

11/16/23 Thursday

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US Lawmaker Renews Call for TikTok Ban After Osama bin Laden's 'Letter to America' Goes Viral

A US federal lawmaker has issued a new call for the social media app TikTok to be banned, after a historical document penned by a top international terrorist leader unexpectedly went viral on the platform earlier this week.

The latest cultural phenomenon to sweep TikTok is a 2002 document by the then-leader of the Al-Qaeda* terrorist group, Osama bin Laden.

Titled "[Letter to the American People](#)," the document is an attempt by bin Laden to justify his organization's terrorist attacks against the West, including the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Virginia, which killed nearly 3,000 people.

In the letter, bin Laden recapitulates several decades of Western domination and war-making across the Middle East, including support for the creation and defense of Israel, and blames the West for the erosion of the importance of Islam in Muslims' lives.

He also draws direct equivalence between the American people and the actions of the US government, writing: "the American people are the ones who choose their government by way of their own free will; a choice which stems from their agreement to its policies."

According to analysts, many shared the letter on TikTok, expressing their shock at the cogency of some aspects of his message, especially with regard to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, with some feeling they had misjudged the terrorist leader.

The subject of an international manhunt for over a decade, bin Laden was killed in northern Pakistan in May 2011 by a US special forces raid. Despite killing bin Laden and launching a so-called "War on Terror," the US has failed to destroy bin Laden's organization, which became a major influence on certain rebel groups in the Syrian Civil War and continues to operate in countries from Afghanistan to Yemen.

However, the letter seems to have gone viral after being rediscovered recently as part of a reckoning with Western nations' long-standing support for Israel amid the highly destructive war in Gaza, where the Israeli Defense Forces ([IDF](#)) [have launched](#) an air assault and ground invasion that has killed more than 11,000 Palestinians in the last six weeks.

Support for Israel has evaporated among Western youth, who have [taken to the streets in protest](#) in unprecedented numbers to demand a ceasefire and an end to their governments' support for Israel, whose anti-Arab policies they have labeled "apartheid," following [United Nations](#) human rights experts.

In [a statement posted on X](#) (formerly Twitter) on Thursday, TikTok said, "Content promoting this letter clearly violates our rules on supporting any form of terrorism. We are proactively and aggressively removing this content and investigating how it got onto our platform."

The Guardian, whose 2002 publication of the letter was being linked to in the posts, has since deleted the article, although it remains in the Wayback Machine internet archive.

US Rep. Mike Gallagher (R-WI) on Thursday called such users “massive idiots” and said the incident was evidence that TikTok should be banned in the US, or otherwise forced to sell its US assets to a US-based company.

"These people are, of course, massive idiots," Gallagher told US media. "I just came from watching the footage that the Israeli Embassy compiled about [the October 7 attack](#). It is horrific. You are seeing Salafi jihadists - Hamas in this case, but al-Qaeda was a Salafi Jihadist organization - kill babies, behead innocent civilians with garden hoes. These images are very disturbing and show the true face of evil."

"So for someone on TikTok to somehow suggest this is America's fault or that bin Laden, who killed thousands of innocent Americans, was right is absolutely disgusting and further evidence that we need to ban TikTok or force a sale before a Chinese-controlled app, before the Chinese Communist Party, checkmates the free world by controlling the dominant media platform in America that can spread this dangerous, disgusting nonsense," Gallagher continued.

"It is time for a ban or forced sale before it is too late," he added.

A TikTok ban has long been Gallagher's pet project, cosponsoring [a bill last year](#) alongside US Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL) and Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi (R-IL) based on the idea that the app poses a national security risk because it is being manipulated by the Communist Party of China. Officials in Beijing and in ByteDance, TikTok's owner, have denied that any such connection exists, including in [congressional testimony](#) by CEO Shou Zi Chew, who is ethnically Chinese but has Singaporean nationality.

More recently, [Gallagher has said](#) TikTok should be banned because it is “brainwashing our youth,” calling it “digital fentanyl” after the synthetic painkiller responsible for a dramatic spike in overdose deaths in the US in recent years.

Previously, former US President Donald Trump considered a ban or forced sale of TikTok alongside his administration's attacks on other leading Chinese tech companies, and his successor, Joe Biden, has continued to support such efforts.

As of April 2023, at least 34 US states have enacted some kind of ban on government employees having the app on their government-issued devices, and Montana has attempted to [enact a complete ban](#) on TikTok in the northern state. On Wednesday, a federal judge in Austin, Texas, heard arguments about whether the Lone Star State's ban is a violation of its state constitution.

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Pentagon Projects to Be Hampered by Congress' Second Temporary Spending Bill

American lawmakers' decision to delay full passage of the 2024 budget bills, including the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) that funds the Pentagon, is going to have a deleterious effect on the US military's many programs, according to US media reports.

On Wednesday, Congress passed a [second continuing resolution](#), a temporary spending bill that will only fund the federal government until February 2, 2024. This is the second time they have used the stopgap measure this year, following one passed on September 30 that only provided funding until Friday. Lawmakers have resorted to these temporary funding bills due to intransigence over the contents of a series of massive budget bills that together comprise the fiscal year 2024 budget.

While the spending extensions have averted a government shutdown, they have still thrown chaos into many of the programs for which they will provide funding, not only due to the uncertainty of the flow of funds after February 2, but also because the bills are based on fiscal year 2023 spending levels and not those projected for the 2024 budget.

Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment Radha Plumb told a Pentagon-focused US media outlet on Thursday that everything from shipbuilding to weapons manufacturing would be affected by the problem.

"It's the additive domino effect of delays, and the particularly hard hit on the sub-tier supplier base that really on the acquisition side compounds the problem," she said.

Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment Bill LaPlante added that continuing resolutions could have a "devastating effect" on the military-industrial complex, even triggering layoffs.

"If the [continuing resolution] ends in January ... the money that goes will not flow out to the commands that do the contracting probably until about May because of all the processes," said LaPlante. "Nothing happens without contracting."

Some of the programs that could suffer include [efforts to replace the artillery](#) and missile stockpiles given to Ukraine and Israel in 2023; new anti-drone systems scheduled for delivery in 2024 and 2025; new anti-air missiles and cruise missiles; three separate shipbuilding programs for the US Navy; and the Air Force's C3 battle management system, part of a Pentagon plan to make a unified battle network that uses artificial intelligence.

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Lisa Franchetti, who was sworn in earlier this month, told lawmakers that the continuing resolution (CR) would interrupt the shipbuilding programs for the US Navy's Virginia-class attack submarine, [Constellation-class frigate](#) and a new submarine tender.

"We have nine ships in the budget request, and we won't be able to start on four of them under a CR," she said.

A notable exception explicitly carved into the bill was the keel-laying for the USS Wisconsin, the second Columbia-class ballistic missile submarine. Construction on the Ohio-class replacement is scheduled to start this year at the cost of \$621 million.

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Russia Set to Record \$75 Billion Account Surplus Amid Booming Energy Sales

Thanks to an increase in exports of petroleum, gas, and other energy products this year, the Russian government's current account is expected to post a surplus of some \$75 billion this year, based on new data from the country's central bank.

The Central Bank of the Russian Federation said on Tuesday that the current-account surplus amounted to \$53.8 billion as of November 1, about four times the level it was at just a year prior. October followed September as the second straight month in which the account had an \$11 billion surplus.

As a result, a US business newspaper has updated its projection for the year, estimating Russia's account will have \$75 billion in it by the end of next month, assuming the trend continues.

The account measures the difference between money coming into the Russian Federation through trade, investments, and wire transfers, as compared to money flowing out of the country.

The world's largest energy exporter, Russia has benefited from high prices for oil and gas, despite Western attempts to smother the Russian economy with trade boycotts and other sanctions in response to the conflict in Ukraine. Russian exports that formerly flowed into Europe have largely been redirected toward Asia and Africa, although some customers, such as the United States, have continued to [buy Russian enriched uranium](#) for their nuclear power plants and European buyers have sometimes resorted to quietly [buying Russian gas](#) through third parties.

Standard & Poor's reported recently that Russian seaborne oil exports hit a four-month high in October.

Trade has [especially bloomed](#) with the People's Republic of China, which Russian President Vladimir Putin estimated would hit \$200 billion this year, having risen by one-third in the first eight months of 2023. China is the recipient of 47% of Russia's petroleum exports and 45% of its coal exports, and [new projects to link](#) Russian and Chinese gas pipelines were announced, including the Power of Siberia 2 pipeline.

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Surprise! Pentagon Fails Audit for Sixth Year in a Row

The US has by-far the world's largest military budget, spending \$877 billion on it last year - more than the next 10 countries combined. It has a network of more than 800 military bases around the globe and is involved directly or indirectly through supplying a participating power with funds or weapons, in numerous conflicts.

The US Department of Defense (DoD) has once again failed its financial audit, making the sixth consecutive year of failing to account for its expenditures.

After some 1,600 auditors and 700 site visits, the Pentagon has once again failed to account for all of its massive swath of programs and expenses.

The Pentagon has some \$3.8 trillion in assets and another \$4.0 trillion in liabilities.

The failure "is not a surprise," Michael J. McCord, the US undersecretary of defense comptroller and the DoD's chief financial officer, told reporters at the Pentagon. "It certainly is not something that we say, 'it doesn't matter.'"

In [a news release](#) on Thursday, the Pentagon said it had made "incremental progress" toward a clean audit this year.

"As of Nov. 13, the auditors had validated that we had closed 490 of last year's 3,008 findings, and we expect that total will continue to increase as the numbers get finalized," McCord was quoted as saying in the release.

"I want to highlight that while we still have much work to do, our work on the audit over the last few years has yielded significant benefits to the department," McCord added. "Our efforts to track, coordinate and quickly deliver security systems to our allies and partners in Ukraine and now Israel is closely related to the work across the DOD enterprise on readiness."

While the recent months of increased military aid for Kiev and Jerusalem were not included in the audit, which focused on 2022, Washington still sent \$43.9 billion in "security assistance" to Ukraine last year, including substantial parts of its stocks of certain weapons.

Because it was given to Ukraine [virtually without oversight](#), the vast volume of aid has [aroused anger and suspicion](#) among some US lawmakers and politicians, who have demanded a halt to aid shipments until methods of accountability can be established.

The audit found no explicit evidence of fraud. Of the 29 sub-audits, only seven were given passing grades, with one being described as "qualified," 18 being given failing grades, and three still ongoing.

The DoD has set a goal of having a "clean" audit by fiscal year 2027.

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Nearly 100 Protesters Calling for Israeli Ceasefire Injured in Clash With DC Police

The protest came two days after one of the largest pro-Israel gatherings in US history took place on the National Mall, where congressional leaders from both the Democratic and Republican parties were present.

At least 90 people were injured late Wednesday following a clash between Capitol Police and protesters outside the Democratic National Committee headquarters in Washington, DC.

Protesters at the scene were calling for a ceasefire in the ongoing Palestine-Israel conflict that broke out on October 7 following a surprise attack by the Palestinian Hamas group. Hostilities have remained at an all-time high as Israel has dismissed calls for a ceasefire.

Reports have indicated that Democratic representatives and candidates were present inside the DNC building during the protest, some of whom include House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, House Minority Whip Katherine Clark and US Rep. Pete Aguilar (D-CA).

At least six officers were injured and treated for minor abrasions, with officers arresting a 24-year-old individual who reportedly punched a female officer in the face. According to the US

Capitol Police, officials had worked to “keep back approximately 150 people” who were “illegally and violently protesting” in the area; activists have disputed this claim, according to one [report](#). The police, who were attempting to evacuate lawmakers from the building, also claimed that protesters moved dumpsters in front of exits, as well as pepper sprayed police officers. “We have handled hundreds of peaceful protests, but last night’s group was not peaceful. The crowd failed to obey our lawful orders to move back from the DNC, where Members of Congress were in the building,” Capitol Police said in a statement.

Members of the Ceasefire Now Coalition said hundreds of people were present during the candlelight vigil. Members from the Jewish Voice for Peace Action were also present during the vigil. Demonstrators have accused the police of forcefully shoving protesters down the steps of the building, pepper-spraying demonstrators and choking one member, according to a separate [report](#).

“We were there lighting candles for all who have died, honoring the lives lost, to call for a ceasefire to honor those lives in prayer and in song. And instead, instead of being able to actually talk to our elected officials and pray with them and sing with them and ask them for a ceasefire, the police shoved our people down the steps,” Rabbi Jessica Rosenberg said at a news conference. Rosenberg had attend the demonstration on Wednesday night.

Dani Noble, a member from the Jewish Voice for Peace Action, stated she doesn’t understand why the demonstration escalated into a violent clash between demonstrators and police.

“I mean, from my personal perspective, I don’t know, like we were doing — we were engaging in civil disobedience,” Noble said, who added that those present were hoping to talk to lawmakers about a ceasefire when the escalation came from police.

“I’ve been at many protests this month, where we’ve engaged in like, nonviolent tactics of civil disobedience. And I personally have never seen such a like fast and violent escalation by police with no warning.”

“And absolutely, in no instance did anyone try to enter the building, and spreading misinformation to the contrary is extremely, extremely dangerous. We were there peacefully singing and chanting, waiting for Democratic officials to show up so that we could actually engage,” Noble added.

Last week, various House Democrats joined a majority of House Republicans in voting to censure Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-MI) over her criticism of the Israeli government’s treatment of Palestinians. Tlaib is the only Palestinian-American politician in Congress.

Meanwhile, US President Joe Biden faces has continued to face pressure to end his support for Israel’s military campaign in Gaza, as he has resisted ceasefire calls.

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Florida Battles Flooding and Power Outages Following Storm

The major, nontropical storm landed in Florida overnight with heavy rain, and left thousands without power.

On Thursday morning, tens of thousands of Floridians woke up without power following a series of harrowing storms. According to a local news report, areas in South Florida were impacted the most severely by the storms, with Miami, Miami Beach, Coral Gables, Aventura, North Miami, Fort Lauderdale, Pompano Beach and West Palm Beach suffering power outages.

By 6:30 PM local time, at least 41,000 people were still without power, according to [PowerOutage.us](#). The power company Florida Power & Light reported on Thursday that more than 59,000 customers in the Miami-Dade County were without power, as well as more than 24,000 in Broward County, and 21,000 in Palm Beach County.

“Our crews are working to restore service safely and as quickly as possible,” Florida Power & Light said in a [statement](#). “We urge customers to monitor the weather and stay safe. This includes staying far away from downed power lines or other damaged electrical equipment.” Wind gusts of up to 60 miles per hour (MPH) were also present in those areas, which prompted warnings through Thursday afternoon.

The storm system, which originated in the Gulf of Mexico and the east coast of Florida, eased away from the state on Thursday, according to meteorologists. But before making its way out, the storm system left the southeastern region of Florida with up to 10 inches of rain in some areas, including Miami. During the storm more than 7 million people were also under flood watches and warnings.

Dozens of flights were also delayed, and a public school system in the Miami metropolitan area closed for all of Thursday.

By [Thursday](#) morning, however, the flooding began to recede and meteorologists eventually removed the flood watch from the area. And despite light rain throughout the region, forecasters noted that wind from the storm system could actually help dry drenched areas faster.

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Dem Lawmakers Pressure Biden on West Bank Violence Amid Heightened Gaza Hostilities

Sen. Cory Booker and Rep. Dan Goldman wrote a letter to US President Joe Biden urging him to speak out against Israeli settler violence in the occupied West Bank, but progress towards peace in Gaza remains elusive.

A duo of Democratic Party politicians are pressing President Joe Biden to criticize Israeli settler violence in the illegally occupied West Bank after feeling heat from their constituents.

Sen. Cory Booker (D-NJ) and Rep. Dan Goldman (D-NY) addressed the letter to the US president Thursday asking him to pressure Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on the issue. At least [190 Palestinians](#) are thought to have been killed in the territory over recent weeks since Hamas’ surprise attack on October 7 that killed some 1,200 Israelis.

“As your administration tirelessly works to prevent the expansion of this conflict, we write to specifically highlight the threat that violence in the West Bank – especially vigilante violence by Israeli settlers – poses to those efforts, Israel’s near-term security, Palestinian human rights, and long-term regional peace,” read the missive from the lawmakers.

Booker and Goldman argued the violence damages the credibility of the Palestinian Authority, a more moderate force that governs the West Bank. For decades world leaders have advocated for a so-called “two-state solution” that creates a fully-recognized Palestinian nation out of territory in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which together are home to more than [5 million people](#).

“We strongly believe that a two-state solution remains the only genuine option to achieve a just, secure, and prosperous future for both Israelis and Palestinians. However, settler violence against Palestinian civilians destroys the very seeds of trust and cooperation needed to make progress toward a two-state outcome and an enduring peace in the region.”

The letter comes after Goldman’s constituents [staged a protest](#) outside his Brooklyn office last week. Hundreds of thousands of Americans have protested Israeli violence and US support for the country over the past month, culminating in [an action](#) outside the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee on Wednesday.

Observers have cautioned that opposition to Biden’s stance on the issue could permanently damage his standing with Muslims and young Americans, which are traditionally reliable constituencies for the Democratic Party.

Voters across the US political spectrum continue to favor a ceasefire in the besieged Gaza Strip, but support for the policy among national lawmakers remains scarce. Biden has instead pressed for brief “humanitarian pauses,” ostensibly to allow civilians in the territory to flee south where Israel has also engaged in frequent bombing. Authorities in Gaza say more than [11,100 Palestinians have been killed](#) there since October 7, or about 1 in every 200 people living in the territory.

Biden has been a supporter of Israel throughout his political career, [arguing once](#) on the floor of the Senate that “were there not an Israel, the United States would have to invent an Israel to protect her interests in the region.”

US Secretary of State James Baker [once threatened](#) to withhold assistance to Israel in the early 1990s, claiming illegal Israeli settlement building damaged America’s reputation in the Arab world, but presidential administrations have mostly remained strongly supportive of the Middle Eastern ally.

Recently, [video emerged](#) of Israeli national security minister Itamar Ben-Gvir distributing weapons to West Bank settlers, underscoring official government backing for the country’s illegal occupation of the territory.

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Potential Attack on US Missile Silos Would Leave 90% of Americans At Risk, Analysis Finds

Millions of Americans could die from exposure to fallout resulting from a foreign attack on the country's missile silos, according to new analysis. The exact figure would depend on wind directions and ability to shelter in place.

People seeking lighthearted poolside reading may enjoy a recent report in US media detailing the disastrous effects of a nuclear strike on the United States.

The analysis, published [earlier this week](#), details the effects of a foreign enemy's hypothetical attack on US nuclear missile silos. The existence of the silos – which altogether number 450 and are located throughout the continental United States – has been touted by the US military as a powerful deterrent as a foreign adversary would deplete significant resources attempting to destroy the country's land-based nuclear arsenal.

If they still attempted to do so, a successful attack would require a nuclear detonation just above each of the 450 below ground bunkers. Such detonations would in turn discharge the missiles inside, triggering massive explosions and huge mushroom clouds. Contaminated dirt and debris would be carried across the United States for days afterward.

The exact number of deaths would depend on the direction of winds on the day of the attack as well as Americans' ability to seek cover. Experts say people would need to shelter in place for at least four days to be best protected from the radioactive fallout.

The report concludes that between 340,000 and 4.6 million Americans would die in the attack, with an average of 1.4 million deaths in the authors' simulations. But millions would be at risk due to circumstances outside their control.

The United States' missile silos represent one prong of the country's so-called "nuclear triad" consisting of nuclear capability from land, sea, and air.

[Five countries](#) are thought to currently possess a nuclear triad: the United States, Russia, China, India, and Pakistan. Israel is also commonly presumed to have a triad, although the nature of the country's nuclear capabilities is a state secret.

France currently possesses the world's [fourth-largest nuclear arsenal](#) but the Western European country no longer maintains ground-based nuclear capability.

Native American reservations across the US have long borne the brunt of the country's nuclear capability, with multiple silos built on Native land. The United States has also mined uranium on Indian reservations and [stores nuclear waste](#) there.

In 1978, US Air Force Chief of Staff Lew Allen Jr. called the missile silos scattered throughout the country "a great sponge" that could "absorb" nuclear weapons attacks from an enemy country.

The report comes two weeks after the US Air Force reportedly "terminated" a Minuteman III missile after a [failed launch](#) over the Pacific Ocean earlier this month. The nuclear-capable missile was unarmed at the time. The US has announced it will spend \$1.5 trillion over the next few years to upgrade the country's nuclear arsenal, replacing the Minuteman with new "Sentinel" missiles.

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'Mass Surveillance in Hyperdrive': US Company Suspected of Enabling Government Abuses - Report

LexusNexus is under fire after it was reported that the data broker is selling spy tools and sensitive private information to US Customs and Border Protection; an agency that has long been criticized for authoritarian behavior.

The US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has a long list of controversial behavior, such as the flouting of constitutional protections and mass arrests of racial justice protesters. Now a US-based data giant is looking to add to that list as it faces criticism for reportedly helping to facilitate the agency's abuses of power.

New [documents](#) released after a Freedom of Information Act request suggest the company LexusNexus has been selling personal location and facial recognition data to the controversial agency since late last year. The information was revealed Thursday in a [report](#) in US media. The data sold by the company also includes social media posts, IP addresses, employment history, and phone call records.

"This contract is mass surveillance in hyperdrive," said Julie Mao, referring to the \$15.9 million agreement signed by LexusNexus.

"It's frightening that a rogue agency such as CBP has access to so many powerful technologies at the click of the button. Unfortunately, this is what LexisNexis appears now to be selling to thousands of police forces across the country. It's now become a one-stop shop for accessing a range of invasive surveillance tools."

Companies such as LexusNexus gather personal data from multiple sources. Among the most invasive information offered by the company is location tracking data gathered from individuals' smartphones. Modern mobile phones are in constant communication with cell towers throughout the country, frequently "pinging" them as they send and receive data.

The information is stored on smartphones and can be retrieved by third-party applications which sell the data to various companies, which is then aggregated by LexusNexus.

Police agencies' purchasing of the information is controversial as it's seen as an end run around constitutional protections against the gathering of such data without a warrant.

The conduct of CBP has generated debate about the limits of government power in the United States; CBP touts the power to operate within 100 miles of any land or sea border in the country. The claim subjects two-thirds of Americans in most major US cities to searches by the agency.

CBP was criticized in 2020 when they flew a Predator drone over Minneapolis to [surveil](#) racial justice protesters there after the murder of George Floyd. In July of that year, CBP agents in unmarked vehicles [rounded up](#) protesters in Portland, Oregon.

And in recent years a [scandal](#) emerged when it was revealed that over 160 asylum seekers have been subjected to physical and sexual abuse by CBP and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials.

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When in Rome: Remains of Ancient Temples and Sacrificial Pit Found in Germany

Researchers uncovered substantial evidence of Roman presence at the location despite disturbance of the site over the last 100 years.

What is now recognized as Western Europe once formed part of the mighty Roman Empire, which extended as far north as modern day Scotland and as far east as the Persian Gulf. Now, archeologists in Germany have unearthed evidence of temples and a sacrificial pit used at what was thought to be an ancient military site.

The [discovery](#) was made at a site of a Roman camp called Haltern in northwestern Germany by researchers with the University of Trier.

Only the foundations of the buildings remained. They're the first recorded discovery of temples at a Roman military site. The unearthing of the sacrificial pit is also unprecedented; a ban on graves within Roman settlements was assumed to have forbidden such sites.

The area was first explored in 1928, but owing to a lack of funding at the time, German archeologists reburied the remains.

Another one of the buildings at the location has been suggested to have been a "schola," or meeting place for Roman military officials. The discovery of tools at the site has also prompted the hypothesis it might have been a workshop.

The buildings "were based on the typical large podium temples made of stone that could be found in numerous Roman cities at the time of Emperor Augustus," said Bettina Tremmel, an archeologist from the Regional Association of Westphalia-Lippe. That would place the construction of the buildings at some point during the rule of Rome's first emperor between 31 BC and 14 AD.

The Roman Empire ruled Europe for some [1,000 years](#) until around 476 AD. Difficulty in maintaining the breadth of the empire's territorial possessions is assumed to have played a key role in its collapse.

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Ban on Travel Beyond 25-Mile Zone Hampers Activities of Russian Consulate in NY - Consul

NEW YORK CITY, November 17 (Sputnik) - The US ban on Russian diplomats' travel more than 25 miles outside their posting severely restricts the activities of the Russian consulate in New York, Consul General Alexander Zakharov told Sputnik.

"One of the serious restrictions on the activities of our mission is the ban on travel beyond the 25-mile zone," Zakharov said, when asked about hurdles to the work of the consulate.

The ban creates difficulties for visiting consular sessions and visits to Russian nationals who are unable to get to the consulate for some reason, the diplomat explained.

"Not to mention meetings with authorities of the states that are part of our consular district — of course, with those of them who are ready to meet and discuss the prospects of restoring and developing cooperation," he said.

Along with consular services, the mission is also tasked with facilitating trade, economic and cultural cooperation, as well as people-to-people contacts, Zakharov recalled

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Russia Suggested to US Abandoning Policy of Visa Trade-Offs, No Positive Response – Consul

NEW YORK CITY, November 17 (Sputnik) - Russia suggested that the United States stop making the number of visas it grants to Russian diplomats conditional on the number of visas issued by Moscow to American diplomats, but has not received a positive response, Consul General in New York Alexander Zakharov told Sputnik.

"Over the past few years, issues of accreditation of our diplomats in the US and American diplomats in Russia have amounted to 'visa trade-offs' based on the principle of reciprocity," Zakharov said.

He called it "quite a time-consuming" procedure.

Russia in bilateral consultations has repeatedly "suggested to the US that this policy be abandoned, but unfortunately has not received a positive response," the consul added.

On Thursday, Zakharov was appointed as consul general in New York. From 2020, he served as consul general in Houston.

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CENTCOM's Top Commander Visiting Israel - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) – US Central Command (CENTCOM) chief Gen. Michael Kurilla is traveling to Israel, a spokesperson confirmed to Sputnik.

"Yes – Israel is CENTCOM Commander General Kurilla's last stop on this trip. We anticipate doing a press release soon," the spokesperson said.

On Thursday, media reported that Kurilla is expected to meet with Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, IDF Chief of Staff Herzl Halevi and several other senior defense and intelligence officials.

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Special Counsel Unlikely to Lay Charges in Biden Classified Documents Probe - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) – Special counsel Robert Hur is unlikely to lay charges in relation to the potential mishandling of classified documents by US President Joe Biden

during his vice presidency, CNN reported, citing two unnamed sources.

Hur's team has told the Justice Department that they hope to complete a detailed report on their year-long investigation by the end of the year, the report said on Thursday.

Hur was appointed in January after classified documents dating from Biden's vice presidency were found at one of his former offices and his Delaware home.

Spokespeople for Hur and the White House Counsel's office declined to comment, according to the report.

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Biden Campaign Team Considers TikTok to Reach Younger Voters - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden's campaign team has been discussing whether to join TikTok in order to reach more voters under 30, Axios reported on Friday, citing two unnamed sources.

Various polls have indicated that Biden needs to increase his appeal among younger voters, who favor the short-form video app, including for news and political content.

Most US politicians have been wary of using the social media platform over data security concerns, given that its parent company, ByteDance, is Chinese-owned. TikTok is banned from use on US government devices.

Biden's campaign has tried to get around the issue by hiring social media influencers who use TikTok, the report said. The Democratic National Committee also uses TikTok on dedicated devices.

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APEC Will Become More Important for Russia Amid Growing Economic Ties With Asia - Envoy

SAN FRANCISCO, November 17 (Sputnik) - The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum will become more important for Russia amid the expanding ties with Asia and Latin America, Russia's senior representative at the APEC summit Amb. Marat Berdyeu told Sputnik.

Berdyeu noted that Russia had joined APEC in 1998 and since then has been actively involved in all its thematic processes.

"We perceive this forum as a core mechanism for deepening economic cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region, the most developing region, one of the key elements of the strengthening multipolar world order," Berdyeu said. "At the same time, the importance of APEC for us will only increase in view of the fact that Russia continues to expand its broad front of economic interaction with Asian economies and Latin America."

Berdyeu pointed out that the trade volume between Russia and the APEC economies is constantly growing and had reached \$278.3 billion at the end of 2022. Over the past several

months, trade has increased by about 12%, he added.

"We proceed from the fact that our efforts in this area require an integrated approach, where the multilateral component will play an important role, especially where the result will require group interaction: creating cross-border transport corridors; energy infrastructure; establishing a common framework for digital transformation; promoting of a sustainable strategy development and response to climate challenges," Berdyev said.

Russia also intends to actively promote in APEC the initiative of its president on building a greater Eurasian partnership, Berdyev added.

APEC is one of the premier trade and economic forums in the Asia-Pacific region. This year's APEC summit in San Francisco is taking place from November 11-17.

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US Debt Collapse Matter of Time, Could Overshadow 2008 Financial Crisis- Russia APEC Envoy

SAN FRANCISCO, November 17 (Sputnik) - The collapse of the US debt is a matter of time and the consequences could overshadow the financial crisis of 2007-2008, Russia's representative at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit Amb. Marat Berdyev told Sputnik.

Berdyev emphasized that there is a need to transform the international payment system. "The dollar is consistently losing its leading position in the world, primarily for objective reasons. You just have to look at the size of the American national debt, which I think is only a matter of time before it collapses like a mudslide," Berdyev said. "The scale of this crisis could seriously eclipse the financial collapse in the United States in 2007-2008."

The US debt may reach 137.5% of GDP in five years, a figure more than 14% greater than the debt level in 2023, the International Monetary Fund said in its Fiscal Monitor report in October.

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(Updates with more details, background in paras 4-7)

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APEC 'Purely' Economic Forum, Political Issues Should Be Tackled At UN - Russian Envoy

SAN FRANCISCO, November 17 (Sputnik) - The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) is a purely economic platform, so any political matters should be dealt with in other formats, particularly at the United Nations, Russia's senior official at APEC, Ambassador Marat Berdyev, told Sputnik.

"APEC is a purely economic platform and there is no place for political issues in it. They need to be resolved in specialized formats, primarily at the UN," Berdyev said. "It would be correct to talk not about the politicization of APEC, but about the desire of the Americans to turn it into a tilt yard, into an arena for fights without rules."

Berdyev said they will systematically work with APEC participants to overcome Washington's "notorious "rules."

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Prospects of Dedollarization Remain Focus of APEC Summit- Russian Envoy

SAN FRANCISCO, November 17 (Sputnik) - The matters of protectionist measures and prospects of dedollarization continue to be in focus of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit in San Francisco, Russia's senior official at APEC, Ambassador Marat Berdyev, told Sputnik.

"As for non-market protectionist measures and the prospects for de-dollarization of the world economy, then, of course, these topics concern our colleagues in APEC," Berdyev said. "They fit entirely within the context of the urgently felt need to prevent the collapse of the world economic system - what is often called 'fragmentation' - which threatens to result in colossal costs for the prosperity of our peoples."

More and more members of the forum are paying attention to the political motivation of the protectionist tools that the West is waving as an "economic cudgel," he added. The so-called sanctions are severely damaging the prospects for global economic growth, fueling poverty and hunger, provoking energy shortages and, most importantly, a long-term surge in inflation, Berdyev said.

"The United States, which is rapidly losing its former dominance, is simply addicted to zero-sum games today," he said. "There are fewer and fewer people willing to echo the Americans in their anti-Russian attacks, and such voices are usually heard under pressure."

Russia, Berdyev added, is preparing a number of specific applied projects through the Russian Central Bank to fulfill the strategic goal of the forum - building an attractive, fair and diversified trade and investment sphere.

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CORRECTION - US Cooperating With Japan on Russia Sanctions, Oil Price Cap - State Dept.

(Corrects to read Japan in headline, lede, Japanese in quote)

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) - The United States cooperates intensively with Japan on all issues related to US sanctions against Russia and the oil price cap, Assistant Secretary of State for Energy Resources Geoffrey Pyatt said on Thursday.

"On the question of Asia, I would simply note, first of all, the very intense cooperation we have with Japanese allies on all of these issues around the price cap and our sanctions regime," Pyatt said.

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Pentagon Operator-Level Officials to Begin Contacts With Chinese Counterparts - NSC

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - The United States Department of Defense at the operator and policy level will have to negotiate military-to-military meetings with their Chinese counterparts in the absence of a Chinese Defense Minister, White House National Senior Council Director for China and Taiwan Affairs Sarah Beran told reporters.

"Right now, of course the Secretary of Defense [Austin] does not have a counterpart, there is no [Chinese] minister of defense. We're gonna have to probably wait on that one. But the operator level, the policy channel and the theater command, will turn that over to our Department of Defense to figure out sequencing now with their Chinese counterparts," said Beran during a press briefing on Thursday.

China's leadership formally dismissed the country's defense minister, Li Shangfu, last month after he disappeared from the public eye.

The comments come after US President Joe Biden said he and Chinese leader Xi Jinping agreed to reestablish military-to-military contacts and reaffirmed an open phone line between the commanders in chief as part of a larger effort to avoid accidental conflict between the super powers.

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US Hospital Potentially Exposes Almost 450 Patients to HIV, Hepatitis - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - A hospital in the US state of Massachusetts may have exposed nearly 450 people to diseases including HIV and hepatitis over the course of two years, ABC News reported, citing the hospital.

Hundreds of patients may have been exposed to HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C during endoscopy procedures, the report said on Thursday. The patients were potentially exposed during the administration of intravenous medications, the report said.

The hospital was alerted to the potential exposures earlier this year and has since corrected its practices, the report said. The hospital has been cooperating with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health on the matter, the report added.

The hospital has notified patients who were potentially exposed, according to the report. There is no evidence of any infections resulting from the incident, the report added.

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US Getting 'Toxic,' Discredits Itself by Abusing Power As APEC Chair - Russian Envoy

SAN FRANCISCO, November 17 (Sputnik) - The United States is turning into a toxic player, and discredits itself as a reliable international partner by abusing its power as a chair of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Russia's senior official at APEC, Ambassador Marat Berdyev, told Sputnik.

Berdyev shared that throughout the year, Russia and other APEC members were faced with unlawful actions to limit participation of their delegations as well as with non-issuance of visas, and harassment of Russian representatives, including various delays and increased attention from border authorities at the airport.

"Americans, long unaccustomed to honest conversation on equal terms, naturally behave in their usual unbridled manner. Actually, they do not hide the fact that they put their internal national guidelines above international obligations and traditions of hospitality," Berdyev said. "For obvious reasons, these abuses were given a hard time, including public rebuff. In the long term, this practice boomerangs on the Americans themselves, who discredit themselves as a responsible international partner and turn into a "toxic" player."

Berdyev spoke on the sidelines of the APEC summit this year taking place in San Francisco. APEC is one of the premier trade and economic forums in the Asia-Pacific region.

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

US Navy Requests Permission to Collide With More Whales Off California - Report

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - The US Navy has officially requested permission to allow its ships to collide with more whales in the Pacific Ocean off California during exercises, the semi-official Navy Times reported.

The Navy has entered an official request to raise the number of air-breathing marine mammals that it is permitted to injure in accidents during Pacific training, the Navy Times said in a story on Thursday.

The request followed collisions in the ocean with several whales in the sea off the Southern California coast in recent years, it said.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) told the Military Times that it expects to make a ruling on the request in spring 2024. US environmental groups have already signalled they will try and block the move, the Navy Times said.

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Blinken Spoke to Israeli Minister Gantz on Accelerating Aid to Gaza - US State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken spoke with Israeli War Cabinet Minister Benjamin Gantz about accelerating humanitarian aid in the Gaza Strip, confronting Israeli settlers' violence and de-escalating the situation in the region, the US State Department said.

"Secretary Blinken and Minister Gantz discussed efforts to augment and accelerate the transit of critical humanitarian assistance into Gaza. The Secretary and the Minister also discussed ongoing efforts to prevent the conflict from widening and to secure the release of hostages held in Gaza, including US citizens. Secretary Blinken stressed the urgent need for affirmative steps to de-escalate tensions in the West Bank, including by confronting rising levels of settler extremist violence," the State Department said in a press release on Thursday.

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US Accuses Russia of Relocating Saved Ukrainian Children to Belarus for Reformation

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - The United States believes that Russia is relocating children saved from conflict zones in Ukraine to facilities in Belarus to undergo reformation, the State Department said in a statement.

"According to the Yale Humanitarian Research Lab, a program partner, more than 2,400 children between the ages of six and 17 have been transported from Russia-occupied regions of

Ukraine to Dubrava and 12 other facilities in Belarus, where many undergo political and cultural re-education and military training to serve the political interests of Belarus and Russia," the statement said on Thursday.

The accusations come as part of a report released by the State Department-sponsored Conflict Observatory on Russia's removal of children from conflict zones in Ukraine. The report alleges that the relocation operations are coordinated at the highest levels of the Russian and Belarusian governments.

However, Russia has rejected claims that it is forcibly removing children from Ukraine. Russia does not conceal the names or locations of Ukrainian children who have been moved out of the country due to the conflict or prevent relatives from recovering them, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said in September.

Nevertheless, the US will continue to pursue accountability for actors involved in Russia's activities in Ukraine, the statement said.

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Number of Attacks on US Bases in Syria, Iraq Increases to 58 - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - The total number of attacks on US forces in Syria and Iraq has increased by three and reached 58 with no casualties reported, Defense Department deputy spokesperson Sabrina Singh said during a press briefing.

"As of today, there have been approximately 58 attacks. So, that's 27 in Iraq and 31 attacks in Syria," Singh said on Thursday.

Singh did not specify where or under what circumstances the attacks took place but said that they were unsuccessful.

Since October 17, US military bases in Syria and Iraq have been targeted by missiles and drones from unknown armed groups. The Defense Department and the White House blame the attacks on armed groups in the region that are supported by Iran.

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UPDATE - Police Arrest 80, Clear Protesters From San Francisco Bay Bridge - Highway Patrol

(Updates with more details in third para, modifies headline)

SAN FRANCISCO, November 16 (Sputnik) - The California Highway Patrol (CHP) said on Thursday that it has arrested 80 people while clearing pro-Palestine protesters who blocked all westbound lanes of the San Francisco's Bay Bridge.

"The protesters have been cleared by California Highway Patrol and taken into custody. CHP said they made 50 arrests and towed 15 cars," a CHP spokesperson initially said in a statement to Sputnik.

The CHP later updated the number, saying they had arrested 80 people - 67 women and 13 men.

On Thursday morning, a large group of demonstrators protested on the Bay Bridge Israel's invasion of Gaza and indiscriminate killing of civilians in the Palestinian enclave. Some demonstrators chained themselves to cars and would not let other cars pass through bridge.

The demonstrators also expressed criticism and disapproval of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit that is being held in San Francisco from November 12-17.

The Bay Bridge is vital for commutes between San Francisco and Oakland and accommodates an average of 260,000 vehicles daily.

During the ongoing APEC summit in San Francisco, a series of protests have persisted throughout the week, involving hundreds of participants and often leading to street closures.

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'Serious Risk' APEC Summit in San Francisco Ends Without Statement - Russian Envoy

SAN FRANCISCO, November 16 (Sputnik) - Leaders at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit face the "serious risk" of failing to agree on a joint statement because the United States as the current chair of the body is unwilling to engage in serious diplomacy, Russia's Senior Official for APEC Marat Berdyevev told Sputnik.

"This has already led to the fact that all events during the year ended without agreed upon results. There remains a serious risk that the scenario will repeat itself at the summit. And I rate these risks quite highly," Berdyevev said.

The US chairmanship of APEC has posed significant challenges to forging any agreements, as the Americans are exhibiting "their trademark" unreadiness for civilized diplomacy and conversation on equal terms and unwillingness to search for common denominators, Berdyevev said.

"From our side, we are committed to constructive interaction with all partners. We are trying to smooth out the current contradictions in APEC and look for reasonable compromises," Berdyevev added.

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Austin to Meet With Chinese Counterpart Once Beijing Names Him - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin will meet with his Chinese counterpart after Beijing names him following the official dismissal of Li Shangfu last month, Defense Department deputy spokesperson Sabrina Singh said.

"President Biden and President Xi committed to the resumption of high-level military-to-military communication. Additionally, the US and the PRC [People's Republic of China] agreed to

resume telephone conversations between their theater commanders. Secretary Austin welcomes this announcement and will meet with his counterpart when that person is named," Singh said during a press briefing on Thursday.

Biden and Xi held extensive bilateral talks on the margins of the APEC summit on Wednesday on a wide range of diplomatic and security-related issues.

The two leaders agreed to improve communications and resume direct military-to-military contacts. Biden, despite saying that progress was made during the conversations, referred to Xi as a "dictator" after the meeting.

The military dialogue between Washington and Beijing was effectively halted following the visit of then-House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan in 2022.

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US Court Sentences Russia's Semenova to Time Served - Lawyer

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - The federal court in the US sentenced Russian national Natalia Semenova, who was imprisoned since February on drug-related charges, to time served, Semenova's lawyer, Alexey Tarasov, told Sputnik.

"Today in federal court in Tyler, this is the federal court for the Eastern District of Texas, Natalia Semenova was sentenced to time served. In other words, the sentence that she already spent in confinement from February 23, 2023," Tarasov said.

Later in the day, or in the near future, Semenova will be processed for either release or possibly for transfer to Immigration and Customs, he added.

The lawyer emphasized that the court did not impose conditions that would mandate Semenova's removal from the country. While his client could potentially remain in the US and possibly be released to the community, he did not rule out deportation.

"In the event that Immigration and Customs does decide to pick her up, there is a 48-hour window, which would start today and run through the weekend," Tarasov said.

Semenova was detained in February 2023 after authorities conducted a search near the residence she shares with her husband, Russell Rothe, who is a US citizen.

According to local media, the authorities in Texas also detained six other people during the February raid, including three Russian and three Bolivian citizens. Law enforcement reportedly seized 1,600 pounds of marijuana during the raid.

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Biden Tells APEC Leaders and CEOs They Can Count on US as Strong and Steady Partner

SAN FRANCISCO, November 16 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden on Thursday told leaders and CEOs attending the Asia-Pacific summit in San Francisco that the United States is a

reliable partner and is delivering on its promises.

"I'm gonna say to all of you here today ... leaders of government and industry can count on the United States. We're delivering on our promises and we're doubling down on our progress," Biden said at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) CEO Summit in San Francisco.

Biden said the US would soon become a robust and steadfast partner as they collaborate to achieve a free, open, prosperous, secure, resilient and connected Asian-Pacific region.

APEC is a trade and economic forum of 21 member economies in the Asia-Pacific region. This year's summit in San Francisco is taking place from November 11-17. Since its inception in 1989, APEC has been a crucial platform for the United States to promote equitable trade, investment and sustainable growth in the Asia-Pacific region.

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US Special Counsel Using California Grand Jury in Hunter Biden Probe - CNN

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - Prosecutors for the special counsel charged with investigating Hunter Biden's business dealings are using a California grand jury to seek documents and potential testimony as part of the probe, CNN reported on Thursday, citing sources familiar with the matter.

Hunter Biden's paternal uncle and erstwhile business partner, James Biden, is among the individuals to receive subpoenas from the grand jury, the report said.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) -

ISRAEL INVASION OF GAZA

* The Israeli military found an underground tunnel and a vehicle with weapons belonging to the Palestinian movement Hamas in the al-Shifa hospital in the Gaza Strip, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) said on Thursday.

* Hamas politburo chief Ismail Haniyeh said that Israel's plans will fail and Israeli hostages will be released on its terms.

* Israel has not found any clear evidence of Palestinian fighters activity in the al-Shifa medical complex, the Washington Post reported on Thursday, citing a European diplomat.

* Israeli tanks have surrounded the Al-Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza City and medical workers cannot reach the injured civilians, the Palestine Red Crescent Society said.

US-CHINA RELATIONS

* US President Joe Biden left the meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping feeling very good about the progress made during the talks, National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said.

* The United States will continue to deliver arms to Taiwan, Kirby said.

* The United States would certainly encourage China to use its influence to rein in Iranian attacks on US forces in the Middle East, Kirby said.

* The United States has lifted export restrictions on the Chinese Ministry of Public Security's Institute of Forensic Science, the US Commerce Department said.

WESTERN SANCTIONS ON RUSSIA

* The United States has sanctioned three entities and has identified three vessels as blocked property for carrying Russian crude oil over the established price cap, the Treasury Department said in a statement on Thursday.

* The United States has targeted eight individuals and six entities with Western Balkans- and Russia-related sanctions, the Treasury Department said.

* The United States has targeted 12 companies and three vessels with Russia-related sanctions, the State Department said.

ENERGY MARKETS

* Global oil prices have decreased by 3% on Thursday, with Brent crude decreasing to under \$79 per barrel for the first time since July 20, according to the latest trading data.

* The United States cooperates intensively with China on all issues related to US sanctions against Russia and the oil price cap, Assistant Secretary of State for Energy Resources Geoffrey Pyatt said.

* The United States is committed to enforcing the price cap on Russian oil and to driving down Russia's fossil energy revenue, Pyatt said.

FINLAND'S RESTRICTIONS ON RUSSIA

* Finland has decided to close four out of eight checkpoints on the border with Russia due to the deterioration of the situation with migrants, the Finnish government said on Thursday.

* Freight traffic between Finland and Russia will practically stop from November 18 due to the decision to close some checkpoints until February, 2024, Director of Statistics at the Finnish Customs Olli-Pekka Penttila said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* The Russian military has repelled 14 Ukrainian attacks in the Donetsk direction in the past 24 hours, where Kiev lost up to 240 soldiers, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Thursday.

* South African President Cyril Ramaphosa and Qatari Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani discussed the Ukraine conflict, with both parties agreeing that it should be resolved through the office of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, the South African presidency said.

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Pentagon Says Ukraine Requires Continued US Support Amid Counteroffensive Endeavors

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) - Ukraine continues to require assistance from the United States as it endeavors to make progress in its counteroffensive against Russia, Deputy Pentagon Press Secretary Sabrina Singh said on Thursday.

"We know that Ukraine continues to endeavor in its counteroffensive, and they need continued support on a regular basis," Singh said during a press briefing.

The US and other Ukrainian backers will discuss how to continue to meet Ukraine's battlefield needs during the next Ukraine Defense Contact Group meeting, Singh said.

The Pentagon's ability to provide security assistance to Ukraine and backfill US weapons stocks is limited by a lack of remaining funding from Congress, Singh said. The Pentagon urges Congress to pass the Biden administration's supplemental funding request for Ukraine and Israel aid, Singh said.

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Sudan Fighting Intensifies Though Parties Declared Readiness to Negotiate - UN Official

UNITED NATIONS, November 16 (Sputnik) - Fighting has intensified in Sudan's Darfur region despite the parties announcing their readiness to negotiate, Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee said on Thursday.

"Hostilities have intensified in recent weeks. While both warring parties have declared a readiness to negotiate a ceasefire, their actions on the ground suggest otherwise," Pobee told the UN Security Council during a meeting on Sudan.

People fleeing from West Darfur to Chad are reporting 'technically-driven' violence against particular communities, he added.

In October, the Sudanese Armed Forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) resumed ceasefire talks in Jeddah, but the hostilities in the country continue.

Since the eruption of violent clashes between the Sudanese army and the RSF paramilitary group in April, the parties to the conflict have introduced a number of temporary nationwide ceasefires, but none has helped settle the conflict.

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Legal Group Seeks Trudeau, Govt. Prosecution Over Complicity with Israel War Crimes

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) – The International Center of Justice for Palestinians (ICJP) said on Thursday that it had notified Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau as well as

three other government officials of its intention to prosecute them for being complicit of Israeli war crimes in Gaza.

The International Centre of Justice for Palestinians describes itself as an independent organisation of lawyers, politicians and academics who support the rights of Palestinians and aim to protect their rights through the law.

"The ICJP's Legal Working Group for Canadian Accountability (ICJP LWGCA) has issued a notice to the Government of Canada of its intention to prosecute Canadian officials for their role in aiding and abetting Israel's perpetration of war crimes," ICPJA statement said. "The notice was issued to ... Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Minister of Foreign Affairs Mélanie Joly, Minister of National Revenue Marie-Claude Bibeau, and Minister of Justice (Attorney General) Arif Virani."

The notice is a warning that Canadian government officials could be found individually liable and face prosecution before the International Criminal Court (ICC), if evidence is found of their complicity in Israeli war crimes and crimes against humanity amid the Israel-Gaza war, the statement said.

ICJP noted that despite the over 11,000 casualties caused by Israel's intervention in Gaza and the Israeli "war crimes" of withholding of humanitarian aide and safe passage, indiscriminately bombing civilians, and ethnic cleansing through a campaign of forced displacement of 1.5 million people, the Canadian government has continues to reiterate its commitment to Israel.

In addition to supporting Israel, Ottawa has declined to halt the export of weapons toward the Jewish State, failed to prevent illegal recruitment of Canadian military volunteers, and refused to halt the "unlawful" flow of millions of dollars sent by Canada-based charitable organizations to the Israel's defense forces.

"CJP LWGCA calls on the Government of Canada to end its complicity in war crimes by calling for a ceasefire, canceling all arms exports permits to Israel, prosecute those recruiting Canadian volunteers for Israel's armed forces, and prevent Canadian charities from using donations to benefit Israel's armed forces," the statement continued.

Trudeau has continuously supported Israel's right to self-defense" in accordance with international law." However, the statesman urged Tel-Aviv on Tuesday to exercise maximum restraint in Gaza.

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Biden Says US Has 'Real Differences' With Beijing on Protecting IP, Maintaining Fair Trade

SAN FRANCISCO, November 16 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden on Thursday at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) CEO Summit in San Francisco said the US has real differences with Beijing in maintaining a fair economic playing field and safeguarding intellectual property.

"We've real differences [with] Beijing, when it comes to maintaining fair level economic playing field and protecting your intellectual property," Biden said.

Furthermore, Biden said they would continue to address the issues with smart policies and

strong diplomacy.

Yesterday, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Biden held their meeting at the historic Filoli estate in northern California on the sidelines of the APEC Summit taking place in San Francisco. APEC is a trade and economic forum of 21 member economies in the Asia-Pacific region.

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US CENTCOM Commander to Visit Israel on Friday to Discuss War in Gaza - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) - US Central Command (CENTCOM) Commander Gen. Michael Kurilla will travel to Israel on Friday for meetings with Israeli military officials to discuss the war in Gaza, Axios reported on Thursday citing Israeli officials.

According to the report, Kurilla is expected to meet with Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, IDF chief of staff Herzi Halevi and other senior defense and intelligence officials.

CENTCOM did not immediately respond to Sputnik's request for comment.

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Oil Prices Hit 4-Month Lows on Worrying US Economic Data and Crude Stockpiles

NEW YORK, November 16 (Sputnik) - Oil prices hit four-month lows Thursday amid weakening macroeconomic data and mounting crude stockpiles in the United States that raised doubts about demand for energy.

New York-traded West Texas Intermediate, or WTI, crude for December delivery, settled at \$72.90 per barrel, down \$3.76, or 4.9%, that wiped out a 3.8% gain built over three past sessions. Thursday's low for WTI was \$72.17, a bottom not seen since July. WTI is down 10% so far for November, after an 11% drop in for October.

UK-origin Brent crude's most-active January contract settled at \$77.42 per barrel, down \$3.76, or 4.6%, on the day. Brent had risen 3.8% gain over the past three sessions. Thursday's low for Brent was \$76.61, a bottom not seen since July. The global crude benchmark is down 9% for November, after an 11% slump for October.

"Oil prices have been trending lower again in recent days after rebounding on Tuesday, around the October lows in the case of WTI," said Craig Erlam, analyst at online trading platform OANDA. "There are clearly concerns around demand going into next year, particularly around China, which OPEC this week sought to relieve, to no avail."

Chinese economic activity rallied in October as industrial output increased at a faster pace and retail sales growth beat expectations. But an expected slowdown in Chinese oil refinery throughput also gave investors pause. Runs eased in October from the previous month's highs as industrial fuel demand weakened and refining margins narrowed.

Over in the United States, the number of Americans filing new claims for unemployment

benefits increased to a three-month high last week, suggesting that labor market conditions continued to ease.

The report came after other data showed US retail sales fell for the first time in seven months in October as motor vehicle purchases and spending on hobbies dropped. This pointed to slowing demand at the start of the fourth quarter that further strengthened expectations the Federal Reserve may be done hiking interest rates.

OPEC and the International Energy Agency, or IEA, have both predicted supply tightness in the fourth quarter, but US data on Wednesday showed crude inventories abundant with a build of 3.6 million barrels last week. US crude stockpiles have jumped nearly 20 million barrels the past four weeks.

‘The recent trend may make it difficult for Saudi Arabia and Russia to allow their unilateral cuts to expire at the end of the year, which is something markets may be gradually pricing in,’ said Erlam of energy trading house OANDA. ‘The lack of a commitment to extend so far may reflect a desire to not but as we’ve seen so often in the past, the producers will do whatever it takes to support the price. The question may be whether they can get others on board.’

Providing a glimmer of hope to oil bulls was speculation that sanctions may be applied after all on Iranian oil, given the active role Tehran was playing in trying to escalate the already-raging Israel-Hamas war. With the conflict in Gaza scaling, US officials said Wednesday they would consider enforcing oil sanctions against Iran, which has long been a backer of Hamas.

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No Agreement on Ceasefire Was Reached in Last Round of Jeddah Talks - UN Official

UNITED NATIONS, November 16 (Sputnik) - No ceasefire was reached in Sudan during the last round of talks in Jeddah, the UN Assistant Secretary-General for Africa, Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee said on Thursday.

‘Regrettably, the parties did not reach an agreement on a ceasefire in this round of Jeddah talks. Instead, they have intensified the fighting,’ Pobee told the Security Council members during a meeting on Sudan.

Civilians need to be big stakeholders to the future agreement to function, he added.

In October, the Sudanese armed forces and the RSF resumed their talks in Jeddah, but the hostilities in the country continue.

In April, violent clashes broke out between the Sudanese army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) paramilitary group. The parties to the conflict have since introduced a number of temporary nationwide ceasefires, but none has helped settle the conflict. In late October, the parties resumed negotiations, mediated by Saudi Arabia. The UN estimates the death toll from the conflict in the hundreds.

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

Biden Says US Remains Vital to Asia Pacific Future

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden said on Thursday the US plays a vital role in the future of the Asia Pacific region.

“The United States remains vital to the future of the region,” Biden said at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) CEO Summit in San Francisco.

He also emphasized that this region is “more vital than ever” to the US.

Biden said that Chinese President Xi Jinping during their meetings was asking him why the US is so engaged in the Pacific region, “It is because we are a Pacific nation,” he answered.

The US President pointed out that his country has deep ties with APEC. “More than 60% of US exports go to fellow APEC economies,” he said.

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Biden-Xi Talks Modified Tone But Not Substance of US-China Relationship - Ex-Diplomat

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden's meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping in San Francisco improved the frosty atmosphere between the two Pacific superpowers but did nothing to resolve any of the sources of tension between them, former senior State Department official Chas Freeman told Sputnik.

Biden and Xi held extensive bilateral talks on the margins of the APEC Summit on Wednesday on a wide range of diplomatic and security matters. The two leaders agreed to improve communications and resume direct military-to-military contacts. Biden, despite saying that progress was made during the conversations, referred to Xi as a "dictator" after the summit.

"It modulated the tone but not the substance of bilateral relations," Freeman, who served as President Richard Nixon's personal translator during his first state visit to China in 1972, said. "Like acupuncture treatment of pain, the meeting sought to address its symptoms rather than the causes."

Freeman said there was "no meeting of the minds" on matters of war and peace in Eastern Europe or West Asia.

"For the time being, Mr. Biden has avoided adding yet another war to those he has already fomented or made the United States co-belligerent in," Freeman said.

The talks, Freeman added, reopened the possibility of cooperation or at least coordinated policies on global issues like climate change, nuclear proliferation, and artificial intelligence, but it remains unclear what this will mean in practice.

The former senior State Department diplomat said Xi's speech to a gathering of American business "moguls," was a model of its kind.

"Mr. Xi reinforced Chinese ties to existing constituencies in the United States while seeking to relieve the anxieties of China's entrepreneurial class and private sector about the direction of his

trade and investment policies," Freeman said.

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US Has Not Yet Moved Military Assets From Indo-Pacific to Middle East– Defense Official

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) – The United States to date has not changed its military posture in the Indo-Pacific region as a result of the war in Gaza and has not moved any military assets from the region to the Middle East, Acting Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Mara Karlin said on Thursday.

“To date, we have not taken posture like platforms or military assets from the Indo-Pacific and put them in the Middle East,” Karlin said during a press briefing.

Karlin noted that in the 1990s the US approach in the Middle East was more sustainable amid military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan and today it is not the case.

Earlier in November, the United States sent an Ohio-class submarine to the Middle East.

In late October, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said that the United States sent the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower carrier strike group to the Persian Gulf and deployed additional air defenses throughout the region as it anticipated a continued escalation of attacks against US forces in the region by Iran's "proxy forces." Additionally, the USS Gerald R. Ford carrier strike group is positioned in the Eastern Mediterranean to serve as a deterrent to any third parties that might consider joining the conflict against Israel, the Pentagon said.

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Biden Signs Memorandum to Advance Human Rights, Higher Labor Standards - Blinken

SAN FRANCISCO, November 16 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden, during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit in San Francisco, signed a groundbreaking memorandum towards advancing human rights and labor standards, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Thursday.

"President Biden signed a new presidential memorandum on advancing human rights, and higher labour standards globally," Blinken said during a press briefing.

Furthermore, Blinken said that the newly signed memorandum formally recognizes the crucial role of labor rights in national security and foreign policy, emphasizing that the matter extends beyond domestic concerns and outlines five lines of efforts to actively integrate and enhance workers' rights globally.

"First, we will engage government workers, labor organizations, trade unions, civil society, and the private sector around the world to protect and promote respect for internationally recognized labor rights," Blinken said.

Blinken further said that the administration's second objective involves holding individuals

accountable for threatening, intimidating, or attacking union leaders, labor rights defenders, and labor organizations, which will be enforced through various tools such as sanctions, penalties, and visa restrictions.

"Third, we will strengthen the federal government's capacity to advance worker rights abroad by prioritizing greater job opportunities for employees with labor expertise, training our personnel to know about worker rights to look for and prevent abuses," Blinken said.

Blinken also said in the plans is to collaborate with governments and multilateral institutions such as the United Nations and G20 to advocate for labor rights and standards.

"Finally, we will step up our due diligence and enforcement to ensure that our own trade agreements supply chains, protect workers. We're not importing goods made with forced labour," Blinken added.

APEC is a trade and economic forum of 21 member economies in the Asia-Pacific region. This year's summit in San Francisco is taking place from November 11-17. Since its inception in 1989, APEC has been a crucial platform for the United States to promote equitable trade, investment and sustainable growth in the Asia-Pacific region.

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Musk Says Second Starship Rocket Launch Postponed From Friday to Saturday

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) - SpaceX chief Elon Musk said on Thursday that the next launch of the Moon and Mars rocket Starship has been postponed from Friday to Saturday because the company's technical team needs to replace one of the rocket's parts.

"We need to replace a grid fin actuator, so launch is postponed to Saturday," Musk said via the social media platform X (formerly Twitter).

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UN Security Council Failing Duty as 'Custodian' of Int'l Peace - UNGA President

UNITED NATIONS, November 16 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council is not meeting its responsibility to act as a guarantor of international peace and security, UN General Assembly President Dennis Francis said on Thursday.

"The Council is dangerously falling short of its mandate as the primary custodian for the maintenance of international peace and security. Absent structural reform, its performance and legitimacy will inevitably continue to suffer," Francis said at the UN General Assembly hall, speaking at a meeting about reforming the Council.

Without public support, the UN will be further weakened, he warned.

On Wednesday, the UN Security Council adopted a Malta-drafted resolution on Gaza. The resolution calls for urgent and extended humanitarian pauses and corridors throughout the

Gaza Strip for a sufficient number of days to enable the full, rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access for UN humanitarian agencies.

The resolution was adopted after four unsuccessful attempts by the UN Security Council to take action with regard to the Israel-Gaza war.

A Russian-drafted amendment that would have included a call for a humanitarian truce was blocked by the United States.

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UN Regrets Israel's Statements Condemning UNSC Resolution on Humanitarian Pauses in Gaza

UNITED NATIONS, November 16 (Sputnik) - The United Nations regrets the statements made by Israel condemning the UN Security Council resolution on humanitarian pauses in Gaza, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Thursday.

"We regret the statements that we saw from the Israeli government on the resolution," Dujarric said during a press briefing.

On Wednesday, the UN Security Council passed a resolution calling for urgent and extended humanitarian pauses and corridors throughout the Gaza Strip as well as for the unconditional release of captives held by the Palestinian movement Hamas.

Dujarric pointed out that it was difficult for the UN Security Council members to make a mutual decision and adopt the resolution.

Earlier on Thursday, Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations Gilad Erdan said that the Malta-drafted UN Security Council resolution on the situation in the Gaza Strip is disconnected from reality and is meaningless.

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US Extends License for Limited Transactions With PDVSA Through May 16 - Treasury

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) - The United States extended the license for limited transactions with Venezuela's PDVSA through May 16, 2024, the Treasury Department said in a notice on Thursday.

"All transactions...are authorized through 12:01 a.m. eastern daylight time, May 16, 2024, for the following entities and their subsidiaries (collectively, the 'Covered Entities'): Halliburton, Schlumberger Limited, Baker Hughes Holdings LLC, Weatherford International, Public Limited Company," the notice said.

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UN PGA Calls for Diversifying Security Council Along Geographic Lines

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) - The UN countries should find an agreement and reform the United Nations Security Council according to an equal representation based on global geography, the President of the General Assembly Dennis Francis said on Thursday.

"I therefore urge the member states to grasp this opportunity, to break through ingrained positions and to promote Security Council reform through practical steps that support effectiveness and moreover, represent the full diversity of geographies," Francis told the UN General Assembly Hall.

But it is at the end of the day the decision of the states, he added.

The UN Security Council is made up of five permanent members - including the United States, Russia, China, France, and the UK and ten non-permanent members. Each year five non-permanent members are elected for two years terms.

More than fifty member states have never sat on the UNSC.

Changing the composition of the Security Council can only be done by amending the UN Charter, which requires approval by two-thirds of General Assembly membership and ratified by two thirds of member states, according to the UN website.

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US National Security Council Says UN Sanctions in 'Dark Place,' Face Challenges

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) - The United Nations faces significant challenges to imposing sanctions, US National Security Council Senior Director for Multilateral Affairs Josh Black said on Thursday.

"So, where are we now on sanctions? I will be honest: I think we're in a dark place. I think there are some real challenges on the horizon," Black said during remarks at the US Institute of Peace.

The challenges are rooted in both old and new dynamics on the UN Security Council, Black said.

It is difficult to effectively integrate sanctions into conflict and mediation processes, Black said. Sanctions have a "bad reputation" in some parts of the UN system and the so-called Global South, Black said.

Sanctions are sometimes viewed as a tool of rich countries to coerce less wealthy governments, Black also said.

The United States must ensure that UN sanctions are applied fairly and include adequate humanitarian exemptions, Black added.

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Only Quarter of Food Stores in Gaza Strip Remain Open - WFP Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, November 16 (Sputnik) - About a quarter of the shops in the Gaza Strip remain open - the ones which have been contracted by the World Food Program (WFP) - and they have very limited supplies, WFP North Africa and Eastern Europe spokesperson Abeer Etefa said on Thursday.

"In general, 25% of the shops in Gaza, those that have been contracted by WFP, remain open and the others have run out of essential food items," Etefa said.

Even the stores that remain open have very limited supplies, Etefa said, adding that an enormous number of Gaza residents struggle with obtaining food.

Prior to Israel's bombardment campaign and invasion of Gaza, there were some 130 bakeries in the Palestinian enclave. Eleven of them have been destroyed by Israeli strikes and the remainder are barely functioning, Etefa added.

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Fifty Arrested as Police Clear Demonstrators From San Francisco Bay Bridge - CHP

SAN FRANCISCO, November 16 (Sputnik) - The California Highway Patrol (CHP) said on Thursday it has arrested 50 individuals while clearing pro-Palestine protesters who blocked all westbound lanes of the Bay Bridge.

"The protesters have been cleared by California Highway Patrol and taken into custody. CHP said they made 50 arrests and towed 15 cars," a CHP spokesperson said in a statement to Sputnik.

On Thursday morning around 8 a.m., a group of protestors caused disruption on the Bay Bridge, expressing their stance with posters saying "Free Palestine" and "NO TO APEC." Protesters also chained themselves to cars and would not let other cars pass.

The Bay Bridge is vital for daily commutes between San Francisco and Oakland and accommodates an average of 260,000 vehicles daily.

During the ongoing Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in San Francisco, a series of protests have persisted throughout the week, involving hundreds of participants and often leading to street closures.

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UN Hopes US, China to Continue Sustained Dialogue - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, November 16 (Sputnik) – The United Nations hopes that the US and China will continue a sustained dialogue, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Thursday.

“We hope that this important dialogue will continue and will be sustained,” Dujarric told reporters, commenting on the meeting between US and Chinese Presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping in San Francisco on November 15.

Dujarric stressed that the UN is “very pleased” that this meeting took place. He declined to comment on its results, called it a move in the right direction.

Xi and Biden held their meeting at the historic Filoli estate in northern California on the sidelines of the leaders’ summit of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation taking place in San Francisco this week.

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US House Speaker Condemns Attack at DNC Headquarters During Anti-Israel Protest

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) - US House Speaker Mike Johnson said on Thursday that he condemns the violent activity that saw six Capitol Police officers injured at the Democratic National Committee headquarters during a protest against Israel's war in Gaza.

"Last night, pro-Hamas protesters outside the US Capitol violently attacked the Democratic National Committee headquarters. I condemn this criminal activity, which injured six brave Capitol Police officers, in the strongest terms. As Americans, we must unite with one voice in steadfast support of our ally Israel," Johnson said in a post on X.

The House Speaker also expressed thanks to the US Capitol Police who were "quick to evacuate members, civilians, and arrest those engaged in violence."

Earlier, police reported that six police officers were treated for injuries and that one person has been arrested for assaulting a police officer.

According to the police, nearly 200 people had gathered in front of the headquarters in a protest that was "not peaceful." Police said that protesters moved dumpsters in front of exits, pepper sprayed officers and attempted to move a bike rack.

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US Committed to Enforcing Price Cap on Russian Oil - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) - The United States is committed to enforcing the price cap on Russian oil and to driving down Russia's fossil energy revenue, US Assistant Secretary of State for Energy and Resources Geoffrey Pyatt said on Thursday.

"The American authorities [are] absolutely committed to enforcing the price cap and to doing everything we possibly can to drive down Russia's fossil energy revenue. The policy is working," Pyatt said during a press briefing.

The official said Russia's oil revenue was down \$4 billion from last year and attributed the drop to the consequences of Russia's actions in Ukraine.

Pyatt's comments come just as the US Treasury Department imposed new sanctions against three maritime companies that were allegedly circumventing the price cap.

However, the United Nations has said that Russia's total volume of gas and oil exports has not changed much despite the Western sanctions imposed on the country since the beginning of its military operation in Ukraine in February 2022, but export revenues did fall 47% in the first half of 2023 due to a global decline in prices.

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US Climate Envoy Kerry to Replace Musk at APEC CEO Summit - Schedule

SAN FRANCISCO, November 16 (Sputnik) - Entrepreneur billionaire Elon Musk's unexpected withdrawal from the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) CEO summit in San Francisco has prompted a schedule shift, with US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry now headlining the event instead, according to the event's program schedule..

US media reported that a change in Musk's schedule was the reason for his absence at the APEC CEO summit. Musk had offered to participate remotely, the report said.

However, Musk attended on Wednesday a reception and a dinner in honor of Chinese President Xi Jinping, the report added.

APEC is one of the premier trade and economic forums in the Asia-Pacific region. This year's summit in San Francisco is taking place from November 11-17.

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UPDATE - US Treasury Targets 8 Individuals, 6 Entities With Balkans-Russia-Related Sanctions

(adds details in paras 3-6)

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) - The United States has targeted eight individuals and six entities with Western Balkans- and Russia-related sanctions, the Treasury Department said on Thursday.

"Today, the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated eight individuals and six entities pursuant to Western Balkans-related Executive Order (E.O.) 14033 and Russia-related E.O. 14024," the Treasury said in a statement.

Treasury noted that its designations were introduced over the targeted individuals perpetuation of corruption and enabling of "malign influence" in the Balkans.

In Bosnia Herzegovina's Republika Srpska (RS) the sanctioned individuals include Savo Cvijetinovic a member of President Milorad Dodik's political party and representative of Russian-based BN Inzinjering, the current minister of industry Petar Djokic, and long-time RS

representative to Moscow Dusko Perovic.

The sanctioned also targeted Montenegrin nationals such as Miodrag Davidovic who has laundered money for crime syndicates for several decades, and Branislav Micunovic, a leading figure of the country's organized crime, the statement said.

A North Macedonians and two Serbians also made it to the list, Sergey Samsonenko a dual citizen of Russia and North Macedonia, as well as the President of the Serbian Right Party Misa Vacic, and former Serbian minister Nenad Popovic.

The sanctions were imposed as Russia continues to use its influence in the Western Balkans to "stymie the region's integration into international institutions and organizations, as well as leverage key jurisdictions to facilitate its aggressive destabilizing activities," Under Secretary of the Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Brian E. Nelson was quoted by the Treasury as saying.

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US to Remain World's Largest LNG Exporter for Years - State Dept. Energy Official

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) - US Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Energy Resources Geoffrey Pyatt on Thursday said the United States, presently the world's top Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) exporter, anticipates retaining this position for an extended period. "But we also have to own up to the fact that the United States... is now the world's largest LNG exporter, and we're going to have that status for years and years to come," Pyatt told reporters. Furthermore, Pyatt said that gas had played an absolutely critical role over the past year in assisting with addressing European energy security.

According to the US Energy Information Administration, the US led global LNG exports in the first half of 2023, with an average of 11.6 billion cubic feet per day. Moreover, the rise in US LNG exports was attributed to the resumption of operations at one of its significant facilities, driven by sustained global demand for LNG, particularly in Europe.

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US Cooperating With China on Russia Sanctions, Oil Price Cap - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) - The United States cooperates intensively with China on all issues related to US sanctions against Russia and the oil price cap, Assistant Secretary of State for Energy Resources Geoffrey Pyatt said on Thursday.

"On the question of Asia, I would simply note, first of all, the very intense cooperation we have with Chinese allies on all of these issues around the price cap and our sanctions regime," Pyatt said.

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US House Intelligence Panel Says Must Reform FISA Section 702 Before Reauthorization

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) - The US government must reform Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) before Congress reauthorizes the surveillance power, the House of Representatives Intelligence Committee said on Thursday.

The committee's Majority FISA Working Group released a report on the need to reform FISA Section 702 powers, which are set to expire at the end of the year, prior to reauthorizing them, the panel said in a statement.

"Our report outlines reforms necessary for FISA's reauthorization. The United States is currently at its greatest risk of a terrorist attack in nearly a decade. We cannot afford to let this critical national security tool expire. I look forward to working with my colleagues on this critical issue before the end of the year," Committee Chairman Mike Turner said in the statement.

The FBI has received criticism for misusing the Section 702 communications database on hundreds of thousands of occasions when searching for information on US citizens, including people linked to the events at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021.

However, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan urged Congress earlier this year to reauthorize the program without "operationally damaging restrictions" on reviewing lawfully collected intelligence.

The House panel's report recommends 45 reforms to FISA, beyond just Section 702 authorities, the statement said.

The panel recommends reforms to prevent the FBI from abusing FISA queries, enhance penalties for lying to the FISA Court or leaking FISA applications, increase transparency of the FISA Court and bolster the intelligence community's ability to monitor drug cartels, the statement added.

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US Senate Not Ready Yet to Take Up Issue of Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Ratification - ACA

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) - The US Senate is not yet ready to approach the issue of ratifying the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and this has been the case since 1999, Arms Control Association (ACA) Executive Director Daryl Kimball said on Thursday.

"It is clear that the United States Senate is not in a state yet where it is ready to take on the issues of this treaty [CTBT], which has not been looked at by the Senate since 1999," Kimball said during a virtual discussion hosted by ACA.

No US administration since 1999 has committed any time, effort, or energy to organize a campaign to support the ratification of the CTBT, he said.

Kimball pointed out that he does not envision that the United States would ratify the treaty in the near future.

The CTBT is a multilateral accord that bans nuclear weapon test explosions and all other nuclear explosions for civilian and military purposes. The treaty was adopted in 1996 but has never entered into effect, as it would require ratification by all 44 countries that had nuclear power or research reactors at the time it was signed.

Of the nine recognized nuclear powers, only Russia, France and the United Kingdom have signed and ratified the treaty, but Moscow withdrew from the accord in November 2023.

The United States signed the treaty in 1996, but the Senate refused to provide its advice and consent in 1999, thereby blocking its ratification.

China and Israel have signed but not ratified the treaty, while India, Pakistan and North Korea have neither signed nor ratified it.

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US, Russia, China Need to Act in Unison to Adopt Nuclear Test Ban Treaty – CTBTO

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) – Russia, China, and the United States have the necessary leadership to move forward with the adoption of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), but this step would require all of them acting in unison, CTBT Organization Executive Secretary Robert Floyd said on Thursday.

“I think now we do have leadership required from the Russian Federation, China, and the United States of America... I would hope that we could move through and see entry into force [of CTBT] ... we need to see this argument presented in the right way to the leadership in the decision-making areas of each of those countries and I think we'll need to see them all acting in unison at some point,” Floyd said during a virtual discussion hosted by the Arms Control Association (ACA).

The CTBT is a multilateral treaty that bans nuclear weapon test explosions and all other nuclear explosions for civilian and military purposes. The treaty was adopted in 1996 but has never entered into effect, as it would require ratification by all 44 countries that had nuclear power or research reactors at the time it was signed. Of the nine recognized nuclear powers, only France, the United Kingdom, and Russia had signed and ratified the treaty before Moscow's withdrawal in November 2023.

The United States signed the treaty in 1996, but the Senate refused to provide its advice and consent in 1999 blocking the ratification of the landmark document.

Besides the United States, China and Israel have signed but not ratified the treaty, while India, Pakistan, and North Korea have neither signed nor ratified it.

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US Senate Not Ready Yet to Take Up Issue of Nuclear Test Ban Treaty Ratification - ACA

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) - The US Senate is not yet ready to approach the issue of ratifying the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and this has been the case since 1999, Arms Control Association (ACA) Executive Director Daryl Kimball said on Thursday. "It is clear that the United States Senate is not in a state yet where it is ready to take on the issues of this treaty [CTBT], which has not been looked at by the Senate since 1999," Kimball said during a virtual discussion hosted by ACA.

No US administration since 1999 has committed any time, effort, or energy to organize a campaign to support the ratification of the CTBT, he said.

Kimball pointed out that he does not envision that the United States would ratify the treaty in the near future.

The CTBT is a multilateral accord that bans nuclear weapon test explosions and all other nuclear explosions for civilian and military purposes. The treaty was adopted in 1996 but has never entered into effect, as it would require ratification by all 44 countries that had nuclear power or research reactors at the time it was signed.

Of the nine recognized nuclear powers, only Russia, France and the United Kingdom have signed and ratified the treaty, but Moscow withdrew from the accord in November 2023.

The United States signed the treaty in 1996, but the Senate refused to provide its advice and consent in 1999, thereby blocking its ratification.

China and Israel have signed but not ratified the treaty, while India, Pakistan and North Korea have neither signed nor ratified it.

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Canada Removes Russian Billionaire Oleg Boyko From Sanctions List - Global Affairs

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) – Canada lifted sanctions on Russian billionaire Oleg Boyko after he took the Canadian Foreign Ministry to court to protest his inclusion in the list of persons sanctioned over Russia's special military operation in Ukraine,

"Item 731 [Boyko] of Part 1 of Schedule 1 to the Special Economic Measures (Russia) Regulations is repealed," an amendment update published on the Global Affairs Canada website said.

Separately, Finstar company confirmed in a statement that Canada lifted sanctions on its founder and chairman Oleg Boyko.

The company said that in August 2023, Boyko filed claims against the Canadian Foreign Ministry with the Federal Court of Canada over his inclusion in the sanctions list.

"After the court initiated administrative proceedings, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada – the person authorized to consider issues of imposition and lifting of sanctions in accordance with national legislation – considered the appeal and decided to satisfy it," the company said.

Boyko's lawyers made his case by stressing that his client does not have any business in Canada, is not a person associated with the Russian government, and does not take part in

political processes in Russia, the company said in the statement.

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US Targets 2 People, 12 Firms Over 'Corruption,' Russian Influence in Balkans - State Dept

(Updates headline, lede; adds quotes in paras 2, 5; details in paras 3, 4, 6-8)

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) - The United States has sanctioned two individuals and 12 companies in connection with alleged corruption and Russia's "malign" influence in the Western Balkans, the State Department said on Thursday.

"Today, in coordination with the Department of the Treasury, the Department of State is imposing sanctions on two individuals and 12 entities in the Western Balkans. All of the following targets are being designated pursuant to Executive Order (E.O.) 14024, which authorizes sanctions with respect to specified harmful foreign activities of the Government of the Russian Federation," the State Department said in a fact sheet.

The sanctions target Misa Vacic, a Serbian politician who currently serves as the president of the Serbian Right political party. The State Department said that Vacic was an international observer at Russia's referenda in four former regions of Ukraine in September 2022, which the US considers "sham."

The other sanctioned individual is Nenad Popovic, a former Serbian minister and founder of the Serbian People's Party.

"POPOVIC owns numerous companies and holdings in Serbia and Russia and uses senior connections in the Kremlin to enrich himself, secure business for his holdings, and facilitate embezzlement and corrupt tax schemes," the fact sheet alleged.

In addition to Popovic, the Department of State is designating 12 companies purportedly associated with him.

The lists includes Russia-based real-estate companies Dominion Tverskaya Yaroslavskaya LLC, Dominion Nikolski LLC, and Asset Automation LLC; Russia-based engineering company JSC ABS Zeim Automation; and Moscow-based consulting company Mosen Esset Menedzhment LLC.

The US also designates Russia-based electronics companies Asset Electro LLC, JSC All-Russian Scientific Research Design and Technological Institute of Relay Engineering With Experimental Production (JSC VNIIR), VNIIR Transstrol LLC, VNIIR Promelektro LLC, ABS Electrotehnika LLC, VNIIR Hidroelektroavtomatika JSC, and JSC VNIIR Progress.

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US, European Allies Must Seize Russian Sovereign Assets to Compensate Ukraine - Senator

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) - The United States and its European allies ought to seize sovereign Russian assets to compensate Ukraine if Moscow refuses to do so, US Senator Jim Risch said on Thursday.

"If Russia refuses to honor its moral and legal obligations to compensate Ukraine to help them rebuild, other countries can and should seize Russian sovereign assets and transfer them to Ukraine," Risch said during remarks at the Hudson Institute.

Congress should enable the United States to lead on the issue by passing legislation to authorize the seizure of sovereign Russian assets, Risch said.

Lawmakers have been working with the State Department and National Security Council to ensure support for such measures across the US government, Risch said.

However, most of Russia's frozen assets are located in Europe, Risch said. As such, European countries will need to participate in the seizure of sovereign Russian assets in order to "make a dent" in what Russia owes Ukraine, Risch added.

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One Protester Arrested at Democratic National Committee Headquarters – US Capitol Police

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) – One person was arrested on Wednesday for assaulting a police officer during a protest against Israel's war on Gaza at the Democratic National Committee headquarters, according to a Capitol Police release.

"24-year old Ruben Arthur Camacho of Woodbridge, NY, was arrested for Assault on a Police Officer after an officer witnessed Camacho slam another officer into a garage door and then punch the female officer in the face," the release stated.

The police said that approximately 200 people had gathered in front of the headquarters in a protest that was "not peaceful." The group "moved dumpsters in front of the exits, pepper sprayed our officers and attempted to pick up the bike rack," leading the police to respond by "pulling people off the building, pushing them back, and clearing them from the area."

Six officers were treated for injuries, "from minor cuts to being pepper sprayed to being punched," the release added.

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Chinese President Xi Indicates Renewed Panda Diplomacy With US

SAN FRANCISCO, November 16 (Sputnik) – Chinese President Xi indicated on Wednesday that China will send more pandas to the United States after hearing of the public's disappointment over the recent repatriation of three pandas from the Smithsonian National Zoo in Washington.

"Pandas have long been envoys of friendship between the Chinese and American peoples. We

are ready to continue our cooperation with the United States on panda conservation, and do our best to meet the wishes of the Californians so as to deepen the friendly ties between our two peoples," Xi said in San Francisco during his speech at a dinner hosted by the US-China Business Council and National Committee on US-China Relations.

Xi noted the public's disappointment over the repatriation of three pandas from the Smithsonian National Zoo in Washington earlier this month. The last two pandas at the San Diego Zoo also returned in China in 2019.

Currently, only four pandas remain in the United States, housed at Zoo Atlanta. They are scheduled to return to China next year.

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US House Ethics Panel Says Found 'Substantial' Proof of Wrongdoing by Congressman Santos

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) - The US House Ethics Committee said on Thursday that it found substantial evidence of criminal conduct by Congressman George Santos, following an investigation into the lawmaker by the panel's Investigative Subcommittee (ISC).

The ISC found "substantial evidence" that Santos filed fraudulent reports with the US Federal Election Commission, used campaign funds for personal purposes and willfully violated the Ethics in Government Act as it relates to financial disclosure statements to the House of Representatives, the panel said in a statement.

"The Committee has unanimously voted to adopt the ISC's report, and with it, refer the substantial evidence of potential violations of federal criminal law to the Department of Justice for such further action as it deems appropriate," the statement said.

The panel also concurs with the ISC's determination that Santos' conduct warrants public condemnation and has brought discredit upon the lower chamber of Congress, the statement added.

Earlier this month, Santos survived an attempt to oust him from the House of Representatives. However, Santos will not seek reelection following the Ethics Committee's findings, the lawmaker told US media on Thursday.

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Russia Committed To Transmit Data From Monitoring Systems to Intl Data Center- CTBTO Chief

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) - Robert Floyd, executive secretary of the CTBT Organization (CTBTO) said on Thursday that Russian officials are telling him that following Moscow's decision to deratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), Russia is committed to transmit data from their monitoring system stations to the international data center

and then to other countries.

"They are committed to continuing to transmit data from their international monitoring system stations through to the international data center and that data then to be shared with all states," Floyd said. "That's what the Russian Federation is saying to me and that is the evidence of them remaining committed although very regrettably only as a signatory state not as a ratifying state. We need to keep the perspective"

Earlier in November, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed the bill to revoke the ratification of the CTBT.

The bill was drafted by the order of Russian parliamentary speaker Vyacheslav Volodin. It effectively repeals Article 1 of the law on the ratification of the CTBT, signed by Russia in New York on September 24, 1996.

The CTBT is a multilateral treaty that bans nuclear weapon test explosions and all other nuclear explosions for civilian and military purposes. The treaty was adopted in 1996 but has never entered into effect, as it would require ratification by all 44 countries that had nuclear power or research reactors at the time it was signed. Of the nine recognized nuclear powers, only France, the United Kingdom and Russia had signed and ratified the treaty before Moscow's withdrawal. The United States, China and Israel have signed but not ratified the treaty, while India, Pakistan and North Korea have neither signed nor ratified it.

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US Treasury Targets 8 Individuals, 6 Entities With Balkans-, Russia-Related Sanctions

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) - The United States has targeted eight individuals and six entities with Western Balkans- and Russia-related sanctions, the Treasury Department said on Thursday.

"Today, the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated eight individuals and six entities pursuant to Western Balkans-related Executive Order (E.O.) 14033 and Russia-related E.O. 14024," the Treasury said in a statement.

The sanctions were imposed as Russia continues to use its influence in the Western Balkans to "stymie the region's integration into international institutions and organizations, as well as leverage key jurisdictions to facilitate its aggressive destabilizing activities," Under Secretary of the Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Brian E. Nelson was quoted by the Treasury as saying.

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White House Says US Would Welcome Back Pandas From China if Offered

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) - The United States would welcome back the panda bears if China were to again offer them, National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said on Thursday.

"Certainly, should the decision be made by the PRC [People's Republic of China] to restore some of the pandas to the United States, we would absolutely welcome them back," Kirby said during a press briefing.

Earlier this month, three pandas were flown back to China from the Smithsonian's National Zoo in Washington, after spending three years in the United States.

The United States respects China's decision to return the animals home, Kirby added.

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US Sanctions 3 Entities, Blocks 3 Vessels for Violating Russian Oil Price Cap - Treasury

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) - The United States has sanctioned three entities and has identified three vessels as blocked property for carrying Russian crude oil over the established price cap, the US Department of Treasury said in a statement on Thursday.

"Today, the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) is imposing sanctions on three entities and identifying as blocked property three vessels that used Price Cap Coalition service providers while carrying Russian crude oil above the Coalition-agreed price cap," the statement said.

In December 2022, the Group of Seven (G7) countries, Australia and the European Union imposed a price cap of \$60 per barrel on Russian crude oil transported by sea in an attempt to block the transport of oil bought at higher prices. Russia responded by prohibiting the selling of its oil to countries supporting the price cap mechanism.

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US Targets 12 Companies, 3 Vessels With Russia-Related Sanctions – State Dept

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) - The United States has targeted 12 companies and three vessels with Russia-related sanctions, the State Department said on Thursday.

The sanctioned companies are Mosen Esset Menedzhment LLC, Dominion Tverskaya Yaroslavskaya LLC, Dominion Nikolski LLC, Asset Automation, JSC ABS Zeim Automation, Asset Electro LLC, JSC All-Russian Scientific Research Design and Technological Institute of Relay Engineering With Experimental Production (JSC VNIIR), VNIIR Transstroj LLC, VNIIR Promelektro LLC, ABS Electrotekhnika LLC, VNIIR Gidroelektroavtomatika JSC, and JSC VNIIR Progress.

The three sanctioned vessels are KAZAN Crude Oil Tanker, LIGOVSKY PROSPECT Crude Oil Tanker and NS CENTURY Crude Oil Tanker. All the vessels sail under Liberian flag.

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Russia Only De-Ratified CTCB Treaty But Remains Committed to Accord - Floyd

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) - Russia continues to be committed and obliged to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) as it has not pulled out of the accord but only de-ratified it, CTBT Organization Executive Secretary Robert Floyd said on Thursday.

"I've been heartened that when I had communications with Senior Russian Federation officials in recent times is that they go to great length to continue to mention several things to me," Floyd said. "They mentioned to me that we might be de-ratifying this treaty but we are not un-signing it, we are remaining committed to this treaty, we are not withdrawing."

Floyd also said that Russian officials emphasized that their moratorium commitment remains the same and they will not conduct nuclear tests unless the United States does.

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White House Says Biden Came Away From Xi Meeting Feeling 'Very Good' About Discussions

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden left the meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping feeling good about the progress made during the talks, National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said on Thursday.

"The president comes away from the meeting yesterday feeling very good about the content of the discussions over the course of four hours and the progress that we were able to make on some very significant fronts," Kirby said during a press briefing.

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US Will Continue to Provide Arms to Taiwan - White House

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) - The United States will continue to deliver arms to Taiwan, White House Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said on Thursday after President Joe Biden a day earlier met his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping in San Francisco.

"President [Joe] Biden made it very clear ... that there's no change to our one-China policy, that we don't support independence for Taiwan, but that we will, in accordance with the Taiwan Relations Act, continue to provide self-defense capabilities to Taiwan," Kirby said during a press briefing.

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US Would 'Certainly Encourage' China's Influences Reining in Iranian Attacks - Kirby

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) - The United States would "certainly encourage" China to use its influence to rein in Iranian attacks on US forces in the Middle East, US National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said on Thursday.

"We know the PRC [People's Republic of China] has communication channels to Iran that we obviously don't have," Kirby said during a press briefing when asked if US President Biden received assurances from Chinese President Xi for help reining in Iranian attacks. "We certainly would encourage them to use those lines to reiterate to the Iranians that we don't want to see a deepening or an escalation of the conflict in the region."

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Montreal Bridge Reopens After Brief Closure by Pro-Palestine Protesters - Police

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) - The Jacques Cartier bridge in Montreal has been reopened after an early-morning blockade by pro-Palestinian protesters, the provincial police agency said on Thursday.

"Traffic over the Jacques Cartier bridge is now open in both directions. We invite road users to be patient and cautions in resuming their travels," the Surete du Quebec said via the social media platform X (formerly Twitter).

Earlier on Thursday, pro-Palestinian activists called for a "Shut it Down for Palestine" rally at the bridge - Montreal's largest - during rush hour at 7:00 a.m.

The organizers issued a statement saying that the protest is organized in light of Israel's invasion of Gaza and in solidarity with the Palestinian people to put an end to "business as usual."

"We are demanding an immediate ceasefire - an end to the genocide currently being carried out against the people of Gaza," the organizers statement said.

The protest also aims at ending Canada's complicity in Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands, the statement added.

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US, Philippines Launch Partnership to Explore Semiconductor Supply Chain Opportunities

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) - The United States and the Philippines have launched a partnership to examine opportunities to enhance and diversify their semiconductor supply chains, the State Department said on Thursday.

"The U.S. Department of State will collaborate with the Government of the Philippines to explore opportunities to grow and diversify the global semiconductor ecosystem under the International Technology Security and Innovation (ITSI) Fund, created by the CHIPS Act of 2022," the department said in a statement.

The new partnership will help both countries create a more resilient, secure, and sustainable global semiconductor value chain, it added.

At the initial phase, the two countries will comprehensively assess the Philippines' existing semiconductor ecosystem and regulatory framework, as well as workforce and infrastructure needs. They will use this assessment as the basis for potential joint projects.

The collaboration between the US and the Philippines underscores the significant potential to expand the Philippines' semiconductor industry, to the benefit of both nations, the State Department added.

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Pentagon Fails for Sixth Time Annual Audit of Its Assets Worth \$3.8 Trillion - Statement

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) - The US Department of Defense has failed again an annual audit of the more than \$3.8 trillion in assets and \$4 trillion in liabilities after it could not provide independent auditors with sufficient information, according to a statement published on Thursday.

"The Department of Defense (DoD) fiscal year 2023 audit of the department's consolidated financial statements resulted in a disclaimer of opinion," the statement said. "Of the 29 components undergoing standalone financial statement audits, seven received an unmodified audit opinion, and one received a qualified opinion."

The annual audit comprises 29 separate audits of all military services and other components, the statement said.

The Defense Department received 18 disclaimers of opinion meaning it did not provide auditors with enough financial data to allow them to form an informed opinion, the statement said.

"Auditing the department's \$3.8 trillion in assets and \$4 trillion in liabilities is a massive undertaking," Under Secretary of Defense and CFO Michael McCord said in the statement. "But the improvements and changes we are making every day as a result of these audits positively affect every soldier, sailor, airman, marine, guardian and DoD civilian."

McCord briefed the media on Wednesday on the results of the 2023 annual audit, which became the sixth audit failed by the Defense Department since 2018 when such detailed financial probes became mandatory, the statement said.

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Two in Five Canadians Would Like Carbon Tax Abolished – Poll

WASHINGTON, November 16 (Sputnik) - Over 40% of Canadians would want to see carbon tax abolished amid the rising cost of life and growing skepticism over whether it helps fight climate change, according to an Angus Reid poll published on Thursday.

"The latest data ... reveals a profound lack of awareness, and misconceptions about how much tax they [Canadians] believe they pay, whether they receive a rebate and the extent to which they are ahead or behind financially once that rebate is paid," the pollster said. "This, combined with the ongoing cost-of-living crisis and skepticism over whether carbon pricing is actually doing much to combat climate change are driving a plurality of Canadians (42%) to call for the tax to be abolished."

Seventeen percent of those polled would rather see it lowered for the next three years, while 26% would hold off any further increases in carbon pricing. Another 15%, in contrast, favor continued gradual hikes as initially planned.

In 2019, the Trudeau government introduced carbon tax. Based on two components: firstly, it aims to charge fossil fuel distributors for fuel consumed across Canada, and secondly, to tax large industrial companies as major carbon emitters.

However, the tax also affects ordinary Canadians who see gas prices at the pump increase, something they can also observe in their households depending on the fuel used to power home-heating.

Both fuel distributors and industrial emitters currently pay C\$65 (\$47) per tonne of carbon, a price that is set to increase by C\$15 every year to ultimately reach C\$170 by 2030.