Council meeting on the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, September 22 (Sputnik) -

US-RUSSIA RELATIONS

- * The United States is forcing Russian citizens in correctional facilities to make a deal with investigators by threatening them with long prison sentences, Russian Ambassador in Washington Anatoly Antonov said on Thursday.
- * Russia is not trying to "hunt down" Americans with a goal to exchange them later for Russians held in correctional facilities in the United States, Antonov said.

US MILITARY AID FOR UKRAINE

- * The first batch of Abrams main battle tanks are expected to arrive in Ukraine in the coming days and weeks, Pentagon spokesperson Pat Ryder said on Thursday.
- * Several Ukrainian pilots and dozens of maintainers will soon arrive in the United States for their English language course instruction followed by training on operating and maintaining F-16 fighter jets, Ryder said.
- * The flow of the United States' aid to Ukraine will lapse if Congress does not provide more funding for assistance by October 1, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said.
- * US President Joe Biden is slated to announce a new military aid package for Ukraine that will include air defense capabilities, Sullivan said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

- * Russia repelled five attacks and Ukraine has lost up to 300 soldiers killed and wounded in the Donetsk direction over the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Thursday.
- * Russian air defense systems shot down all the missiles with which Kiev tried to attack the Saki airfield in Crimea, Oleg Kryuchkov, an adviser to the Crimea governor, said.
- * Russian air defense systems shot down five Storm Shadow cruise missiles and a record 75 Ukrainian drones over the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said.
- * The United States believes that Poland will continue to support Ukraine, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said.

GRAIN DISPUTE

- * Ukrainian Agrarian Policy and Food Minister Mykola Solskyi spoke over the telephone with Polish Agriculture Minister Robert Telus and agreed to develop an option for cooperation in the field of grain export policy, the Ukrainian Agrarian Policy Ministry said on Thursday.
- * Slovakia and Ukraine have agreed to create a licensing system for grain supplies, and the ban on the import of four Ukrainian agricultural products will be in effect until its launch, a representative of the Slovak Ministry of Agriculture, Kristina Jurickova, said.

NAGORNO-KARABAKH

- * The Azerbaijani Prosecutor General's office said on Thursday that two criminal cases have been opened in connection with the death of six Russian peacekeepers in two incidents in Nagorno-Karabakh on Wednesday.

* Five ceasefire violations have been recorded in Nagorno-Karabakh since the end of hostilities, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

* The European Union is ready to take appropriate actions against Azerbaijan if the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh deteriorates, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said.

* The ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh persists in general, and the situation remains stable despite violations in some areas, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said.

RUSSIAN ECONOMY

* The growth of investments in the Russian economy in the second quarter of 2023 continued and amounted to 12.6%, President Vladimir Putin said on Thursday.

* The Russian government announced that it had introduced temporary restrictions on the export of gasoline and diesel fuel to stabilize the domestic market.

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Global Oil Prices End Lower After Swinging on Russia Fuel Ban

NEW YORK, September 21 (Sputnik) - Oil prices swung Thursday, initially rallying on Russia's fuel export ban before ending lower on the Federal Reserve's caution of more US interest rate hikes.

US crude oil's struggle to stay above the key bullish level of \$90 per barrel also raises questions on how seriously some view the market as overbought, analysts said.

New York-traded West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude for delivery in November settled at \$89.63 per barrel, down 3 cents, or 0.03%, on the day. WTI earlier hit an intraday high of \$90.98. The US crude benchmark fell almost 1% on Wednesday, after reaching a 10-month high of \$92.43 in the prior session.

WTI has to re-enter \$90 territory to avoid being pushed to mid-\$80 levels, Sunik Kumar Dixit, chief technical strategist at SKCharting.com, said.

"WTI's charts are showing that Unless the \$91 or \$92 levels are reclaimed, a further test of the Daily Middle Bollinger Band could take WTI to \$86.75," Dixit said. "Beyond that, a test of the 100-Week SMA, or Simple Moving Average, of \$86 is very likely."

London-traded Brent crude settled at \$93.30 a barrel, down 23 cents, 0.3%. Like WTI, Brent also fell 1% on Wednesday. The global crude benchmark hit a ten-month high of \$95.96 the day before.

Oil prices saw a volatile session on Wednesday after Russia temporarily banned exports of gasoline and diesel to all countries outside a circle of four ex-Soviet states with immediate effect in order to stabilize the domestic fuel market.

The shortfall will force Russia's fuel buyers to shop elsewhere, prompting refiners to process more of a dwindling crude supply to meet that demand, Tamas Varga of oil broker PVM said.

Crude prices have been on a tear since early June, with the rally accelerating in the past three weeks after major oil exporters Saudi Arabia and Russia collaborated to remove a combined 1.3 million barrels from the market each day until the end of the year.

"The oil market just finished pricing in the extension of a 300,000 bpd oil export cut, and now faces uncertainty as to how long this temporary ban will last," analyst Ed Moya said. "A stronger dollar is limiting today's oil price rally as it comes along with a deteriorating outlook for Europe."

The euro and other currencies in the bloc came under fresh stress Thursday from a potential end to central bank rate hikes in the region amid a weakening economic outlook. The dollar surged instead to a six-month high, limiting buying of dollar-denominated commodities by holders of other currencies.

The dollar strengthened after the Fed projected another quarter-percentage point rate increase by the year-end, despite leaving rates unchanged for September itself at a policy meeting on Wednesday.

Fed Chairman Jerome Powell said the US central bank is prepared to raise interest rates further, if appropriate, and the fact it decided to maintain the rate does not mean the Fed has reached its monetary policy goals.

Powell said energy-driven inflation, led by the 30% rally in oil prices since June, was one of the Fed's concerns.

The Fed raised interest rates 11 times between February 2022 and July 2023, adding a total of 5.25 percentage points to a prior base rate of just 0.25%.

Economists fear that the Fed's renewed hawkish stance will dampen global growth, though many also agree that a lid has to be put on oil prices if the Fed is to achieve its annual inflation target of 2%* US * OIL * PRICES * RUSSIA * BAN

Global Oil Prices End Lower After Swinging on Russia Fuel Ban

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Armenia's Mirzoyan Calls on UNSC to Deploy Interagency Mission to Nagorno-Karabakh

UNITED NATIONS, September 21 (Sputnik) – Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan called on Thursday on the United Nations Security Council to immediately deploy an interagency mission to Nagorno-Karabakh following an escalation.

"I appeal to the Security Council ... to immediately deploy an interagency mission by the United Nations to Nagorno-Karabakh, with the aim to monitor and assess the human rights, humanitarian and security situation to ensure unimpeded access of the UN agencies and other international organizations to Nagorno-Karabakh," Mirzoyan said during a UN Security Council meeting following the escalation.

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Abbas Calls for Palestine to Be Admitted to Full Membership in United Nations

UNITED NATIONS, September 21 (Sputnik) - Palestine should gain admission in the United Nations as a full member state and countries that have not recognized it should do so, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said on Thursday.

"I also call on the states that have not yet recognized the state of Palestine to declare the recognition. I call for the State of Palestine to be admitted to full membership in the United Nations. There are two states that the entire world are talking about, Israel and Palestine, but only Israel is recognized. Why not Palestine?" Abbas said in a speech at the UN General Assembly.

Abbas said he refused to accept that states like the United States and other European countries are expressing reluctance in officially recognizing Palestine as a full fledged United Nations member, considering the organization itself has accepted Palestine's participation as an observer state.

"These same states confirm every day that they support the two-state solution," Abbas said, adding that they still only recognize Israel.

Abbas asked what these countries were afraid of with respect to their continued refusal to grant Palestine full membership in the United Nations.

The Palestinians are defending their homeland and legitimate rights to live in Palestine through "peaceful popular resistance," and the efforts toward liberation would continue until an end is put to Israel's occupation, Abbas added.

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World Must First End Use of Coal, Find Replacement to Avoid Disruptions - US Envoy

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - The world should first focus on phasing out the use of coal amid the clean energy transition but a replacement energy source needs to be available to avert any disruptions, US Special Envoy for Global Infrastructure and Energy Security Amos Hochstein said on Thursday.

"So the first thing we need to do is do whatever we can to stop the rise in coal," Hochstein said during a discussion hosted by Foreign Policy. "We should stop the rise in everything, but coal has to come first. We need to get rid of coal in our energy system, that is a lot harder than it sounds."

Hochstein noted that demand around the world is rising across oil, gas, and coal.

Getting rid of coal in the power system will require finding an alternative energy source that can replace it that will not create disruptions, the US envoy said.

Hochstein stressed that the world needs to accelerate the clean energy transition, such as facilitating permits for clean energy projects and securing critical supply chains.

However, while the world goes through the energy transition, it's also important to have a delicate balance that ensures the energy market can still sustain everyone's needs so that no no energy shocks arise that result in economic shocks, Hochstein said.

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Russia to Assist Armenia, Azerbaijan to Elaborate Peace Agreement – UN Deputy Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, September 21 (Sputnik) – Russia stands ready to assist Armenia and Azerbaijan to elaborate a peace agreement between the countries, unblock transport communications, and delineate borders following an escalation in Nagorno-Karabakh, First Deputy Permanent Representative of Russia to the UN Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Thursday. “We intend to assist in launching work on all the pillars for normalization agreed to by the three leaders, including elaborating a peace agreement, unblocking transport communications, delimiting borders, and normalizing contexts between two neighboring peoples,” Polyanskiy said during a UN Security Council meeting.

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Russia Interested in Quick Normalization of Azerbaijan-Armenia Relations – UN Deputy Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, September 21 (Sputnik) – Russia is interested in seeing the normalization of the bilateral relationship between Armenia and Azerbaijan as soon as possible, First Deputy Permanent Representative of Russia to the UN Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Thursday. “More than anyone else, we're interested in resolving the situation as soon as possible,” Polyanskiy said during a UN Security Council meeting following an escalation in Nagorno-Karabakh.

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Abbas Questions Why Israel Has Not Been Sanctioned Over Flagrant Int'l. Law Violations

UNITED NATIONS, September 21 (Sputnik) - Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said on Thursday that he remains puzzled why there is a silence about Israel's flagrant violations of international law and why the country has not been held accountable and sanctioned.

"I wonder, why remain silent about all the flagrant violations of international law that are being committed by Israel, the occupying power? Why isn't Israel being subjected to serious accountability? Why are sanctions not imposed on it for ignoring and violating international resolutions, as is the case with other countries in the world?" Abbas said in his address at the UN General Assembly.

Abbas said the international community is practicing a double standard on issues pertaining to Israel and treats that country as being "above the law."

Palestine will continue to persist in its pursuit for relevant international bodies to hold Israel accountable for its occupation of Palestinian territory and for all the crimes committed against its citizens in the past and in the future, Abbas said.

The United States and the United Kingdom should also be held accountable for their roles in the redaction of the Balfour Declaration, Abbas said.

The Palestinians will not forget history and are calling for acknowledgment, apologies and reparations in accordance with international law, he said.

Abbas also highlighted mounting confessional tensions in Jerusalem, noting that he has repeatedly warned against transforming the current political conflict into a religious one, for which Tel-Aviv would bear all responsibility.

The history and legal status of Jerusalem must be preserved, Abbas added.

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One Person Dead, 49 Injured in School Bus Crash in New York - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - At least one student has died and 49 have been injured as a result of a school bus crash in the state of New York, CNN reported on Thursday.

Three students have been injured severely, the report said, citing sources from the Emergency Management Services (EMS) working on the scene.

The school bus, along with two others, headed from Long Island to the state of Pennsylvania, the report said.

The New York State Police issued a statement saying it is currently investigating the bus crash in Orange County.

However, the police did not provide more details except that the accident resulted in "multiple serious injuries" and the interstate highway where the crash occurred has been closed.

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We Need Roadmap to Integrate Nagorno-Karabakh Population Into Azerbaijan – UN Deputy Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, September 21 (Sputnik) – There is a need for a roadmap to integrate the population of Nagorno-Karabakh into the constitutional order of Azerbaijan with clear rights and guarantees, First Deputy Permanent Representative of Russia to the UN Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Thursday.

“We need to develop a gradual roadmap to integrate the population of Nagorno-Karabakh into the constitutional order of Azerbaijan, with clear guarantees of their rights and security. These processes will be actively supported by Russian peacekeepers. The security and rights of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians are of key importance,” Polyanskiy said during a UN Security

Council meeting following an escalation in the region.

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Russia Takes Note of Baku's Readiness to Probe Killing of Its Peacekeepers-UN Deputy Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, September 21 (Sputnik) – Russia took note of Azerbaijan's readiness to conduct an immediate and thorough investigation into a killing of Russian peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh, First Deputy Permanent Representative of Russia to the UN Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Thursday.

"We took note of the readiness of Azerbaijan to conduct immediately a thorough investigation of the tragedy and bring those responsible to justice," Polyanskiy said during a UN Security Council meeting following an escalation in Nagorno-Karabakh.

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US Urges Immediate Halt to Azerbaijan's Actions in Nagorno-Karabakh - Ambassador

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - The United States calls on Azerbaijan to immediately halt its military actions in Nagorno-Karabakh, US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield said during a UN Security Council (UNSC) meeting on Thursday.

"The United States is alarmed by the situation in Nagorno Karabakh due to Azerbaijan's continued military actions, and we call for these actions to cease immediately," Thomas-Greenfield said.

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US Approves \$500M In Land Forces Spare Parts Sale to Saudi Arabia - Defense Security Agency

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration has approved a half-a-billion-dollar sale of spare parts for fleets of tanks, Bradley vehicles, heavy artillery howitzers and other military equipment to Saudi Arabia, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) announced on Thursday.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia of Cooperative Logistics Supply Support Arrangement (CLSSA) Program, Foreign Military Sales Order (FMSO) II and related equipment for an estimated cost of \$500 million," the DSCA said in a press release.

The DSCA delivered the required certification notifying Congress of the possible sale earlier in

the day, the release said.

Saudi Arabia has requested a blanket order requisitions under CLSSA for common spares/repair parts to support its fleet of Abrams tanks, M-60 tanks, Bradley vehicles, mortar carriers, combat engineer vehicles, high mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles, light armored vehicles, howitzers and additional support vehicles, the release said.

The sale will also include spare parts for pistols, rifles, crew-served weapons, mortars, vehicle periscopes, night vision devices, TOW launchers and missile parts, radar sets, generators, testing/calibration equipment, communication equipment and other related elements of logistics and program support, the release added.

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Ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh 'Indispensable,' Must Be Respected - Top French Diplomat

UNITED NATIONS, September 21 (Sputnik) - The ceasefire recently struck between Azerbaijan and Armenian forces in Nagorno-Karabakh is indispensable and must be respected, French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Catherine Colonna said on Thursday.

"A ceasefire was announced yesterday. It was indispensable. And it is essential that it be respected," Colonna said during a UN Security Council meeting.

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France Says Azerbaijan Must Ensure Amnesty for Karabakh Forces That Accepted Ceasefire

UNITED NATIONS, September 21 (Sputnik) - Azerbaijan must ensure that amnesty be provided to the Armenian forces in Nagorno-Karabakh that have accepted the ceasefire and immediately reestablish traffic through the Lachin corridor, French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Catherine Colonna said on Thursday.

"[Azerbaijan] must ensure the amnesty for the forces that have accepted the ceasefire. It must reestablish unconditionally and without delay the traffic on the Lachin corridor in accordance with the order handed down by the International Court of Justice on February 22, 2023," Colonna said during a UN Security Council meeting on the escalation in Nagorno-Karabakh.

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Zelenskyy Meets With Kissinger, Wall Street CEOs in New York - White House Press Pool

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - Volodymyr Zelenskyy engaged in a series of high-level meetings during his visit to New York, including encounters with former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and Wall Street CEOs, according to a White House press pool report. Zelenskyy's itinerary in New York also encompassed discussions with other business leaders and diplomats.

On Thursday, prior to his White House visit, Zelenskyy also held talks with Congressional leaders and made a stop at the Pentagon, where he met with US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin.

After his visit to Washington, Zelenskyy will head to Canada for talks with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

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US State Dept. Contractor Charged With Espionage - Justice Department

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - A US State Department contractor faces espionage charges related to gathering defense information to aid a foreign government, the Justice Department announced in a press release on Thursday.

"A government contractor is charged by criminal complaint ...with espionage," the release said. "Abraham Teklu Lemma, 50, a naturalized US citizen of Ethiopian descent living in Silver Spring, Maryland, is charged with gathering or delivering national defense information to aid a foreign government; conspiracy to gather or deliver national defense information to aid a foreign government; and having unauthorized possession of national defense information and willfully retaining it."

Lemma worked as an IT administrator for the Department of State, and as a Management Analyst for the Department of Justice and was granted a top secret security clearance and granted access to classified systems, the release noted.

"According to the criminal complaint, between December 19, 2022, and August 7, 2023, Lemma copied classified information from Intelligence Reports and ...then removed the information, which was classified as secret and top secret, from secure facilities at the Department of State against protocol," the Justice Department said.

The two espionage charges carry a potential sentence of death or any term of years up to life, and the retention charge carries a maximum sentence of ten years, the release said.

The State Department in a separate release said they uncovered that Lemma may have transmitted information without authorization following a self-initiated review prompted by the arrest earlier this year of a member of the Massachusetts Air National Guard for the unauthorized disclosure of classified national defense information, in mid-April 2023.

The guardsman, Jack Teixeira, 21, allegedly transmitted classified information beginning in or around January 2022. The documents purportedly contained information regarding the conflict in Ukraine, US espionage activities, and other national security matters.

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EU's Michel in UNGA Speech Says Will 'Relentlessly' Support Ukraine

UNITED NATIONS, September 21 (Sputnik) - The European Union will "relentlessly support" Ukraine, European Council President Charles Michel said on Thursday.

"The European Union will relentlessly support Ukraine in its right to legitimate defense," Michel said in his address to the UN General Assembly.

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S. Sudan Feels Impact of Russia Sanctions Hindering Supplies From Europe - Finance Chief

UNITED NATIONS, September 21 (Sputnik) - Africa has been impacted by the conflict in Ukraine and anti-Russia sanctions given the region's reliance for crucial supplies from Europe, South Sudanese Finance Minister Bak Barnaba Chol said on Thursday.

"We do," Chol told reporters when when asked if South Sudan feels the impact of Anti-Russian sanctions. "The region depends on inputs from the Eastern Europe, especially the wheat and other essential commodities."

Additionally, Chol further pointed out the significant impact of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war on the region.

"We call upon the two parties to stop the war for humanity," Chol added.

Moscow exited the UN and Turkey-brokered grain deal with Ukraine in July due to the West's failure to lift sanctions on food and fertilizer exports from Russia.

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Pentagon Says Confident It Can Defend US Following F-35 Crash

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) – Despite the incident with the crash of the newest American F-35 fighter jet, the United States continues to be able to defend itself, Pentagon press secretary Pat Ryder said on Thursday.

"We're confident that we can continue to defend the nation and do what we need to do," Ryder said during a press briefing.

On Sunday, an F-35B Lightning II jet went missing over the US state of South Carolina. The pilot was able to eject safely but it took the military more than 24 hours to locate the debris of the crashed aircraft in Williamsburg County.

The US Marine corps started an investigation into the incident and issued a two-day stand

down for all aircraft units inside and outside the United States.

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Russia Has Been, Will Continue to Be A Friendly Country With Lebanon - Top Diplomat

UNITED NATIONS, September 21 (Sputnik) - Russia had been and will remain a friendly country with Lebanon, Lebanese Foreign Minister Abdallah Bou Habib told Sputnik.

"Russia has been and will continue to be a friendly country with Lebanon," Bou Habib said. "We were against the war between Russia and Ukraine. And that's all. Otherwise we are almost always with Russia on the international scene, either we are abstaining or supporting Russia. And we have good relations with the Russian government as well."

When asked where Lebanon would like to expand this cooperation, the minister noted, "This has to be studied between the various ministers in both countries."

Bou Habib spoke on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York.

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US Sentences Ex-Novatek CFO Gyetvay to 86 Months, \$4M In Restitution, \$350,000 Fine

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - A US court on Thursday sentenced former Novatek Chief Financial Officer Mark Gyetvay to 86 months in prison, a \$4 million restitution, and a \$350,000 fine, according to a court filing said.

"The Court imposes the sentence as follows: Imprisonment: 86 months," the filing said, recommending incarceration in Florida.

The defendant is to self-surrender by November 7.

The court has also ordered a 3-year term of supervised release, a \$4 million restitution to the Internal Revenue Service, and a \$350,000 fine, according to the document.

In March, Gyetvay was convicted of making false statements to US tax authorities, failing to disclose offshore accounts, and failing to file tax returns.

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Sullivan Says Biden, Zelenskyy Not Holding Joint Press Conference Due to Lack of Time

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy will not hold a joint press conference after their meeting in Washington due to the latter's busy schedule, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on

Thursday.

"President Zelenskyy came in from New York, he's going off to other destinations tonight. He has a limited number of hours here," Sullivan said during a press briefing, when asked why Zelenskyy and Biden did not schedule a joint press conference for after their meeting.

The White House wanted to make sure Zelenskyy had plenty of time to engage with lawmakers at the Capitol, Sullivan said.

Biden also wanted adequate time to meet with Zelenskyy one-on-one and with his cabinet, Sullivan also said.

Biden and Zelenskyy will make two statements to the press during that time, Sullivan added.

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US Senate Confirms General Eric Smith as Marine Corps Commandant

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - The US Senate on Thursday confirmed General Eric Smith as Commandant of the Marine Corps, following the confirmation of two other senior military officials by the upper chamber of Congress

Senators confirmed Smith in a unanimous vote of 96-0.

On Wednesday, the Senate confirmed General Charles Brown as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Earlier on Thursday, Senators confirmed Gen. Randy George as Army Chief of Staff.

The Senate confirmed the three nominees after Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer decided to file cloture following months of inaction.

Senator Tommy Tuberville placed a hold on using unanimous consent processes to confirm nominees, putting him in a months-long standoff with Schumer, who eventually decided to bring the confirmations to the floor via regular procedure. Schumer could have taken this same action "months ago," Tuberville said.

Tuberville is inhibiting military confirmation in opposition to Defense Department policies allowing reimbursement of service members who receive abortions.

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Ukrainian Pilots, Maintainers to Arrive in US Soon for F-16 Jet Training - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - Several Ukrainian pilots and dozens of maintainers will soon arrive in the United States for their English language course instruction followed by training on operating and maintaining the F-16 fighter jets, Defense Department spokesperson Pat Ryder said on Thursday.

"To my knowledge, the training in Denmark has already begun, but as it relates to the training here, in the United States, we do expect Ukrainian pilots and maintainers to arrive in the United

States soon to conduct the initial English language training, and then the pilot training to start in the weeks after that," Ryder said during a press briefing. "We expect several Ukrainian pilots and dozens of maintainers."

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Abrams Tanks to Arrive in Ukraine in Coming Days, Weeks - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) – First Abrams main battle tanks are expected to arrive in Ukraine in the coming days and weeks, Pentagon press secretary Pat Ryder said on Thursday.

"I'm not going to be able to go into specifics in terms of when exactly those tanks will arrive, other than to say we expect them to arrive in Ukraine in the coming days and weeks," Ryder said during a press briefing.

The Biden administration has committed a total of 31 Abrams main battle tanks to Ukraine.

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Mexican Foreign Secretary Calls Lavrov 'One of the Best' International Persons She Knows

UNITED NATIONS, September 21 (Sputnik) - Mexican Foreign Secretary Alicia Barcena called her Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov "one of the best" international persons she knows.

"I admire Lavrov very much. He's one of the best international persons I know from before," Barcena told Sputnik at the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York.

Barcena said she will meet with Lavrov on Friday, adding that relations between Mexico and Russia are "very good."

"We have been long, long partners on many fronts," Barcena said.

While Mexico is concerned about the Russian military operation in Ukraine, the two sides have a lot of other things to discuss in bilateral talks, Barcena added.

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Sullivan Says US Aid to Ukraine Will Lapse Without New Funding by October 1

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - The flow of the United States' aid to Ukraine will lapse if Congress does not provide more funding for assistance by October 1, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Thursday.

"The day after the funds lapse or run out at the end of the fiscal year, there would be a break if

we do not get the funding starting October 1," Sullivan said during a press conference.

The Biden administration sent a supplemental funding request to Congress for the end of the fiscal year to the end of the calendar year. There is not a "single dollar amount" that is necessary for Ukraine, Sullivan said, adding that Congress could include a proportional amount of aid to the funding measure passed.

The administration does not have a projection for how much more funding it will ask for to assist Ukraine, Sullivan also said.

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Sullivan Says US Believes Poland Will Continue to Support Ukraine

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - The United States believes that Poland will continue to support Ukraine, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Thursday.

"So, we will stay in consultation with them to ensure that we understand fully what the nature of Poland's stance is on these issues, but I believe that Poland will continue to be a supporter of Ukraine," Sullivan said during a press briefing.

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Biden Determined US Will Not Give Ukraine ATACMS, But Option Remains on Table - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden has decided not to provide Ukraine with ATACMS as part of today's military aid package, but has not taken the long-range weapons off the table for the future, White House Spokesman Jake Sullivan said on Thursday.

"[Biden] has determined that he will not provide ATACMS but he is also not taking it off the table in the future," Sullivan said during a press conference.

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Biden, Zelenskyy to Discuss Ukraine's Economic Recovery at White House Talks - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will discuss Ukraine's economic recovery during a meeting with Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the White House on Thursday, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said.

"President Biden and President Zelenskyy will also discuss our joint efforts to support Ukraine's economic recovery," Sullivan said during a press briefing.

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Biden to Unveil New Military Package for Ukraine Today to Include Air Defenses - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden is slated to announce Thursday a new military aid package for Ukraine that will include air defense capabilities, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said.

"President Biden will announce a new package of military assistance today that includes significant air defense capabilities to help Ukraine protect its people," Sullivan said during a press conference.

Biden is hosting Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the White House on Thursday.

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Africa Acknowledges Russia's Support, Expresses Interest in Economic Cooperation - Chol

UNITED NATIONS, September 21 (Sputnik) - South Sudanese Finance Minister Bak Barnaba Chol said on Thursday that Russia's support for Africa across various sectors has been significant and is being recognized.

"That is significant. It's important that Africa receive support from Russia and we recognize the support from Russia in different sectors," Chol said on Thursday.

The finance minister highlighted the potential for increasing collaboration between Russia and African countries, particularly emphasizing opportunities in South Sudan.

"In Africa, particularly in countries like South Sudan, we have potential in agriculture. So many sectors that Russia can help," Chol said.

South Sudan "definitely" has a strong interest in economic cooperation with Russia, Chol added.

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Ottawa Not Aiming to Provoke India Over Nijjar Murder But Must Protect Canadians - Trudeau

UNITED NATIONS, September 21 (Sputnik) - Ottawa does not seek to provoke India over the assassination of a Sikh community leader in British Columbia, but is unequivocal about the importance of rule of law and protecting Canadian citizens, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Thursday.

Earlier today, the BLS Indian visa application center in Canada said it would be suspending its visa services in the country until further notice. The news was shortly followed by the Indian

Foreign Ministry spokesman Arindam Bagchi informing that it expected Ottawa to reduce its diplomatic presence in India to maintain parity.

"There is no question that India is a country of growing importance and a country that we need to continue to work with, not just in the region but around the world. And we're not looking to provoke or cause problems, but we are unequivocal around the importance of the rule of law, and unequivocal about the importance of protecting Canadians and standing up for our values," Trudeau said during a press conference from New York.

Earlier this week, Trudeau said the country's law enforcement agencies suspect the Indian government of involvement in the murder of the leader of the Sikh community in the Canadian province of British Columbia, Hardeep Singh Nijjar.

Trudeau also said the Indian government should cooperate with their Canadian counterparts in establishing relevant processes required to unveil the truth behind Nijjar's death, and allow for justice and accountability to be served.

Trudeau declined to address a question on the nature of the evidence Canada had on the murder of Nijjar, noting that the decision to publicly share the allegations was done with "utmost seriousness."

On Monday, Canada expelled a high-ranking Indian diplomat allegedly linked to India's foreign intelligence.

On Tuesday, in response to Ottawa's actions, the Indian authorities announced decision to expel a senior Canadian diplomat and asked him to leave the country within five days. Later in the week, the Indian Foreign Ministry urged its citizens planning to visit or currently in Canada to exercise extra caution.

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Trudeau Says Canada Supports UN Reforms Amid Calls to Strip Russia of Veto Power

UNITED NATIONS, September 21 (Sputnik) - Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Thursday that Canada supports various reforms of the United Nations amid calls by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to strip Russia of its veto power.

"Canada has long encouraged UN reforms of various types and these are conversations that are ongoing," Trudeau said on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly when asked whether Ottawa backs Zelenskyy's calls to strip Russia of its veto power.

Trudeau said the world finds itself in an odd situation as Russia, a permanent member of the UN Security Council, uses its veto power to block actions aimed at holding it accountable for what he called violations of the UN Charter.

Canada alongside its allies will continue to work at the United Nations and other forums to hold Russia to account and ensure that Moscow cannot profit from its special military operation in Ukraine.

During his address to the UN Security Council on Wednesday, Zelenskyy said the United Nations was at a "dead end" due to Russia having the right of veto in the world body. Zelenskyy called for reforming the United Nations, including its veto power mechanism, saying that the UN

General Assembly should be enabled to override a Security Council veto with a two-thirds majority vote.

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US Envoy to UN Did Not Share With Reporters Details of Her Speech at UNSC on Karabakh

UNITED NATIONS, September 19 (Sputnik) - US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield told Sputnik on Thursday that she cannot yet unveil the details of the statement she will deliver at the UN Security Council emergency meeting on Nagorno-Karabakh.

"I can't talk about it, you'll hear it," Thomas-Greenfield said when asked what message she will send at the meeting on the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Earlier on Thursday, Azerbaijan Ambassador to the United Nations Yashar Aliyev told Sputnik that his country will call for peace at the upcoming meeting.

The emergency meeting of the UN Security Council on Nagorno-Karabakh is set to take place later on Thursday.

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US Senate Confirms General Randy George as Army Chief of Staff

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - The US Senate on Thursday confirmed Gen. Randy George as the Army's Chief of Staff, following Majority Leader Chuck Schumer's decision to bring the confirmation votes to the floor earlier this week.

Senators confirmed George in a vote of 96-1.

On Wednesday, Schumer filed cloture on three military nominations and Senators confirmed Gen. Charles Brown as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Senators are set to consider the confirmation of Gen. Eric Smith as Marine Corps Commandant later on Thursday.

The confirmations come following months of inaction on the nominations, linked to Senator Tommy Tuberville's hold on using unanimous consent processes to confirm nominees. Tuberville's hold on batching nominees came in protest to Defense Department policies allowing reimbursement for service members who receive abortions.

The lack of unanimous consent procedures requires the Senate to bring the confirmations to the floor through regular procedure, which is more time consuming. However, the Senate could have taken this same action "months ago," Tuberville said.

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

Szijarto on Ukraine WTO Complaint: Deal With Kiev Concerned Only Transit of Grain

UNITED NATIONS, September 21 (Sputnik) - Hungary's import ban on Ukrainian agricultural products only concerned grain and was implemented to protect domestic farmers, Foreign Affairs Minister Peter Szijarto told Sputnik on Thursday regarding Ukraine's complaint to the World Trade Organization (WTO).

"We in Hungary have made huge investments in order to ensure a big transit capacity for Ukraine through Hungary, to the ports either in Croatia or Romania, and we keep this transit corridor open, but it has not been a part of the original agreement that the Ukrainian grain would spread on the Hungarian market," Szijarto said. "This destroys our market, destroys our farmers, and it's obvious that we'll not let it happen, but the original agreement was not about importing grain to Hungary, it was about ensuring transit."

The WTO said earlier on Thursday that Ukraine requested dispute consultations with Hungary, Poland and the Slovak Republic regarding the continued imposition of import bans by the three countries on certain agricultural products, including grain, from Ukraine.

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Bangladesh Supports Resumption of Black Sea Grain Agreement - Energy Adviser

UNITED NATIONS, September 21 (Sputnik) - Bangladesh supports the resumption of the Black Sea Grain Initiative and wants to see all countries in the world have access to sufficient grain volumes, energy adviser to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury told Sputnik on Thursday.

"I think so," Chowdhury said when asked whether the grain agreement should be restored. "The grain supply to the world should be sufficient enough and smooth [for] all parties, all countries who are dependent [partially] or fully on the imports of grain."

Bangladesh wants to see stable prices for grain and fertilizer to provide its population with access to both, Chowdhury added.

On July 18, the Turkey- and UN-mediated Black Sea Grain Initiative, which provided for a humanitarian maritime corridor to allow safe exports of Ukrainian and Russian agricultural products, expired after Russia refused to extend its participation. Moscow cited the persistent non-implementation of the agreement's provisions to facilitate Russian grain and fertilizer exports.

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Bangladesh's Energy Adviser on Cap Price: Interested in Uninterrupted Access to Oil

UNITED NATIONS, September 21 (Sputnik) - Bangladesh is interested in having uninterrupted access to fossil fuels and considers it important to maintain current oil prices at an affordable level, Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury, energy adviser to the Bangladeshi prime minister, told Sputnik. "[T]he prices of oil have gone up, and with the reduction in supply, the experts say it will go up. So, our concern is to have the oil price within our ability to import; we import most of the fossil fuels," Chowdhury said when asked about the G7-led price cap on Russian oil.

He suggested that the price cap is not working and stressed the critical importance of smooth supply and availability of fossil fuels.

The United States and its G7 allies imposed a joint price cap on Russian oil in response to Russia's special military operation in Ukraine. Proponents of the measure have said the price cap is intended to reduce the Russian government's profits from the energy industry that it could spend on its military. The price cap was set in December 2022 at \$60 for a barrel of crude oil.

Moscow responded by implementing a full ban on crude oil exports to countries that agreed to cap the price of Russian oil and cut its oil production.

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McCarthy Dealing With Conference Growing Tired of Spending on Ukraine - Source

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy is dealing with a Republican conference that is growing tired of further spending on Ukraine, a congressional source told Sputnik on Thursday.

"McCarthy is dealing with a conference that is growing tired of all the spending on Ukraine," the source said.

Opposition to further US spending on Ukraine is increasing with each "dime being sent," the source added.

According to the source, McCarthy turned down a request from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to address a joint session of Congress during his visit to Washington on Thursday.

McCarthy, after meeting with Zelenskyy on Thursday morning, told NBC News that Zelenskyy answered a lot of his questions about the direction of the conflict, but the House Speaker was non-committal about the White House's request for an additional \$24 billion to aid Ukraine.

Zelenskyy is in Washington, D.C. on Thursday to meet with US lawmakers and President Joe Biden after addressing the UN General Assembly in New York earlier this week. The United States is expected to announce a significant aid package for Ukraine later on Thursday, but it will reportedly not include ATACMS long-range missiles.

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Lebanon Hopes to Expand Cooperation With Russia on Medical Training, Supplies - Minister

UNITED NATIONS, September 19 (Sputnik) - Lebanon would like to increase cooperation with Russia with respect to medical training and medical supplies, the country's Public Health Minister Firas Abiad told Sputnik.

When asked where the cooperation with Russia May be expanded, Abiad said, "I think that the areas that we talked about. Medical supplies, medications, or capacity building and training are the things we are happy with and we're hoping we can expand them."

Abiad also said that cooperation between the two countries in the health area is ongoing and includes medical personnel studying in Russia as well as Russia supplying medical products like vaccines.

"We have just sent also some doctors to do some training. So the cooperation between Lebanon and Russia is ongoing," he said.

Abiad also said that the sanctions by the collective West against Russia have had no impact on the two countries' collaboration.

"I don't see it," he said when asked about the impact of the sanctions. "We are cooperating, we are receiving medication, we are doing the training," he added.

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US House Again Rejects Rule for 2024 Defense Department Appropriations Bill

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives on Thursday again rejected a resolution on a combined rule that included a Defense Department appropriations bill.

House lawmakers rejected the resolution in a vote of 212-216. On Tuesday, the House also rejected a rule on the appropriations bill.

The action comes as lawmakers attempt to pass a government funding measure before the end of the month to avoid a shutdown.

Some House Republicans have proposed passing separate appropriations bills for different spending areas through the standard process. House Republican leadership introduced a measure to temporarily fund the government to give lawmakers more time to pass appropriations bills.

Congress could also pass an omnibus spending bill or longer-term continuing resolution to fund the government, although there is debate among lawmakers about whether to include aid for Ukraine in such legislation.

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Bangladesh 'Very Indebted' to Soviet Russia for Help in Times of Crises - Adviser

UNITED NATIONS, September 21 (Sputnik) - Bangladesh is very indebted to Soviet Russia for its help in times of crises and challenges, including during the Liberation War, Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury, adviser to the Bangladeshi prime minister, told Sputnik.

"We're very indebted to Soviet Russia, for standing beside us in our times of crises and challenges in 1971," Chowdhury said.

The Soviet Union supported Bangladesh in its liberation war in 1971, the official recalled. "Russia is now not the Soviet Union. But it's a large part of Soviet Union. So we're really grateful for having helped us during our liberation war," he added.

Chowdhury spoke on the margins of the UN General Assembly.

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Bangladesh-Russia Projects Not Affected by Western Sanctions - Energy Adviser

UNITED NATIONS, September 21 (Sputnik) - Western sanctions do not affect bilateral cooperation and joint projects between Russia and Bangladesh, Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury, energy adviser to the Bangladeshi prime minister, told Sputnik.

"[O]ur projects [with Russia] are not being affected by the sanctions that you're talking about," Chowdhury said.

Chowdhury added that there was an issue with the delivery of equipment from Russia because the shipping company was under sanctions but it was successfully resolved.

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Bangladesh Hopes Putin to Join Rooppur Npp Inauguration in October by Video Link - Adviser

UNITED NATIONS, September 21 (Sputnik) - Bangladesh hopes that Russian President Vladimir Putin will take part in the inauguration of the Russian-built nuclear power plant Rooppur 1 by a video link as soon as October, Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury, energy adviser to the Bangladeshi prime minister, told Sputnik.

"There is a chance that President Putin and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will formally inaugurate the power plant sometime next month. We are looking forward to such a milestone in our cooperation," Chowdhury said.

The Rooppur nuclear power plant has been under construction since 2016. The plant is being built on the eastern bank of the Padma River, 87 miles from the capital city of Dhaka. The plant will consist of two power units using Russia's modern VVER-1200 reactors with a capacity of 1,200 MW each. The life cycle of the reactors is 60 years, but it may be extended for another 20

years.

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Zelenskyy Following Meeting with US Senators: 'I Am Not Speaking' to Putin

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Thursday that he is not willing to speak to Russian President Vladimir Putin, following a meeting with US Senators at the Capitol in Washington.

"I am not speaking to him," Zelenskyy told reporters, when asked whether he had a message for Putin.

On Thursday, Zelenskyy met with a number of US lawmakers from both the House of Representatives and the Senate to bolster support for continued aid to Ukraine.

Zelenskyy told lawmakers that Ukraine will "lose the war" if it does not receive aid from Congress, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said after the meeting.

Senate leadership have supported the idea of including aid for Ukraine in government funding legislation, although some House Republicans have said they will oppose any efforts to include Ukraine aid in a funding bill.

Zelenskyy answered many of the lawmakers' questions about the direction of Ukraine's conflict with Russia, US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy said. Ukraine cannot afford a war of attrition and needs a plan for victory soon, House Foreign Affairs Chair Michael McCaul said.

The Biden administration has repeatedly deferred to Zelenskyy to determine under which circumstances he would negotiate an end to the conflict with Russia.

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Russian-Built NPP in Bangladesh to Start Generating Electricity in 2024 - Energy Adviser

UNITED NATIONS, September 21 (Sputnik) - The nuclear power plant Rooppur, which is being built by Russia in Bangladesh, will begin generating electricity by the end of 2024, Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury, energy adviser to the Bangladeshi prime minister, told Sputnik.

"The biggest area of cooperation is a nuclear reactor that is being established in Bangladesh with Russian assistance, and we are hoping that next year, by the end of next year, the reactor will start providing electricity which, as you know, is a very important aspect of national development," Chowdhury said.

Nuclear energy is the main area of cooperation between Russia and Bangladesh, but the two countries are also engaged in joint projects to produce gas with the participation of Russian gas giant Gazprom. Chowdhury said Bangladesh is very satisfied with the results of cooperation on joint projects.

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Police Investigating China's Role in Death of Chinese Man in British Columbia – Reports

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) – The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) is investigating the possible role China may have played in the death of a Chinese man in British Columbia in 2021, Global News reported on Thursday.

In 2000, Wei Hu had left China for Canada's British Columbia. The individual was said to be, a critic of the Chinese government. Wei was found dead in July 2021 in what was then ruled as a suicide.

Wei's case has been reopened and is now under a national security investigation by the RCMP after a witness came forth saying that he had complained about harassment by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the report said.

Accordingly, the death of Wei, who had been put on the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol)'s "Red-Notice" at China's request over financial crimes, is being probed over whether pressure from the CCP contributed to his passing.

The investigation is being conducted by Canada's Integrated National Security Enforcement Team (INSET) in BC, the report said, adding that RCMP decided to reexamine Wei's death over suspicions that it could have been motivated by more than just mental problems.

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Yellen Signals US Support for Windfall Tax on Frozen Russian Assets - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen expressed support for the European Union initiative to impose a windfall tax on profits generated from frozen Russian sovereign assets, Bloomberg reported on Thursday.

According to the report, a substantial portion of the frozen Russian assets, totaling more than \$219 billion, is held in Europe, the bulk of them at the settlement giant Euroclear Ltd. in Belgium.

This initiative to tap into Russian assets has the potential to attract greater support for continued assistance to Ukraine, the report said.

While the Biden administration has sought to directly seize the Russian assets, Yellen has consistently argued that doing so would violate existing legal statutes, the report said.

The European Union legal service has supported this view, prompting consideration of an alternative approach - to tax profits from the frozen assets, the report added.

The Biden administration is actively advocating for Congress to approve an additional \$24 billion in aid to Ukraine, according to the report.

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Nuland Says No Prospects for Strategic Talks With Moscow, Claiming Russia Not Interested

UNITED NATIONS, September 21 (Sputnik) - Acting US Deputy Secretary of State Victoria Nuland told reporters on Thursday that there are no prospects for strategic talks between the United States and Russia soon, claiming that Moscow is not interested in diplomatic engagement.

"Russia does not seem to be interested," Nuland said. "Russia's doesn't want to do it." President Joe Biden during his speech on Tuesday before the United Nations General Assembly said the United States would stand with Ukraine for as long as it takes amid Russia's special military operation.

Western countries have imposed sweeping sanctions on Russia over its military operation in Ukraine, providing Ukraine with more than \$150 billion in arms and financial aid. Moscow has repeatedly said that it is open to peace negotiations as long as Kiev recognizes the territorial gains made by Russian forces since February 2022.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is in Washington, DC on Thursday to meet with US lawmakers and Biden after addressing the UN General Assembly in New York earlier this week.

US officials previously said the United States will announce a significant aid package for Ukraine later on Thursday.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told the UN Security Council on Wednesday that Western countries lack arguments for a substantive, fact-based conversation on the conflict in Ukraine and therefore avoid it altogether.

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Congressman McCaul Says Intends to Include Arms for Ukraine in US House Supplemental Bill

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - US House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Michael McCaul said on Thursday that he intends to include weapons, such as the long-range Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMS) and F-16 fighter jets, for Ukraine in a supplemental funding bill.

"The takeaway of the Speaker [Kevin McCarthy] was you need the ATACMS, you need the F-16s, you needed them a year ago and it has taken too long. So, we can write this into the supplemental and that would be my intention," McCaul said during a press conference.

McCaul explained that lawmakers can include weapons that the Biden administration is reluctant to provide to Ukraine in appropriations bills.

The statement comes after a meeting took place between Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and US lawmakers at the Capitol.

Congress is attempting to pass US government funding legislation before the end of the month

to avoid a shutdown, as well as a supplemental funding request from the Biden administration, which includes billions of dollars in assistance for Ukraine.

Some US House Republicans have opposed including aid for Ukraine in any government funding measure, while the Senate leadership has backed the idea.

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UPDATE - McCarthy Rejected Zelenskyy's Request to Address Congress - Congressional Source

(Updates to change in attribution in headline, lede, adds details in paras 2-4)

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) – US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy turned down a request from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to address a joint session of Congress during his visit to Washington on Thursday, a congressional source told Sputnik.

"McCarthy rejected the request for a joint session noting that Zelenskyy has previously addressed a joint session and this in line with courtesies afforded to other foreign leaders," the source said.

McCarthy, according to reports, also explained that there is a lack of time to hold a joint session of Congress considering it is a busy legislative week as lawmakers work to pass spending bills before a deadline in October in order to avert a government shutdown.

McCarthy, after meeting with Zelenskyy on Thursday morning, told NBC News that Zelenskyy answered a lot of his questions about the direction of the conflict, but the House Speaker was non-committal about the White House's request for an additional \$24 billion to aid Ukraine.

Zelenskyy is in Washington, D.C. on Thursday to meet with US lawmakers and President Joe Biden after addressing the UN General Assembly in New York earlier this week.

US officials previously said the United States will announce a significant aid package for Ukraine later on Thursday.

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Central African President Calls on UNSC to End 10 Year Weapon, Diamond Embargoes

UNITED NATIONS, September 21 (Sputnik) – The President of the Central African Republic (CAR) Faustin-Archange Touadera called on Thursday for the UN Security Council (UNSC) to put an end to its ten years-long embargos on weapons and diamonds.

On July 29, the UNSC voted on a draft resolution proposed by France to extend the sanctions regimes on CAR for another year. Ten members voted in favour while Russia, China, Ghana, Gabon, and Kenya abstained.

"I deplore and must remind that the embargos on weapons and diamonds that have been renewed for ten years in addition to the suspension of budgetary supports, constitute real

obstacles for our country to fulfill its objectives under the 2030 Agenda,” Touadera said during his address to the UN General Assembly. “I urge the Security Council to stop these artifices that aim to veil their desire to perpetuate insecurity and control over the country’s natural resources for the benefit of foreign powers,” he added.

Touadera condemned the “cynical” decision to extend the sanctions regime, and wondered how CAR could accelerate its implementation of the 2030 Agenda goals on peace, prosperity, and progress when some states use of their political, economic, and military might for coercive diplomacy.

Those states constantly instrumentalize international financial institutions to enforce blockades against countries impoverished by slavery, colonialism, and imperialism, the President continued.

Since the full ban on CAR diamond trade, imposed in 2013, was lifted, the country is divided into so-called green areas, from where export is allowed, and red areas in the CAR's north and east, controlled by anti-governmental armed groups, where the ban is still active.

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US Creates Special Fund to Support Ukrainian Courts Prosecute War Crimes - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - The United States is creating a special fund to support Ukrainian courts in their efforts to prosecute war crimes and urges other countries to join it, Ambassador-at-Large for Global Criminal Justice Beth Van Schaack said on Thursday.

“The United States is creating a multinational fund and we are inviting other states to join us in this effort to promote complementarity in Ukrainian courts,” Van Schaack said.

The ambassador pointed out that Ukrainian courts are very active in prosecuting war crime cases.

Van Schaack noted that the International Crime Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants for Russian President Vladimir Putin and Children's Rights Commissioner Maria Lvova-Belova over alleged deportation of Ukrainian children.

“We may see requests for further arrests in the future,” she said.

However, Van Schaack expressed concerns for several reasons, including regarding the possible creation of a war crimes tribunal through the UN General Assembly.

“One is the legal one, does the General Assembly have the legal power under the UN Charter system to be able to create a standalone tribunal that would exercise coercive powers?” Van Schaack asked.

Another is the possibility that there might not be the necessary number of votes to support this idea in the UN General Assembly, she said.

The ICC issued in March arrest warrants for Putin and Lvova-Belova on the grounds of alleged “unlawful deportation” of Ukrainian children to Russia. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russia was not a party to the ICC and did not recognize its jurisdiction, while also rejecting the accusations about deportation of children.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said in June that ICC prosecutor Karim Khan, a UK

citizen of Pakistani origin, bypassed all procedures to move with unprecedented speed to "concoct the warrant" against Putin and Lvova-Belova.

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US to Dispatch Up to 800 More Military Personnel to Southern Border – DHS

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) – The US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) will dispatch up to 800 additional military personnel to the southern border, as part of a new series of actions by the White House to address the migrant crisis, according to a release.

"This surge support includes up to 800 new active-duty personnel to assist with logistics and other functions at the border to allow more Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents and officers to return to their core mission and responsibilities," DHS stated in a release on Wednesday.

It said that there are already 2,500 steady state National Guard personnel, 24,000 CBP agents and officers, over 2,600 non-uniformed personnel, and 500 law enforcement and general support volunteers from other parts of DHS assigned to border operations.

DHS will also extend Temporary Protected Status for 18 months for Venezuelan nationals who were residing in the US on or before July 31. This will enable hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans to be immediately eligible to apply for work authorization. Citizenship and Immigration Services will also accelerate processing of work authorization applications for parolees.

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Szijarto Says No Reason to Amend Contract With Gazprom

UNITED NATIONS, September 21 (Sputnik) - Hungary sees no reason to make changes to its gas supply contract with Gazprom since Russia remains a reliable partner, Foreign Minister Peter Szijarto told Sputnik on Thursday.

Szijarto spoke on the margins of the UN General Assembly.

"Tomorrow [Friday] I'm going to see Sergey Lavrov and we'll definitely discuss issues of energy cooperation. So far so good. Russia is a reliable partner, and deliveries are according to the schedule and contract. So, I don't see any reason to change," Szijarto said.

The nuclear cooperation project with Russia has also reached a "spectacular stage" as Rosatom began the main stage of the construction at the Paks-2 nuclear power plant, the minister added.

"I think if we can keep the deliveries according to the contractual framework, we are fine. In case we need some amendments, we will discuss it," he said.

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Fight Against Extremism, Terrorism, Naval Piracy Must be Ensured – Yemeni President

UNITED NATIONS, September 21 (Sputnik) – It is necessary to ensure the freedom of navigation and combat naval piracy as well as terrorism and extremism, the President of Yemen Rashad al-Alimi said on Thursday.

“Today we reaffirm the need to guarantee the freedom of international navigation to combat extremism, terrorism, piracy and support measures to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction,” al-Alimi said during his address at the UN General Assembly.

Al-Alimi called on the international community to condemn Iranian meddling in Yemen’s internal affairs, and to abide by the sanction’s regime against them, notably those related to arms embargo.

By sticking to the weapons embargo on Iran, UN member states would be preventing them from supplying the Houthis, other militias with military capacities, ballistic missiles and drones allegedly involved in the deliberate killing of civilians, the President continued.

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McCarthy Says He Rejected Zelenskyy’s Request to Address Congress - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) – US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy said that he turned down a request from Volodymyr Zelenskyy to address a joint session of Congress, NBC reported on Thursday.

McCarthy explained his refusal by the lack of free time for a joint address amid a busy legislative week, adding that Zelenskyy had previously had an opportunity to speak before Congress, the report said.

Zelenskyy is in Washington, D.C. on Thursday to meet with US lawmakers and President Joe Biden after addressing the UN General Assembly in New York earlier this week.

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Zelenskyy Arrives to US Capitol for Talks With Lawmakers - Video

WASHINGTON, September 21 (Sputnik) - Ukraine's Vlodomyr Zelenskyy arrived to the US Capitol early Thursday for meetings with US lawmakers amid growing Republican concern about US aid for Kiev, a video broadcast showed.

Zelenskyy is due to meet with House Speaker Kevin McCarthy at 9:00 a.m. local time (13:00 GMT), before attending a closed meeting with all members of the US Senate at 10:00 a.m. He will later meet with some members of the US House as he attends a Congressional Ukraine Caucus event at the National Archives at 5:00 p.m.

During his meetings with US lawmakers, Zelenskyy is expected to try to solidify support Ukraine and for President Joe Biden's request for \$24 billion in supplemental assistance for Kiev.

Zelenskyy's visit to the Capitol comes amid increasing criticism of US aid for Ukraine, particularly among House Republicans, a growing number of whom have called for cutting off aid to Kiev.

A group of Republican lawmakers earlier on Thursday rejected the \$24 billion White House budget request for additional assistance to Ukraine, citing a lack of accounting transparency and clarity of strategy, according to a letter addressed to the director of the Office of Management and Budget.

"It would be an absurd abdication of congressional responsibility to grant this request ... until we receive answers to the questions above and others forthcoming — we oppose the additional expenditure for war in Ukraine included in your request," the letter said.

The letter, led by Sen. J.D. Vance and Rep. Chip Roy and signed by 23 House members and six senators, argued that Congress was unaware of how much the US had truly spent to date on the conflict, pointing to a lack of transparency exemplified by a recent \$6.2 billion accounting error on the Ukraine Presidential Drawdown Authorities. It also noted that a \$5 billion request for the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative greatly exceeded the recent \$300 million authorized by the Senate and House for the program for the fiscal year 2024.

The letter argued that recent White House statements implied an "open-ended commitment to supporting the war in Ukraine of an indeterminate nature, based on a strategy that is unclear, to achieve a goal yet to be articulated to the public or the Congress." It questioned the progress of Ukraine's counteroffensive and the White House's strategy, definition of victory, and exit plan.