

**11/17/23 Friday**

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Philippines Pens Nuclear Fuel Deal With US as Tensions Rise in Pacific

The US expanded its partnership with a key Southeast Asian ally on Thursday, striking a new agreement on nuclear power with Manila.

The pact on reintroducing nuclear power to the Philippines was signed in San Francisco on Thursday on the sidelines of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit by Philippine Energy Secretary Raphael Lotilla and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, with president Ferdinand Marcos Jr. in attendance.

Blinken said the nuclear plants would help Manila dramatically cut the nation's greenhouse gas emissions by up to 75% by 2030 and would help the island nation meet its expanding energy needs, which are expected to quadruple by 2040.

"With access to US material and equipment, the US and the Philippines will be able to work together to deploy advanced new technologies, including small modular reactors, to support climate goals as well as critical energy security and baseload power needs within the Philippines," Blinken said.

"In a nation of more than 7,000 islands, small modular reactors - some just the size of a city bus - can generate energy locally and conveniently," he added.

However, in Marcos' comments, he said that nuclear power would become "a part of the Philippines' energy mix by 2032," two years after his own stated goal of a 75% greenhouse emission reduction, making it unlikely either the goal will be reached on time or that nuclear power will play a sizeable role in achieving it.

In June, [Lotilla noted](#) nuclear power is the cornerstone of the decarbonization effort in the energy sector, but said the government was exploring other technologies, such as hydrogen fuel cells, and looking at reducing their use of coal by turning coal-burning plants into ammonia-burning cogeneration plants. In 2021, the country got 58% of its electricity from coal, the most pollutive fossil fuel, according to [government data](#).

Manila's Pursuit of Nuclear Power

Under the Philippine Energy Plan, Manila plans to be producing 1,200 megawatts using nuclear power by 2032, which would increase to 2,400 MW by 2040 and to 4,800 MW by 2050.

The pact is what is called a [Section 123 Agreement](#) by the US Department of Energy and is a legally mandated agreement outlining how the US and the partner nation will share and care for nuclear technology for peaceful purposes within the confines of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

The new deal will allow Manila to buy nuclear fuel from the United States as well as reactors, equipment, and other specialized nuclear material. Ironically, the US itself buys nearly all of the uranium-235 used to power its nuclear power plants [from other nations](#), including Russia.

The effort to revive nuclear power in the Philippines was begun by Marcos' predecessor, Rodrigo Duterte, who had a less rosy relationship with the US than Marcos, the son of a Philippine dictator who was very closely aligned with Washington.

Last year, Washington and Manila [signed a memorandum](#) of understanding on civil nuclear cooperation that included reviving the mothballed [Bataan Nuclear Power Plant](#), a 620-megawatt pressurized light water reactor built by the US nuclear power company Westinghouse in 1976, while Marcos Sr. was president. However, as the plant neared completion, the 1986 disaster at the [Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant](#) in the Soviet Union caused Manila to get cold feet about nuclear power, and the building has sat dormant ever since having never been fueled or turned on.

Separately from the 123 Agreement, Marcos said the Philippine electric company Meralco, which provides electricity in the Manila area, had signed a deal with the US-based Ultra Safe Nuclear Corp (USNC) for a pre-feasibility study on [Micro-Modular Reactors](#) (MMRs), a type of small nuclear reactor that can be transported on a trailer to "power communities in the middle of nowhere, large industrial sites, and cities," according to the company.

#### Key US Ally

A former colony of the United States from 1898 to 1946, the Philippines has remained a close US ally in the decades since independence, hosting several large US military bases that played key roles in the US wars in Korea and Vietnam.

Since the US began its strategic shift toward "great power competition" with Russia and China, Washington has courted Manila as a key partner in "containing" China and pulling the nation of 114 million people away from Beijing's orbit.

Washington has [thrown its weight](#) behind Manila's claims over islands and waterways in the South China Sea, some of which overlap with those made by China and Vietnam. A series of ongoing feuds between Beijing and Manila have kept relations between them sour, [the most recent of which](#) is over Ren'ai Reef, a submerged reef in the Spratly Island chain on which the Philippine Navy has [wrecked a rusting freighter](#) and claimed it forms an island over which they can exert sovereignty.

Still, the Philippines, China, and other regional powers have pushed ahead on de-escalation efforts, including establishing direct hotlines and [working toward a universal code of conduct](#) for the South China Sea that would govern all interactions in the waterway in accordance with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

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#### Microplastic Traces in Rain Clouds Raise Weather Impact Concerns

Scientists have found that plastics, a modern industrial product made most often from petroleum, have infiltrated almost every environment on the planet, even being found inside human blood. However, their impact, including on human health, is not well understood. A new study has found evidence that microplastics have made their way into rain clouds and could be affecting their formation.

The study, [published on Wednesday](#) by the American Chemical Society in Environmental Science and Technology Letters, was written by a group of scientists from Shandong University in China.

In 24 of 28 samples taken from cloud water atop Mount Tai, they found chemicals commonly found in synthetic fibers, packaging, and other plastic products, including polyethylene terephthalate (PET), polypropylene, polyethylene and polystyrene.

"This finding provides significant evidence of the presence of abundant MP's [microplastics] in clouds," the researchers said.

A [study earlier this year](#) found secondary evidence that microplastics were likely in clouds, but the latest study is the first to find microplastics in samples taken directly from clouds. [The other study](#), published in the journal Environmental Chemistry Letters in September, found microplastics on top of Mt. Fuji and Mt. Oyama in Japan, which the scientists deduced could only have been deposited there by precipitation.

The term "microplastics" applies to a broad array of tiny plastic pieces smaller than 5 millimeters in diameter. While some can be "pristine" plastics manufacturing at a tiny size, most are likely pieces of larger plastics that have been broken and degraded by exposure to weather, water, and sunlight, which includes ultraviolet radiation that can change its chemical makeup.

In the Shandong study, the microplastics scientists found tended to be smaller than 100 micrometers in length, although some were as large as 1,500 micrometers or 1.5 millimeters. They found a greater density of microplastics in lower-altitude clouds with greater density, such as those that produce rain, and the older particles tended to have more lead, mercury, and oxygen attached to their surfaces - chemicals the scientists said could help trigger the development of clouds.

Officials used computer models to determine how the particles got there, finding that airflow from highly populated inland cities had been the primary source of the microplastics, rather than from the ocean or from nearby mountains.

"More research is needed to understand microplastic-cloud interactions and the potential impacts on atmospheric metal cycles and cloud formation," the study said.

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#### Santos Faces New House Expulsion Effort After Scandalous Ethics Panel Report

An expulsion effort was undertaken in the US House earlier this month against the freshman politician but ultimately saw the New Yorker remain in his post as officials sought to allow due process and await the results of an ethics report.

Lawmakers have mounted a renewed effort to remove US Rep. George Santos (R-NY) from office in the wake of a report by the House Ethics Committee. Santos faces nearly two dozen federal charges of embezzlement and fraud

The motion was filed on Friday by a member of Santos' own party, House Ethics Committee Chairman Michael Guest (R-MS), who said Santos is "not fit to serve as a Member of the United States House of Representatives" because of "his egregious violations."

“The evidence uncovered in the ethics committee’s investigative subcommittee investigation is more than sufficient to warrant punishment and the most appropriate punishment, is expulsion,” Guest said. “So, separate from the committee process and my role as chairman, I have filed an expulsion resolution.”

The resolution says “Santos must be held accountable to the highest standards of conduct in order to safeguard the public’s faith in this institution.”

A day prior, the committee [published a report](#) finding “substantial evidence” Santos had “violated federal criminal laws” and saying it would submit its findings to the US Department of Justice “for such further action as it deems appropriate.”

Since even before he took office in January, Santos has aroused controversy, including that he [falsified major parts of his resume](#), including his claim to be descended from Jewish Holocaust survivors (to which he replied he was Jew-ish) and to have attended Baruch College and worked for several major banks. His support quickly evaporated, with a majority of voters in his New York district saying they [didn’t support him](#) just weeks after being sworn in, and members of both parties working to [limit his ability](#) to access classified information.

In May, he was [arrested on 13 charges](#) of embezzlement and fraud that included wire fraud, money laundering, theft of public funds, and making false statements before Congress. A [23-count superseding indictment](#) followed last month.

He has pleaded not guilty to all charges, but two days ago, his campaign manager, Samuel Miele, pleaded guilty to one count of wire fraud in connection with a fundraising scheme in which he used donors’ credit cards for unauthorized payments.

Following release of the report on Thursday, Santos said he would not seek reelection.

The resolution comes just as Congress is embarking on a two-week recess in connection with the Thanksgiving holiday, making the first date lawmakers can vote on the resolution November 28.

Republicans control a narrow majority in Congress, meaning even small gaps in the ranks can quickly flip the tables on an issue, as former House Speaker [Kevin McCarthy \(R-CA\) discovered](#) last month when he was ousted by GOP dissidents upset with his leadership decisions.

House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA), another Republican, described the ethics report as “very troubling” and his spokesperson said Johnson “encourages all involved to consider the best interests of the institution as this matter is addressed further.”

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Amateur Astronomers Prepare for Peak of Leonid Meteor Shower

Skywatchers with their eyes trained to the heavens on Friday night will be treated to the peak of the Leonid meteor shower, a prolific display of shooting stars that comes every November. According to the American Meteor Society, the Leonid meteor shower will reach its peak intensity on Friday night and early Saturday morning, with viewers able to see between 10 and 15 shooting stars per hour.

The brightness of the moon, which is waning and at just 23% of its peak intensity, should offer little barrier to observation, the group said.

"The most important thing is to get away from light pollution," Dr. Sharon Morsink, a professor of physics at the University of Alberta, told US media about observing the meteor show.

"You can still see some meteors if you're in the city, but you're not going to see anywhere near the number that you get to see if you get out of the city."

The meteor shower is called the Leonids because it appears to radiate from the constellation Leo in the northern sky, but in fact the meteors are tiny pieces left behind by the comet Temple-Tuttle as it crosses Earth's orbit.

Leo can easily be found in the northern celestial hemisphere near the ecliptic, or the path traced by the sun, moon, and planets across the sky. Its stars form a "backwards question-mark" shape next to the bright blue star Regulus.

Because Temple-Tuttle orbits the sun every 33 years, the Leonid meteor shower is especially intense in those years, reaching up to 1,000 shooting stars per hour. The next outburst is expected around 2033.

If viewers miss the opportunity to look upward on Friday night, they can still see the Leonids until early December, or just wait until next November when Earth will pass through the comet's tail once again.

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Hundreds of Small Rescue Animals in CA Likely Frozen to be Used to Feed Reptiles - Report

A recent report has indicated that the long and hazy investigation into the disappearance of more than 300 small shelter animals has come to somewhat of an end.

Shocking new findings have revealed that hundreds of small animals transported from California to Arizona for adoption may have wound up being used as food for reptiles.

On August 7, the San Diego Humane Society (SDHS) in California sent more than 300 rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters, rats and mice to their counterpart, the Humane Society of Southern Arizona (HSSA).

The transfer was one of the group's largest on record, and came about as SDHS had reached 160% capacity. The shelter, which had small animals that had been at the base or at a shelter home for nearly a year, does not euthanize their animals.

The shelter in Arizona, HSSA, reached out to SDHS and offered to take on the animals in need.

The organization in Arizona paled in comparison to the size of the California shelter, but Christian Gonzalez, who was the chief operating officer of the facility at the time, made "elaborate" and "comforting" assurances to those at SDHS that their shelter could take on the task.

But two weeks after the animals were supposedly dropped off in Arizona, those back in San Diego noticed there were no adoption listings on their website, and no publicity regarding the transfer.

Concerned, Kelly Paolisso, a therapist of SDHS, reached out to a variety of individuals including Gonzalez and Steve Farley, who was the CEO of HSSA at the time. What the SDHS member received in return were “two very different stories on what occurred,” a result that promptly raised a “lot of red flags,” she [told](#) US media.

According to the report, with local broadcast stations beginning to investigate the disappearance, Farley, a former Arizona state senator, made assurances that the missing rabbits and guinea pigs were in “good hands,” telling a San Diego news station they were “in their forever homes right now and having a wonderful life.”

However, HSSA was not able to provide adoption records or proof that the animals had even been taken to the shelter in the first place. After pressure from SDHS and other animal rescuers, Farley said the animals had been taken to a family-run rescue that wished to stay anonymous.

At some point, about 62 of the animals were returned to HSSA; however, about 250 of the other animals were still missing. After sleuthing, officials discovered the “family-run rescue” was actually a reptile breeding business run by two brothers named Trevor and Colten Jones. The business is called Fertile Turtle.

And then a devastating text message sent from Colten Jones to a Phoenix reptile breeder was uncovered by a local news channel.

The text read: “Do you have the ability to freeze off a bunch of guinea pigs and or rabbits? I don't have the manpower or labor to be able to do it in time for the [reptile] show.”

The text appears to suggest the animals in need did not end up in their forever homes, but were instead frozen or fed to reptiles. Gary Weitzman, CEO of SDHS who had been following the soft investigation, said he received the news about the text while in the middle of a meeting.

“It dropped me to my knees,” Weitzman said. “I don't know why I had such a visceral reaction to that, because it's not like I thought this was going to be a fairy-tale ending.”

“This has literally never happened in my 30-year history of animal welfare,” Weitzman also told local [reporters](#).

Farley and Garcia have since been fired following the scandal.

Both the SDHS and HSSA are reviewing their transfer and vetting protocols, and are leaving open the possibility of civil action against those potentially responsible. The Tucson police department are also leading an investigation into the incident.

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#### Lost Astronaut Tool Bag Captured in Telescope Image

Two astronauts were taking part in a spacewalk on the International Space Station (ISS) when they lost their grip on a tool bag.

On November 1, NASA astronauts Jasmin Moghbeli and Loral O'Hara decided to venture out of the ISS and embark on a spacewalk to work on a solar array.

Everything was going according to plan, until the astronauts lost their grip on a tool bag. That tool bag was then tracked just two weeks later according to an image taken by the Virtual Telescope Project, which is located in Italy.

"The image above comes from a single 2-second exposure," project founder Gianluca Masi wrote in a [statement](#), alongside the image. "The object looks like a sharp dot of light in the center, as the telescope tracked it, so stars left long trails on the background."

The loose tool bag was spotted as it was zooming through Earth's orbit at speeds reaching [17,500 miles per hour](#), and the telescope had to work quickly just to keep it in its sight. In the image, the tool bag looks like a far away star in the sky.

Luckily, the bag will not be reunited with anyone back at ISS, according to a statement released by NASA.

"Mission Control analyzed the bag's trajectory and determined that risk of recontacting the station is low and that the onboard crew and space station are safe with no action required," [NASA](#) said in a statement after the spacewalk ended on November 1.

A video of the bag's escape was taken with a camera that had been mounted on Moghbeli's helmet at the time. Luckily, the tools were not needed for the remainder of the spacewalk, according to NASA.

Unlike other pieces of space junk, the tool bag will eventually burn up in Earth's atmosphere, putting an official end to its escape [plan](#).

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### European Central Bank Warns World Economy 'Fragmenting Into Competing Blocs'

Geopolitical tensions are increasingly "degloblizing" the world economy, an official with the European Central Bank has emphasized, highlighting the looming effects of climate disasters and the decline in working-age population.

European Central Bank (ECB) President Christine Lagarde warned in a speech delivered in Frankfurt on Friday [of the increasing polarization](#) in the global economy.

"There are increasing signs that the global economy is fragmenting into competing blocs," Lagarde said at a session of the European Banking Congress. The French economist warned of the three major [challenges](#) of "deglobalization, demographics and decarbonization" facing the continent's economy in the coming years.

"As new trade barriers appear, we will need to reassess supply chains and invest in new ones that are safer, more efficient, and closer to home," added Lagarde. "As our societies age, we will need to deploy new technologies so that we can produce greater output with fewer workers." Demographic change is a major challenge facing Europe, where birth rates have been declining for several years. The dynamic will result in a reduction of size in the working-age population as early as 2025, according to analysts.

Additionally, workers across the continent are increasingly facing financial challenges. Only 41% of French millennials and 31% of millennials in the UK own their own homes, according to [recent figures](#). This compares to 70% of millennials in China who enjoy homeownership.

[Greater percentages](#) of people in European countries have also shown to require financial assistance from their parents in order to buy a home.

The BRICS economic bloc of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa recently expanded this year to include Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia. The Beijing and Moscow-led initiative has become increasingly important since its creation in 2009.

Analysts predict the trading bloc will comprise nearly half the world's economic activity by 2040. This would make the bloc's economic output twice the size as that of the G7, which is dominated by Western European nations.

Despite rising political tensions more recently, Germany and Russia had been solidifying economic integration in recent years with Russia providing much of the natural gas fueling Germany's industrial output.

US President Joe Biden [previously vowed](#) the US would "bring an end" to the Nord Stream 2 natural gas pipeline that connected the two countries if Russia acted to address the threat posed by a Russophobic government in neighboring Ukraine. The Nord Stream 2 suffered an explosion later that year that took the pipeline out of service, in what is [widely thought by many](#) to have been an act of sabotage secretly directed by the United States.

The US has [historically feared](#) cooperation between Germany and Russia, the two biggest powers in Europe.

Lagarde also advocated for a Europe-wide regulatory agency to oversee economic activity across the continent, similar to the United States' Securities and Exchange Commission. Additionally, she floated the idea of a unified European stock exchange.

The trend towards increasing economic integration may face opposition from various elements within Europe, who warn of a "democratic deficit" in the European Union and oppose moves they see as threatening national sovereignty. That opposition was perhaps most famously reflected in 2016, when voters in the UK chose to exit the economic and political bloc.

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'Cracking Sound' Halts Rescue Effort for 40 Indian Workers Trapped Inside Tunnel

Forty men have been stuck in the hillside tunnel after a cave in last Sunday blocked their exit. Efforts to rescue 40 workers trapped in a hillside tunnel in Uttarkashi, India, were [temporarily suspended](#) after a "large-scale cracking sound" was heard as rescuers attempted to drill towards the men.

India's National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL), which is spearheading the rescue efforts, updated journalists on the situation in a report issued on Friday.

The drilling machinery hit a snag as efforts were being made to construct a narrow pipe to rescue the workers, according to the NHIDCL. The accompanying cracking noise "created a panic situation in the tunnel as well as to the team working," stoking fears of further collapse.

"We cannot go fast and risk a second disaster," said Arnold Dix, president of the International Tunneling and Underground Space Association in Australia. "This situation is extremely dangerous and we must be extremely careful."

Dix's expert guidance is being sought as authorities in India attempt to rescue the workers. There is a "strong possibility of further collapse," noted the NHIDCL report. A meeting has been scheduled by members of the rescue team to plan the next steps in the effort. Meanwhile, several family members of the workers have been camping nearby as they await news of the situation.

At present, a narrow pipe allows the workers to receive food, water, medicine, and oxygen while they are able to communicate with walkie-talkies.

Falling debris has previously stymied rescue efforts over the past several days. Rescuers were reportedly one-third of the way towards reaching the workers when efforts were paused Friday. Engineers are creating spare bearings for the drilling machine in order to resume efforts, according to NHIDCL Director Anshu Manish Khalkho.

The tunnel project in northern Uttarakhand state is part of the Char Dham highway, one of a number of construction projects undertaken by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's administration.

The nationalist leader's ambitious projects have included a new parliament building and the [Statue of Unity](#), which currently stands as the world's tallest statue. The massive monument, which is twice the height of the Statue of Liberty, is 597 feet tall and depicts the Indian independence leader Vallabhbhai Patel.

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Peronist Fervor May Give Center-Left Massa Edge in Argentina in Sunday Election - Activist

Political activist Denis Rogatyuk joined Sputnik's Political Misfits crew to discuss Spanish politics and Argentina's upcoming presidential runoff this weekend. Rogatyuk believes Sergio Massa's superior organization could lead him to victory, but the outcome of Sunday's election remains uncertain.

Onlookers say Sunday's presidential runoff election in Argentina could be amongst the most consequential in the country's modern history, with the two candidates offering highly contrasting visions for the future of the South American nation.

Economist Sergio Massa, who enjoys the backing of the party that currently governs Argentina, would likely represent a continuation of center-left policy. Meanwhile, self-described "[anarcho-capitalist](#)" Javier Milei has pledged to eliminate government departments, dollarize the economy, and "freeze" [relations](#) with China.

Denis Rogatyuk, the International Director of the El Ciudadano media platform, joined Political Misfits Friday to discuss each candidate's chances in Sunday's election.

"I would not say he's a libertarian candidate," said Rogatyuk, disputing a label that's often used to describe the upstart candidate Milei. "I certainly say that he is a candidate of the far-right in

Argentina. He's ultra-conservative, which is something you can't say about most libertarians, certainly not about libertarians like Ron Paul."

Rogatyuk noted Milei's proposals to ban gay marriage and end legal access to abortion in Argentina, which recently became only the third Latin American country to legalize the procedure in 2021. The issue is still highly [contentious](#) in the traditionally Catholic country, the birthplace of Pope Francis.

Rogatyuk also discussed Milei's controversial foreign policy views; the candidate promises to "break diplomatic relations with China, with Russia, with Brazil, with Venezuela, with Cuba; and instead strengthen them with countries like Israel and the United States."

The Argentine business class would consider such a development to be "economic suicide" according to Rogatyuk, noting the importance of Argentina's relations with Brazil and China in particular.

Rogatyuk also slammed Milei's proposal to adopt the US dollar as Argentina's currency and his support for abolishing Argentina's central bank, in addition to numerous other arms of the government. Earlier this year, a [video](#) went viral on the TikTok platform of Milei ripping stickers representing various Argentine government ministries off a presentation board, shouting "afuera!" or "out!"

Sergio Massa achieved an upset victory over Milei in the first round of Argentina's election last month, and Rogatyuk believes the Peronist candidate could have the edge in Sunday's election. "Sergio Massa is what I would like to call the Frank Underwood of Argentinian politics," said Rogatyuk of the veteran politician, in reference to a fictional character from the TV show 'House of Cards'. "This is a man who has... been behind the scenes for a very long time."

Rogatyuk claimed Milei's recent popularity "feels like a flash in the pan moment," speculating that Massa's performance in recent debates and the political structure behind him could lead him to victory.

"Massa... has a vast political structure [and] logistics to help him as the Peronist coalition," said Rogatyuk. "The Justicialist Party... is a party which still remains the largest political force in the country. Javier Milei really doesn't have a party. What he has is basically still just a movement. A movement that doesn't have any political structures across Argentina except for in Buenos Aires."

In order to win, Massa will need to overcome a difficult economic situation in the South American country, where Massa's predecessor, fellow left-Peronist Alberto Fernández, has struggled to tame inflation and a rise in poverty.

Rogatyuk also touched on the political situation in Spain, where current Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez is set to continue to govern with the backing of regional independence and autonomist parties.

"The kingmakers are now, and for the foreseeable future, the pro-independence parties," said Rogatyuk. "It's ironic that the political future of Spain from now on will be decided by these small nations within Spain, something that the Spanish right has been trying to avoid as hard as possible."

Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez was able to make a deal with the party Junts per Catalunya ("Together for Catalonia") to receive their support in parliament in exchange for dropping sedition charges against party leader and pro-Catalan independence leader Carles Puigdemont.

Puigdemont spearheaded Catalonia's independence referendum in 2017, a move the country's federal government deemed unconstitutional.

The Spanish right has fiercely opposed movements towards independence or greater autonomy for the Spanish regions of Catalonia, Galicia, and the Basque Country. Spain repressed Catalan culture under the more than thirty-year reign of dictator Francisco Franco, even [banning](#) the speaking of the Catalan language in public spaces.

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To TikTok or Not - Cartoon

President Joe Biden considers joining TikTok in the runup to the 2024 election, but may need his grandkids to help him figure out how to use the app.

US President Joe Biden's political team is considering joining the TikTok social media platform in the runup to his 2024 reelection campaign, according to [reporting](#) on Friday.

The move would demonstrate US government efforts to influence content on the platform, and on social media in general. Many politically-sensitive positions at tech giants such as Twitter, Facebook, and Google are already [filled](#) by veterans of the FBI and CIA. TikTok, which originally became popular in China, represents an outlier in the social media landscape.

That's led many Republicans – and some [Democrats](#) – to call for the platform to be banned in the United States. Such a move would be unprecedented in a country that purportedly values freedom of speech as a core principle, although many Russian media outlets were banned from US platforms last year after the country launched its special military operation in Ukraine. Republican presidential candidates [vowed](#) to shut down the platform's US operations in a recent debate, claiming the app is being used to promote anti-Israel views. The issue reemerged this week after videos went viral on the platform linking to the late Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden's "[Letter to America](#)" from 2002.

The heavy hand of government interference on social media may spark discussion about the degree to which freedom of speech and open debate truly exists in America, where elite voices and powerful interests often monopolize the public square – all served up via opaque social media algorithms closely guarded by a handful of companies.

There's no word yet on whether Biden's attempts to appeal to younger Americans may involve a rethinking of his steadfast support for Israel, a position becoming increasingly unpopular with younger age groups.

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## Mysterious CEO Firing at ChatGPT Triggers Employee Protest Resignations

It's speculated that OpenAI board members disagreed with CEO Sam Altman on issues of safety and commercialization of technology.

The motivation for the ouster of OpenAI CEO Sam Altman remained uncertain Saturday as several members of the company's board [resigned](#) in protest.

The resignations started with the exit of OpenAI President Greg Brockman on Friday, who announced his departure shortly after Altman was forced out.

"Sam and I are shocked and saddened by what the board did today," [wrote](#) Brockman on the X platform. "We too are still trying to figure out exactly what happened."

Brockman said he was told he would be removed from his position on the board but "was vital to the company and would retain his role" as President of OpenAI. He instead opted to step down in protest.

On Saturday he was joined by three other senior staff members according to reporting from a US-based tech outlet. Jakub Pachocki, the company's director of research, Aleksander Madry, head of a team dedicated to AI safety, and Szymon Sidor, a researcher, all announced their resignations.

The company has [reportedly](#) been in a state of turmoil since Friday, when employees held an "all-hands" meeting to respond to the sudden news. Prominent investors in OpenAI were reportedly blindsided by the development, including Microsoft. The tech giant released a statement claiming they remain committed to their partnership with the company.

Speculation swirled that Microsoft may take advantage of the moment to solidify control over OpenAI. "We would expect Microsoft now to exert more control of OpenAI given its importance, and expect more disruption from an OpenAI board/company perspective over the coming months," said Wedbush, a wealth management firm. "This is the time for Microsoft to now essentially take this over, strategically speaking."

OpenAI's remaining board members said in a statement on Friday they had lost confidence in co-founder Altman, making the decision to part ways after "a deliberative review process" that found he had not been "consistently candid in his communications." The statement offered no further detail.

But speculation emerged that the decision stemmed from disagreements within the company over AI safety. There was also reportedly internal concern over whether OpenAI software, such as ChatGPT, was being commercialized prematurely.

OpenAI is now being led by interim CEO Mira Murati.

Ilya Sutskever, who leads an AI safety team at the company, was reportedly quizzed by employees on Friday over whether board members had intended to execute a "coup" or "hostile takeover" against Altman.

"You can call it this way," Sutskever reportedly responded. "And I can understand why you chose this word, but I disagree with this. This was the board doing its duty to the mission of the nonprofit, which is to make sure that OpenAI builds AGI [artificial general intelligence] that benefits all of humanity."

The sudden shakeup at OpenAI has sent shockwaves through the industry. One investment advisory firm called the events an "earthquake," a "soap opera," and a "Netflix documentary in the making."

OpenAI was [established](#) in 2015 to research “safe and beneficial” artificial intelligence technology, with the goal of developing “highly autonomous systems that outperform humans at most economically valuable work.” Its trademark ChatGPT software has become popular, but critics question the safety implications of highly sophisticated artificial intelligence. The development of the technology has even caused some to envision science fiction-like scenarios where humans are unable to contain the power of AI systems.

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‘Dehumanizing’: Muslim and Arab Congressional Staffers Feel ‘Betrayed’ by Capitol Hill Employers

Capitol Hill staff describe the struggle of working within an institution that, to them, feels like funding the death of those who look like them in Gaza.

Muslim and Arab US Congressional staffers shared their frustration over legislators’ apparent lack of concern over a climbing death toll in Gaza in a [report](#) in US media Saturday.

“They have the same faith as us, have the same names as us, a lot of our families live in the region,” said one Capitol Hill employee. “So when we hear that dehumanizing language, it’s dehumanizing us... My life would not matter to this place if I had been born somewhere else.” Each staffer interviewed for the article requested anonymity, fearing reprisal as critics of Israel’s month-long attack on the Gaza Strip have often faced [firings](#) and other disciplinary action from employers on Capitol Hill.

Congressional staffers spoke of an environment that reminded them of the days after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, even as Muslim and Arab representation has increased in the country over recent years. That perception was reinforced after Senator Lindsay Graham (R-SC) advocated US support for what he called Israel’s [“religious war.”](#)

“We can’t even start a conversation about whether what’s going on in Palestine is in our national interest,” said one staffer. “We’re finding that you can come to the table with every possible qualification, but just by coming to the table as a Muslim American, your opinion will be cast aside as ‘biased.’”

Another staffer recounted the congressman they work for helping to organize transportation for Tuesday’s March for Israel, an event on Washington DC’s National Mall where legislators spoke before pro-Israel constituents. Official backing for the event was seen to legitimize support for Israel, while concern over the deaths of Palestinians was seen as an afterthought.

Newly-minted House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA) instigated a chant of “no ceasefire!” among the gathered crowd on Tuesday. Activist groups in the US have called for a suspension of hostilities in the besieged Gaza enclave as the death toll there has surpassed 11,000, including at least 4,500 children.

If moderate and liberal legislators’ reaction to the crisis has been seen as underwhelming by Arab and Muslim staffers, Johnson’s response represents the outright hostility they’ve perceived from more conservative members of Congress. Representative Virginia Foxx (R-NC) accused a

constituent of support for Hamas after they sent an email calling for an end to Gaza's siege and a restoration of electricity to its hospitals.

"You need the facts because your position is alarming," read the response from Foxx's office. "It is unwise to support a regime which destroys its own hospitals during a humanitarian crisis."

Though, some investigators have cast [doubt](#) on Israel's claims that a rocket from militant group Islamic Jihad would've been capable of the destruction of Gaza's al-Ahli Arab Hospital, an event that caused the death of hundreds last month.

When a reporter asked Foxx's office for comment, they demanded to know the identity of the person who leaked her office's email response.

Staffers expressed an overall sense of powerlessness over the issue. One recalled breaking down in tears in front of their boss who had refused to support a ceasefire. Another recounted expressing fear for their relatives in [Palestinian territories](#).

US Congressional leadership has continued to organize events mourning the deaths of some 1,200 Israelis during Hamas' October 7 attack more than a month later. But one congressional staffer described feeling "invisible" after an invitation to a candlelight vigil made no mention of the thousands of casualties in Gaza. She privately wept in a stairwell of a House office building. "Mourn Israeli lives, release the hostages – I agree with all of that," said the staff member. "We just want to be included in the empathy. Even if you truly don't care. Even if you just add 'and Palestinian lives' and you don't mean it. This is a place of performances. We do that all the time."

"Several of the children who have died have not only looked like me or my siblings but bore my name," said another staffer. "Literally you have people working in this building who know people who have died because of the policies this institution is supporting."

The staffer said the home of a friend had been destroyed in an Israeli bomb attack last month. The friend survived but spent hours trapped underneath her mother's body in the rubble of the building.

"Inside I feel like I'm being torn apart," said the staffer of their experience working in Congress amidst the crisis. "I cannot wait to leave every day."

"At the end of the day, do they really think my life matters?" asked another. Staffers noted that not even the presence of US citizens trapped in Gaza has seemed to generate urgency on Capitol Hill.

Hundreds of thousands of Americans have protested US support for Israel's military in recent weeks, with many of those demonstrations being led by Jewish groups like If Not Now and Jewish Voice for Peace.

Some legislators have responded by calling for the disbanding of pro-Palestine activist groups. Florida governor Ron DeSantis (R) recently ordered the dissolution of chapters of the group Students for Justice in Palestine on the state's college campuses, triggering a [lawsuit](#) with the backing of the American Civil Liberties Union.

The saga has prompted a [debate](#) over the limits of free speech in the United States, with some lawmakers even demanding the banning of social media platforms where users share pro-Palestine views.

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Lawmakers Slam 'Political Performance Art' in US Congress, Announce Retirements

“I don’t think being in Congress is the best way for me to make progress,” said retiring Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-OR). “Life is short. I don’t want to be a part of this charade. And I won’t be.” In 2011, former Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy [mused](#) on an increasing decline of civility and decorum in the US Congress, lamenting the lack of “rational, quiet, thoughtful, respectful discussion and debate” within the legislative body.

“The verdict on freedom is still out in over half the world,” said Kennedy. “And the rest of the world is looking at us. They see the current dialogue and discourse and they are horrified by it.” Those were the days when iconoclasts like Anthony Weiner, Jim DeMint, and Alan Grayson made headlines, gleefully attacking opposing members of Congress from the floor of the US Capitol. Since then it seems Congress has only become a more brutal and unforgiving place, with several retiring lawmakers recently telling US media that chronic legislative dysfunction contributed to their decision not to seek reelection in 2024.

“You’re rewarding the wrong kind of behavior here,” said retiring Rep. Brian Higgins (D-NY), decrying the tendency towards theatrics at the expense of cooperation. “My concern is the trend has just begun, it’s not ending. And my sense is, I can just do more constructive things with my life.”

“I’m just afraid that the performative nature of the House today, the people that – you know their names, they’re household names now – and the people that are making names for themselves are making spectacles of themselves.”

Rep. Ken Buck (R-CO), who also recently announced his retirement, agreed, saying, “unconstitutional impeachments and censures that don’t make any sense.”

“The big driver was we can’t admit that Republicans lost an election in 2020, which is crazy.”

So far, the number of lawmakers announcing their retirements is reportedly in line with previous years. But onlookers note that 2023 has seen an unusual number of experienced, highly valued members announce their exit.

“It’s not the quantity of retirements. It’s the quality,” said former Rep. Steve Israel (D) of New York. “These are people who really understand how to get things done.”

A recent study from the Center for Effective Lawmaking seems to buttress this perception. By 2021, the group found almost half of US House members have served for five years or less. This compares to about a third of representatives who had served for that amount of time in 2003. In other words, US Congress is increasingly made up of newer, less experienced members.

There may be some advantage to the trend. The average age of members of the US House of Representatives [declined](#) slightly after the last midterm election. That may suggest the perspective of younger Americans could get a hearing in a legislative body that many argue has become a stale [gerontocracy](#).

But conversely, the average age of those in the US Senate increased slightly. Time will tell whether that trend changes next year, and whether a growing exodus of lawmakers will play a

part. Some analysts predict the number of legislators announcing their retirements will increase in early 2024 after they return from time spent with their families over the holiday season. In another era, not long after our country's founding, US politics was more explicitly dedicated to serving elite interests. Most states [required](#) citizens to own land in order to vote. Non-Christians were banned from the polls. And of course, women and African Americans were shut out altogether.

Today, we're told that America is a more democratic, egalitarian place. But lawmakers' cynicism belies that claim. Americans generally agree with their assessment, with Congress' approval rating currently [standing](#) at 13%.

A recent [study](#) conducted at Princeton University found that average peoples' stances on issues were statistically uncorrelated with action taken by US legislators. Rather, it's the desires of the wealthiest Americans that were found to drive Congress' activity. The researchers suggested the United States would be more accurately described as an "oligarchy" rather than a "democracy."

In light of those findings, perhaps leaders in Washington should spend less time criticizing who they view as "state enemies" like Russia and China, and more time learning from the way things are done outside of the United States.

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Recently Ousted CEO Sam Altman May Return to Company Responsible for ChatGPT

Investors in OpenAI, and some members of the company itself, are reportedly pushing for the recently ousted CEO's return.

The tech world was stunned on Friday when OpenAI founder and CEO Sam Altman was suddenly [fired](#) from his position over an alleged refusal to be "candid in his communications" with the company's board. Now, [reports](#) have emerged about efforts to bring him back.

"We are still working towards a resolution and we remain optimistic," read a memo from OpenAI chief strategy officer Jason Kwon.

"By resolution, we mean bringing back Sam, Greg, Jakub, Szymon, Aleksander and other colleagues (sorry if I missed you!) and remaining the place where people who want to work on AGI [artificial general intelligence] research, safety, products and policy can do their best work." OpenAI President Greg Brockman, Director of Research Jakub Pachocki, researcher Szymon Sidor, and AI safety lead Aleksander Madry had all announced their resignation in solidarity with Altman in the hours after his sacking.

Kwon added that he hoped to be able to update staff further on Sunday.

The effort to bring back Altman is reportedly being [led](#) by tech giant Microsoft, the largest investor in the company known for the popular ChatGPT software. Venture capital fund Thrive Capital, the company's second-largest investor, is also pushing for his return.

Altman told US media he's considering a return to OpenAI but would require the board that ousted him to be replaced. He also [wants](#) a new governance structure as a precondition. Altman

is alternatively considering forming a new company with ex OpenAI colleagues according to reports.

OpenAI Chief Operating Officer Brad Lightcap clarified that Altman's firing was due to a "breakdown of communications" and not "malfeasance" in an internal company memo on Saturday.

Altman's sudden sacking on Friday surprised Silicon Valley, and members of the company itself. Speculation emerged that the decision stemmed from disagreements within the company over AI safety. There was also reportedly internal concern over whether OpenAI software, such as ChatGPT, was being commercialized prematurely.

OpenAI was [established](#) in 2015 to research "safe and beneficial" artificial intelligence technology, with the goal of developing "highly autonomous systems that outperform humans at most economically valuable work." Its trademark ChatGPT software has become popular, but critics question the safety implications of highly sophisticated artificial intelligence.

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Shock Result: Radical Political Upstart Javier Milei Wins Argentine Presidency

The outsider neoliberal candidate rose to prominence while promising to overturn the economic and social order in South America's second-largest economy.

Right-wing populist candidate Javier Milei pulled off a surprising win in the final round of Argentina's presidential election on Sunday, stunning establishment forces on all sides of the country's political spectrum.

The result was made official just after 8:00 PM local time when candidate Sergio Massa conceded defeat, having viewed early results that showed a victory for Milei. Early [numbers](#) released 30 minutes later showed Milei with almost 56% of the vote with 89% of ballots counted. "I want to tell you that obviously the results are not what we expected," [said](#) Massa in a speech at his campaign headquarters in Buenos Aires. "I have contacted Milei to congratulate him because he is the president that the majority elected to represent them."

Milei has yet to make an official statement as of the time of this article's publication.

Despite his win, Milei had generated controversy in recent days by invoking the possibility of fraud in Sunday's election in a [complaint](#) to a federal electoral judge.

"They changed the content of the ballot boxes and the documentation for others that they modified in favor of the ruling party and Sergio Massa, which considerably altered the electoral result," read the complaint, referring to the first round of Argentina's election process last month that saw Milei lose to Massa. Milei stunned observers when he won Argentina's presidential primary election in August, though he claimed electoral fraud also robbed him of votes in that election.

The claims of fraud prompted an angry response from Argentine Minister of Security Anibal Fernández, who claimed she would sue Milei and his Liberty Advances party.

"Today confirms one thing in the face of so much discussion: Argentina has a strong, solid and transparent democratic system that respects the results," said Massa Sunday evening. He said

he conceded the election “convinced that the most important thing... is that coexistence, dialogue and peace is the best path we can take.”

“I trust that tomorrow we can start working with Javier Milei to guarantee an orderly transition,” said current Argentine President Alberto Fernández in a [post](#) on the X platform.

The outspoken Milei has gained traction in Argentina as the country copes with annual inflation over 100% and rising poverty. After current president Fernández declined to seek reelection, many onlookers assumed his economy minister Sergio Massa would face an uphill battle to replace him.

But Massa defied polls during the first round of Argentina’s presidential election last month by defeating Milei by almost seven points. The result led many to believe that support for Massa from trade unions and Peronist political structures might lead him to victory even as his ruling party faced accusations of economic mismanagement.

And Milei also performed strongly on Sunday after having received the endorsement of the country’s major center-right political alliance, which placed third in August’s primary.

Milei and Massa put forth sharply contrasting economic visions. Argentina recently joined the BRICS economic block under current President Fernández. Massa pledged to solve the country’s economic crisis via cooperation with other BRICS countries, proposing to borrow money from the BRICS New Development Bank.

Milei, meanwhile, has suggested breaking relations with Brazil and China, among other countries, promising closer relations with Israel and the United States. He also wants to “dollarize” Argentina’s economy, adopting the US dollar as the country’s official currency over the Argentine Peso.

The 53-year-old has described himself as an “anarcho-capitalist” and a “libertarian,” although others have [disputed](#) the latter label, noting Milei’s conservative social views. He has proposed banning gay marriage and ending legal access to abortion in Argentina, which recently became only the third South American country to legalize the procedure in 2021.

Milei has also proposed abolishing Argentina’s central bank, in addition to numerous other arms of the government. Earlier this year, a [video](#) went viral on the TikTok platform of Milei ripping stickers representing various Argentine government ministries off a presentation board, shouting “afuera!” or “out!”

Sunday’s victory will send shockwaves throughout Latin America, which is currently dominated by center-left presidents in countries like Brazil, Chile, and Mexico.

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Heat Wave Persists in Brazil After Taylor Swift Fan Dies at Outdoor Concert

Heat and humidity have combined to create fatal conditions in Rio de Janeiro and much of Brazil.

Unseasonably hot temperatures have continued in Brazil after a Taylor Swift fan died at a concert in Rio de Janeiro.

The death of 23-year-old Ana Clara Benevides Machado [occurred](#) Friday after the fan complained of feeling unwell at the outdoor concert. She was brought to paramedics then transported to a nearby hospital where she died of cardiorespiratory arrest.

The deadly heat prompted Swift to postpone her second show in Rio Saturday evening. Locals have recently taken to [referring](#) to the city as "Inferno de Janeiro," a play on the Portuguese word for "Hell," as temperatures again [soared](#) to over 100 degrees Fahrenheit with a heat index as high as 137 degrees Fahrenheit.

The El Niño climate pattern and an offshore high pressure system have combined to create warm weather throughout much of the continent, where summer is still more than four weeks away. El Niño typically brings hot temperatures, which have been intensified by the weather system carrying warm moist air and clearing away cloud cover.

Humid conditions have made things particularly oppressive as saturated air prevents sweat from evaporating, undermining the human body's natural ability to cool itself.

Fans at Swift's Friday show had [complained](#) about venue policy that prevented them from bringing water, leading to the concert's organizer to announce water would be provided for free on Saturday.

The hot weekend conditions extended to Paraguay and other neighboring countries Saturday, with cities in Peru and Bolivia reporting record November temperatures. Elsewhere in Brazil, wildfires [ravaged](#) the tropical Pantanal wetlands.

The warm weather continues a period of high temperatures throughout the continent that drove [fires](#) in Argentina last month. In August and September, the continent [experienced](#) a rare winter heat wave.

Scientists say climate change is increasing the intensity and duration of periods of extreme heat as well as other severe weather events. According to expert Eliot Jacobson, Saturday was the first day in recorded human history that the global surface temperature average exceeded two degrees Celsius above the 1850-1900 baseline.

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Yellen Says TikTok Matter Remains Unresolved

WASHINGTON, November 20 (Sputnik) – The United States has concerns about issues with privacy and social media but the matter involving TikTok remains unresolved, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen told CNBC.

"This wasn't an explicit matter of discussion between presidents Biden and Xi. I met with my own Chinese counterpart vice premier He for two days preceding the Biden-Xi meeting and we did discuss issues concerning China's investments in the United States and the CFIUS [Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States] process where we review investments but there's a legal action that is currently pending in regard to TikTok and we are not really able to pursue further CFIUS actions while those legal issues are pending," Yellen said.

The secretary reiterated that the US has "concerns around the potential issues with privacy and social media."

"But I'm really not at liberty to discuss the TikTok case in detail. I want to avoid giving advice to investors, this is a matter that has not yet been resolved," she added.  
TikTok is banned from use on US government devices.

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Senior Biden Admin Official in Israel for Talks on Preventing War With Lebanon - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 20 (Sputnik) - US Special Envoy and Coordinator for International Energy Affairs Amos Hochstein arrived in Israel on Monday for talks with senior officials on the need to prevent a war between Israel and Lebanon, Axios reported, citing US and Israeli officials.

While in Israel, Hochstein is due to meet with Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, Minister for Strategic Affairs Ron Dermer, IDF chief of staff Herzi Halevi and Israeli national security adviser Tzachi Hanegbi, the report said.

Hochstein last year brokered a maritime boundary agreement between Israel and Lebanon, paving the way for gas exploration in the area.

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Yellen Says Ukraine Utterly Dependent on US Aid

WASHINGTON, November 20 (Sputnik) – US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said on Monday that Ukraine is "utterly dependent" on American aid.

"Ukraine is utterly dependent on this aid," Yellen told CNBC.

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Pentagon Chief Says Met With Zelenskyy in Ukraine to Reaffirm Support

WASHINGTON, November 20 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said that he met with Volodymyr Zelenskyy during his surprise visit to Ukraine on Monday and reaffirmed the US's support for Ukraine's urgent battlefield needs and long-term defense requirements.

"I was honored to meet with President @ZelenskyyUa in Kyiv today to reaffirm the United States' steadfast support for Ukraine. We, along with our allies and partners, will continue to support Ukraine's urgent battlefield needs and long-term defense requirements," Austin wrote on X.

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Biden Says US Prepared to Sanction Israeli Settlers Involved in West Bank Violence

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Saturday that the United States is prepared to sanction Israeli settlers involved in attacks against Palestinians in the West Bank.

"I have been emphatic with Israel's leaders that extremist violence against Palestinians in the West Bank must stop and that those committing the violence must be held accountable," Biden said in a column in The Washington Post. "The United States is prepared to take our own steps, including issuing visa bans against extremists attacking civilians in the West Bank."

Earlier this month, the State Department said the United States sent a "very clear message" to Israel that settler violence in the West Bank is unacceptable and those responsible for it should be held accountable. In late October, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said during a congressional hearing that they were carefully tracking Israeli settler violence in the West Bank and had raised this issue in talks with their Israeli counterparts.

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'Mishap' During 2nd Test Flight of SpaceX's Starship Resulted in Loss of Spacecraft - FAA

WASHINGTON, November 18 (Sputnik) - A mishap during SpaceX's second test flight of the Starship Super Heavy rocket resulted in the loss of the spacecraft, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) told Sputnik on Saturday.

"A mishap occurred during the SpaceX Starship OFT-2 launch from Boca Chica, Texas, on Saturday, November 18," the FAA said. "The anomaly resulted in a loss of the vehicle."

No injuries or public property damage have been reported, according to the FAA.

The FAA said it will oversee SpaceX's investigation into the mishap to ensure it complies with federal regulations.

The Starship spacecraft triggered its automated flight termination system during the second phase of its flight, destroying the vehicle before reaching orbit, according to the SpaceX broadcast.

If the Starship spacecraft reached orbit, it would have reentered the Earth's atmosphere later on Saturday and splashed down near the coast of Hawaii.

During the first phase of the launch, the Starship spacecraft successfully detached from the Super Heavy Booster rocket using hot-stage separation. The booster rocket, designed to be reusable, should have splashed down in the Gulf of Mexico but exploded shortly after the separation.

SpaceX said the Starship successfully lifted off under the power of all 33 Raptor engines on the

Super Heavy Booster and made it through the hot-stage separation, but the booster experienced a "rapid unscheduled disassembly" shortly after stage separation.

The upgrades to Starship's fully integrated rocket for its second test flight included the hot-stage separation system to improve separation of the spacecraft from the booster rocket, a new electronic Thrust Vector Control system to improve control of the rocket mid-flight, and the installation of a water-cooled steel flame deflector at the launch pad.

The first launch of the nearly 400-foot Starship rocket system, the biggest and most powerful rocket ever built, took place on April 20.

SpaceX engineers deliberately detonated Starship during the first test flight after it began tumbling and losing altitude when multiple engines failed. The first test flight did not reach the second stage — separation of the Starship spacecraft from the Super Heavy Booster.

The Starship is the centerpiece of SpaceX efforts to develop a fully reusable transportation system designed to carry humans to the Moon and on long-duration flights to Mars and beyond. The system is designed for in-space refueling and the ability to land at destinations across the solar system and return to Earth.

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SpaceX's Starship Triggers Automated Termination System Before Reaching Orbit

WASHINGTON, November 18 (Sputnik) - SpaceX's Starship spacecraft triggered its automation termination system before reaching orbit, according to the company's broadcast on Saturday.

The Starship spacecraft was expected to reenter the Earth's atmosphere later this morning and splashdown near the coast of Hawaii.

Earlier in the launch, the Starship spacecraft successfully separated from the Super Heavy Booster. The booster was expected to splashdown in the Gulf of Mexico but exploded several seconds after the hot-stage separation.

The Starship is the centerpiece of SpaceX efforts to develop a fully reusable transportation system designed to carry humans to the Moon and on long-duration flights to Mars and beyond. The system is designed for in-space refueling and the ability to land at destinations across the solar system and return to Earth.

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CORRECTION - SpaceX's Starship Rocket Successfully Separates From Booster, Heading Toward Orbit

(Corrects headline, lede to read 'Heading Toward Orbit' instead of 'Reaches Orbit')

WASHINGTON, November 18 (Sputnik) - SpaceX's Starship spacecraft has successfully separated from the Super Heavy booster and is heading toward orbit, according to the company's broadcast on Saturday.

The Starship spacecraft is expected to reenter Earth's atmosphere later this morning and splashdown near the coast of Hawaii.

The Starship is the centerpiece of SpaceX's efforts to develop a fully reusable transportation system designed to carry humans to the Moon and on long-duration flights to Mars and beyond. The system is designed for in-space refueling and the ability to land at destinations across the solar system and return to Earth.

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SpaceX's Starship Rocket Successfully Separates From Booster, Reaches Orbit

WASHINGTON, November 18 (Sputnik) - SpaceX's Starship spacecraft has successfully separated from the Super Heavy booster and reached orbit, according to the company's broadcast on Saturday.

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The Starship is the centerpiece of SpaceX's efforts to develop a fully reusable transportation system designed to carry humans to the Moon and on long-duration flights to Mars and beyond. The system is designed for in-space refueling and the ability to land at destinations across the solar system and return to Earth.

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SpaceX's Starship Super Heavy Rocket Successfully Lifts Off From Southern Texas

WASHINGTON, November 18 (Sputnik) - SpaceX's Starship Super Heavy rocket successfully lifted off on Saturday from the launch pad in Boca Chica, Texas, with hopes of reaching orbit, according to the company's broadcast.

The Starship is the centerpiece of SpaceX's efforts to develop a fully reusable transportation system designed to carry humans to the Moon and on long-duration flights to Mars and beyond. The system is designed for in-space refueling and the ability to land at destinations across the solar system and return to Earth.

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US Kept Political Statements From APEC Declaration Due to Muslim Member Pressure - Source

SAN FRANCISCO, November 18 (Sputnik) - The United States had to keep the political statement out of the APEC final declaration due to the pressure from the Muslim members of the organization, a diplomatic source from one of the delegations told Sputnik.

"Political statements were not included into the final document," the source said. "The United States had to give up political statements due to the pressure from the Muslim members."

Meanwhile, the United States issued a separate statement upon the conclusion of the summit.

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PREVIEW - SpaceX's Starship Heavy Rocket System Set for 2nd Test Flight, Aims to Reach Orbit

WASHINGTON, November 18 (Sputnik) - SpaceX is set to conduct its second test flight of its Starship Heavy rocket system on Saturday with the hopes of reaching orbit after undergoing several major upgrades since its first trial in April ended with an explosion.

The company is targeting a 20-minute launch window that opens at 8:00 a.m. ET (13:00 GMT) on Saturday at its test facility in Boca Chica, Texas.

SpaceX founder Elon Musk recently said the company has implemented major upgrades to the Starship rocket system that will increase its chances of reaching orbit on the second test flight.

The upgrades include a hot-stage separation system to improve separation of the spacecraft from the booster rocket, a new electronic Thrust Vector Control system to improve control of the rocket mid-flight, and the installation of a water-cooled steel flame deflector at the launch pad.

The first launch of the full Starship rocket system, the biggest and most powerful rocket ever

built, took place on April 20.

SpaceX engineers deliberately detonated Starship during the test flight after it began tumbling and losing altitude when multiple engines failed. The spacecraft climbed to an apogee of about 39 kilometers (24 miles) over the Gulf of Mexico, which is the highest point any Starship spacecraft has reached to-date in the program's history.

The nearly 400-foot Starship rocket system uses two reusable components, including the Super Heavy Booster that uses 33 methane-powered Raptor engines and the Starship spacecraft that is equipped with another six Raptor engines.

The Starship is the centerpiece of SpaceX efforts to develop a fully reusable transportation system designed to carry humans to the Moon and on long-duration flights to Mars and beyond. The system is designed for in-space refueling and the ability to land at destinations across the solar system and return to Earth.

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Israel, Hamas in Talks With Support From US in Qatar, Reached Tentative Deal - Hersh

WASHINGTON, November 18 (Sputnik) - Israeli and Hamas officials are in the middle of negotiations in Qatar with support from the United States, US investigative journalist Seymour Hersh said citing sources.

"Talks between the Hamas leadership and Israel, with support from the United States, are now going on in Qatar," Hersh said in his column published on Substack on Friday. "The American team includes CIA Director William Burns, President [Joe] Biden's most experienced foreign policy aide."

According to Hersh, a tentative agreement was reached days ago between Israel and Hamas. Under the tentative agreement, Hamas agreed to release 50 women and elderly hostages in return for the release of hundreds of women and teenage girls of Hamas families who are now in Israeli jails, Hersh added.

The United States insists that family members be released together from captivity, Hersh said, adding that as a result of this demand Washington is calling for the release of 71 hostages held by Hamas.

Hamas reportedly agreed to the US demand.

However, Hamas insisted on a five-day halt to the war, which was immediately rejected by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Hersh reported.

On October 7, Hamas launched a surprise large-scale rocket attack against Israel from the Gaza Strip and breached the border, killing and abducting people in neighboring Israeli communities. Israel launched retaliatory strikes and ordered a complete blockade of the Gaza Strip, cutting off supplies of water, food, and fuel. On October 27, Israel launched a large-scale ground incursion inside the Gaza Strip with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas fighters and rescuing the hostages.

The conflict has resulted in the deaths of around 1,200 people in Israel and over 11,500 in the

Gaza Strip.

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Multiple Victims in Shooting at New Hampshire State Hospital in Concord - Police

(Adds details, quote in paras 5,6)

WASHINGTON, November 18 (Sputnik) - Officers on the scene are investigating the shooting in a state hospital in the city of Concord claimed multiple victims, the New Hampshire State Police said in a series of statements via social media.

"Troopers are currently investigating a shooting at New Hampshire State Hospital in Concord. There are multiple victims," New Hampshire State Police said on Friday evening.

In a separate statement, the New Hampshire Homeland Security and Emergency Management said that while the scene is still active, the suspected shooter is dead.

"The situation at New Hampshire Hospital has been contained. The scene remains active. The suspect is deceased," the statement said.

Furthermore, the New Hampshire Homeland Security and Emergency Management department reported that the shooting incident at New Hampshire Hospital was contained to the front lobby.

"All patients are safe and there is no active threat to the public. The scene remains active while authorities investigate a suspicious vehicle. Please avoid the area at this time," New Hampshire Homeland Security and Emergency Management department said.

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US Has Operated 4 Deportation Flights to Venezuela Since October - DHS Senior Official

WASHINGTON, November 18 (Sputnik) - The United States has conducted four deportation flights to Venezuela since resuming such flights last month, Homeland Security Department (DHS) senior official Blas Nunez-Neto said.

"We operated our fourth repatriation flight to Venezuela yesterday [Thursday] and we will continue to operate those flights moving forward," Nunez-Neto said during a press briefing on Friday.

The United States has seen a 74% decrease in encounters of Venezuelan migrants on the US southern border with Mexico in the second half of October compared to September, Nunez-Neto said.

The significant drop in Venezuelan migrants arriving on the US southern border is attributed to the resumption of US deportation flights to Venezuela, Nunez-Neto said.

There has been a significant reduction in the number of migrants crossing the highly dangerous and deadly Darien jungle between Colombia and Panama, which has claimed the lives of many US-bound migrants, Nunez-Neto added.

Earlier on Friday, a senior Biden administration official said President Joe Biden and his Mexican counterpart discussed immigration-related issues and the situations in Venezuela and Cuba during a meeting at the White House the day before.

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APEC's Final Statement Does Not Contain Any 'Toxic' Political Narratives - Overchuk

SAN FRANCISCO, November 18 (Sputnik) - The final statement of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit does not contain any toxic political narratives, Deputy Prime Minister Alexei Overchuk, who leads the Russian delegation at the summit in San Francisco, told reporters.

"There are no toxic political narratives. This is a calm working document that outlines the main economic problems," Overchuk said on Friday.

The Russian official pointed out that the final version of the document focuses on the problems of climate, digital transformation, and women's rights, and allows "to move forward within the framework of the Peruvian presidency."

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Russian Delegation Head Says APEC Summit Successful Given Consensus At Such Difficult Time

SAN FRANCISCO, November 18 (Sputnik) - The Russian delegation considers the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit held in San Francisco to be successful given that the parties managed to achieve consensus in difficult conditions, the head of the Russian delegation, Deputy Prime Minister Alexei Overchuk told reporters.

"Judging by the declaration and the areas outlined in it, and judging by the fact that today in very difficult conditions it was possible to reach a consensus, this is a successful summit," Overchuk said on Friday.

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Head of Russia APEC Delegation Says Was Greeted by Biden, Officials Received With Dignity

SAN FRANCISCO, November 18 (Sputnik) - Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexei Overchuk, who leads Moscow's delegation to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit, told reporters he was greeted by US President Joe Biden at the protocol event on the sidelines of

the leaders' summit and Russian officials were greeted with dignity.

"Yesterday there was a protocol event and, in accordance with protocol, we were received, and I was greeted by President Biden and the First Lady, greeted each other like polite people," Overchuk said Friday. "We talked a little with a number of countries - Singapore, Vietnam and Malaysia. With a number of other countries too - with whom there were contacts."

Overchu said the delegation was received in accordance with protocol and with dignity.

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Russia Believes in Need for More Representative, Compact UN Security Council - Polyanskiy

UNITED NATIONS, November 18 (Sputnik) - Russia believes in the need to reform the UN Security Council and make it a more representative institution, Russian Deputy Envoy to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said.

"Russia, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, believes in the need to give this body a more representative nature by including developing countries from Africa, Asia and Latin America," Polyanskiy said on Friday.

The Russian diplomat emphasized that reforming the UN Security Council is one of the most important yet complex issues under consideration by the United Nations.

Efforts to enlarge the UN Security Council should not impact its ability to effectively and promptly respond to emerging challenges, Polyanskiy said.

"We advocate preserving the compact nature of the Security Council membership. Its optimal numerical composition should not exceed the low twenties," Polyanskiy said.

Russia considers India and Brazil as worthy candidates for permanent UN Security Council seats, Polyanskiy said.

However, Russia would accept an expansion of only elected UN Security Council members as well, Polyanskiy said.

The diplomat highlighted the importance of the permanent UN Security Council members' veto powers.

Russia opposes any initiative that would infringe on the prerogatives of permanent members, Polyanskiy said.

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APEC Agrees on Final Statement Fully Taking Into Account Russian Position - Overchuk

SAN FRANCISCO, November 18 (Sputnik) - Leaders at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit agreed on the text of the final statement, which fully takes into account Russia's position, Deputy Prime Minister Alexei Overchuk said.

"Declaration has been adopted by consensus," Overchuk, who led the Russian delegation at

the APEC summit in San Francisco, said on Friday.

When asked whether Russia's position was taken into account in the text of the final statement, Overchuk said, "Everything has been taken into account."

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OpenAi Board Sacks CEO Sam Altman, Picks CTO Mira Murati as Interim Head - Statement

WASHINGTON, November 18 (Sputnik) - The board of directors of OpenAI, the developer of the ChatGPT artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot, sacked CEO Sam Altman, 38, following a deliberate review concluding that he has not been consistently candid with the board and appointed chief technology officer Mira Murati as interim replacement, according to a statement published by the company.

"The board of directors of OpenAI, Inc.... today announced that Sam Altman will depart as CEO and leave the board of directors. Mira Murati, the company's chief technology officer, will serve as interim CEO, effective immediately," the statement said on Friday. "Mr. Altman's departure follows a deliberative review process by the board, which concluded that he was not consistently candid in his communications with the board, hindering its ability to exercise its responsibilities."

The statement pointed out that the board no longer has confidence in Altman's ability to continue leading OpenAI.

"We are grateful for Sam's many contributions to the founding and growth of OpenAI. At the same time, we believe new leadership is necessary as we move forward," the statement said.

Altman responded to the news about his removal in an X post later on Friday.

"I loved my time at OpenAi. It was transformative for me personally, and hopefully the world a little bit. Most of all I loved working with such talented people. Will have more to say about what's next later," the post said.

Open AI's ChatGPT gained popularity after its launch in November 2022, attracting its first million users in less than a week. In late January, Microsoft said it would invest "billions of dollars" in OpenAI. Earlier in March, OpenAI unveiled a new multimodal AI model, GPT-4, which is capable of recognizing both text and images and solving complex problems with greater accuracy.

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Trump Files Motion to Oppose August 5 as Trial Start Date in Georgia Election Case

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump filed a motion in court to oppose the state's motion to set the trial date in the Georgia election case for August 5, 2024.

"President Trump respectfully notifies the Court that he opposes the state's 'motion to schedule a trial date for August 5, 2024,' and requests the opportunity to present oral argument in opposition to the motion at a hearing to be held at a time convenient to the Court," the court filing said on Friday.

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'Multiple Victims' in Shooting at New Hampshire State Hospital in Concord - Police

WASHINGTON, November 18 (Sputnik) - Officers on the scene are investigating the shooting in a state hospital in the city of Concord claimed multiple victims, the New Hampshire State Police said in a series of statements via social media.

"Troopers are currently investigating a shooting at New Hampshire State Hospital in Concord. There are multiple victims," New Hampshire State Police said on Friday evening.

In a separate statement, the New Hampshire Homeland Security and Emergency Management said that while the scene is still active, the suspected shooter is dead.

"The situation at New Hampshire Hospital has been contained. The scene remains active. The suspect is deceased," the statement said.

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UPDATE - Apple Pulls All Ads on X After Site Owner Musk's Antisemitic Post - Reports

NEW YORK, November 17 (Sputnik) - Apple will temporarily suspend all advertising on X, formerly known as Twitter, amid a controversy over a recent post by its owner Elon Musk, Axios reported on Friday, citing sources familiar with the matter.

Musk on Wednesday appeared to endorse a post on X that claimed that Jewish communities push hatred against white people, saying in a thread of posts, "You have said the actual truth."

The pause by Apple, which Axios said has been a major advertiser on X, follows similar moves by IBM and Lions Gate Entertainment Corporation, both of which reportedly pulled ads from the social media platform.

Musk's post also drew condemnation from the White House, whose spokesperson Andrew Bates said, "It is unacceptable to repeat the hideous lie behind the most fatal act of Antisemitism in American history at any time."

A group of 164 Jewish leaders and activists on Wednesday endorsed a statement calling on Apple, Amazon, Google and Disney to stop advertising on "the platform that allows him to spread his ideology to hundreds of millions people" and urging individuals to press the firms to withdraw ads.

X's content standards restrict monetization of violent content, content related to sensitive events, sexually suggestive content, and content involving criminal behaviors, with a number of

exceptions, according to the social media platform's website.

Musk in his thread said that he was "deeply offended" by racism of any kind, including "anti-white racism," which he claimed is pushed by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and other groups.

The statements drew criticism from the ADL, who accused Musk of spreading ideas frequently considered anti-Semitic.

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#### SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, November 18 (Sputnik) -

##### CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

\* Russia's naval aviation destroyed seven unmanned boats and one US-made Willard high-speed boat with a Ukrainian landing group traveling toward Crimea, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Friday.

\* The Netherlands will allocate \$2.17 billion in military assistance to Ukraine in 2024, the Dutch Defense Ministry said.

\* Russian forces repelled 33 Ukrainian attacks and Kiev lost more than 1,810 soldiers in the Donetsk direction in the past week, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

##### UN SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING ON SITUATION IN UKRAINE

\* Ukrainian law enforcement has failed to sufficiently investigate violence against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) and take action to protect its members, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Ilze Brands Kehris said on Friday.

\* Kiev is attempting to "cleanse the religious space" in Ukraine, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said.

##### ISRAEL INVASION OF GAZA

\* The death toll in the Gaza Strip from the Israeli attacks reached 12,000, including 5,000 children, the Gaza authorities said on Friday.

\* The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) said on Friday that it carried out strikes against the infrastructure facilities, operational control center, military posts of Hezbollah in Lebanon.

\* More than 650 patients and 300 health workers are still inside the Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza, World Health Organization (WHO) Chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said.

\* The Israeli raid of the Al-Shifa hospital, just like operations in other hospitals in Gaza, has been carried out with the permission of the United States, Mahmoud al-Habbash, an adviser of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, told Sputnik.

##### SUDAN DEVELOPMENTS

\* The United States, United Kingdom and Norway condemned the growing violence and human

rights abuses in Sudan, calling for a ceasefire and unfettered humanitarian access, according to a joint statement on Friday.

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Trudeau Says Israel's Approach to Civilians 'Extremely Worrisome'

SAN FRANCISCO, November 18 (Sputnik) - Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said that many things that Canadians and people around the world see regarding Israel's approach toward civilians in the Gaza Strip and elsewhere are "very worrisome."

"I think, obviously, there are a lot of things that are extremely worrisome that Canadians and people around the world are watching and not entirely understanding," Trudeau said during a press briefing on Friday.

Trudeau's comments came in response to a reporter's question of whether he believed that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is doing everything he can to get civilians out of harm's way during Israel's invasion of Gaza.

Trudeau said that in his discussions with Netanyahu, Benny Gantz and other Israeli officials, he focused on ensuring comprehensive measures to safeguard civilian lives.

"Not only is the loss of women and children now heartbreaking, it is also impeding the ability of Israel to be able to see a long term stable solution, to get to a two-state solution," Trudeau said.

However, Trudeau said he has engaged in prolonged disagreements with Netanyahu regarding the imperative need for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"Our condemnation of settlements, that's well established Canadian policy that goes back years, even as we continue to stand in support of the people of Israel," Trudeau said.

Ensuring support for the people of Israel involves securing a future with a robust, viable, and safe Jewish state alongside a strong and viable Palestinian state, Trudeau said.

"That will be Canada's continued focus, and we will continue to do everything we can to ensure that there are as few civilian casualties as possible," Trudeau added.

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House Speaker Says Releasing January 6 US Capitol Riot Tapes to Public

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - US House Speaker Mike Johnson said on Friday that he is releasing footage from inside the US Capitol during the January 6, 2021 riots to the public in an effort to bolster transparency.

"Today, I am keeping my promise to the American people and making all the January 6th tapes available to ALL Americans," Johnson said in a statement via social media platform X.

Transparency is necessary to restore trust in the US government, Johnson added.

Johnson shared a link to the House Administration Committee's websites, where the footage

has been uploaded for public viewing.

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Georgia Prosecutors Propose Start Date for Trump's Election Interference Trial on August 5

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - Prosecutors of the US state of Georgia have proposed that the start of former President Donald Trump's election interference trial be scheduled for August 5, according to a court filing published on Friday.

"Comes now, the State of Georgia, by and through Fulton County District Attorney Fani T. Willis, and moves this Court to schedule the trial for the remaining Defendants to August 5, 2024," the filing said. "The State requests that this Court schedule the remaining defendants for a Final Plea hearing date of Friday, June 21, 2024, and to begin trial on Monday, August 5, 2024."

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US Designates Kataib Sayyid al-Shuhada, Its Leader as Global Terrorists - Blinken

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - The United States has designated Kataib Sayyid al-Shuhada and its secretary-general as specially designated global terrorists, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Friday.

"The Department of State is today designating Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada (KSS) and its Secretary-General Hashim Finyan Rahim al-Saraji as Specially Designated Global Terrorists," Blinken said in a statement.

The group's terrorist activities have threatened the lives of US personnel as well as personnel from the Global Coalition to Defeat the Islamic State Iraq and Syria, the statement said.

Blinken pointed out in the statement that the US Treasury Department designated earlier six individuals affiliated with Kata'ib Hezbollah group.

Blinken accused Iran of supporting these groups and providing them with training, funding and sophisticated weapons, the statement said.

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Apple Pulls All Ads on X After Site Owner Musk's Antisemitic Post- Reports

NEW YORK, November 17 (Sputnik) - Apple is pausing all advertising on X, the Elon Musk-owned social network previously known as Twitter, news portal Axios reported on Friday.

It said the move followed Musk's endorsement of antisemitic conspiracy theories as well as Apple ads reportedly being placed alongside far-right content.

Apple has been a major advertiser on X and its pause follows a similar move by IBM, Axios reported.

Apple's exit from X-advertising comes amid a broader backlash against Musk for endorsing an antisemitic post. Nearly 165 Jewish rabbis and activists upped their call to Apple, Google, Amazon and Disney to stop advertising on X, and for Apple and Google to remove it from their platforms.

The nonprofit Media Matters for America published a report Thursday that highlighted Apple, IBM, Amazon and Oracle as among companies whose ads were shown next to far-right posts.

Musk on Wednesday wrote on X that "[y]ou have said the actual truth" in response to an X post that claimed Jewish communities support "dialectical hatred against whites."

X CEO Linda Yaccarino, however, said in a post on the site a day later that the company has been "extremely clear about our efforts to combat antisemitism and discrimination," adding: "There's no place for it anywhere in the world — it's ugly and wrong. Full stop."

Apple itself did not announce the advertising ban and it remains to be seen how quickly the iPhone maker will make the matter public.

Lions Gate Entertainment, one of Hollywood's biggest filmmaking brands, is also pulling all advertising from Twitter, Bloomberg reported amid the move by Apple.

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Former First Lady Rosalynn Carter Enters Home Hospice Care - Carter Center

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - Former First Lady Rosalynn Carter has begun hospice care at home, choosing to spend moments with President Jimmy Carter and their family, the Carter Center said in a statement on Friday.

"Former First Lady Rosalynn Carter has entered hospice care at home. She and President Carter are spending time with each other and their family. The Carter family continues to ask for privacy and remains grateful for the outpouring of love and support," the statement said.

In May, the Carter Center conveyed that the Carter family disclosed former First Lady Rosalynn Carter's dementia diagnosis. Despite this, she remains contentedly at home with her husband, relishing the springtime in Plains, Georgia and cherishing visits with loved ones.

"We recognize, as she did more than half a century ago, that stigma is often a barrier that keeps individuals and their families from seeking and getting much-needed support. We hope sharing our family's news will increase important conversations at kitchen tables and in doctor's offices around the country," the statement released in May said.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), dementia is not a specific illness but a term for problems with memory, thinking, or decision-making that can make daily activities challenging; Alzheimer's disease is the most common type, and though it often affects older adults, it's not a normal part of aging.

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Biden Passes APEC Chair to Peru President at Summit Close Out in San Francisco

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden passed the chairmanship of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit to Peruvian President Dina Boluarte on Friday.

In the afternoon, Biden convened the Pacific nations' leaders for a retreat to conclude the APEC summit that took place from November 11-17 in San Francisco.

"I'd like to take a moment to pass a ceremonial torch from the United States to Peru," Biden said during his concluding remarks.

Biden said the summit made it possible for US companies to reach agreements for investments of more than \$500 billion in the APEC economies. Some of the agreements pertain to subsea cables, decarbonizing energy grids and completing the largest US airline expansion in the South Pacific.

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US Approves Potential \$2.35Bln Sale of Tomahawk Weapons System to Japan - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - The United States approved a potential \$2.35 billion sale of the Tomahawk weapons system to Japan, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said on Friday.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of Japan of Tomahawk Weapon System and related equipment for an estimated cost of \$2.35 billion. The Defense Security Cooperation Agency delivered the required certification notifying Congress of this possible sale today," the DSCA said in a statement.

Japan's authorities expressed the intention to purchase up to 200 Tomahawk Block IV All Up Rounds (AURs) (RGM-109E), the same amount of Tomahawk Block V AURs (RGM-109E), and 14 Tactical Tomahawk Weapon Control Systems (TTWCS).

The deal also includes support for the Tomahawk Weapon System and the Mission Distribution Software Suite Centers (MDSSC)), as well as containers, feasibility studies, software, hardware, training, and other equipment, materials, and services, according to the statement.

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## Oil Rebounds But Still Ends Down 4th Week in Row

NEW YORK, November 17 (Sputnik) - Oil prices rebounded Friday from the previous session's four-month lows but still finished down for a fourth straight week as weakening macroeconomic data and mounting crude stockpiles in the United States raised doubts about demand for energy.

New York-traded West Texas Intermediate, or WTI, crude for December delivery, settled at \$75.89 per barrel, up \$2.99, or 4.1%, on the day. For the week though, WTI slid 1.7%, adding to the cumulative 13% drop from three prior weeks. The US crude benchmark is down 6.5% so far for November, after an 11% drop in October.

UK-origin Brent crude's most-active January contract settled at \$80.61 per barrel, up \$3.19, or 4.1%, on the day. For the week, Brent lost 1%, adding to the cumulative 12% slump over three prior weeks. The global crude benchmark is down 5.4% so far for November, after an 11% drop in for October.

While Friday's price rebound restored some much-needed optimism in oil markets, the trade was still reverberating from the prior session's 5% drop that pulled the market to July lows - a phenomenon triggered by a bigger-than-expected build in US oil inventories, coupled with record-high production levels. That led to bets that oil supplies in the world's largest fuel consumer were not as tight as initially expected.

"It has become clearer that the oil balance for the remainder of this year is not as tight as initially expected," said analysts at ING, in a note. "Higher-than-expected supply has eroded a large amount of the expected deficit over 4Q23. And as things stand, the market is still expected to return to surplus in 1Q24."

Additionally, easing concerns over the Israel-Hamas war weighed on the sentiment in oil, as traders priced in a smaller risk premium from the conflict after it proved to have little impact on Middle Eastern supplies.

On the demand front, signs of steady US fuel demand were largely offset by a series of weak economic prints from Japan, China, and the eurozone.

The European Commission cut its growth forecast for the eurozone in 2023 to 0.6% from the 0.8% expected in September, while Japan's economy weakened in July-September, snapping two straight quarters of expansion, data showed on Wednesday.

Data also showed that Chinese refiners processed lower amounts of oil in October than the prior month.

Focus is now squarely on an upcoming OPEC meeting on Nov. 26, where traders will be looking to see if Saudi Arabia, principally, and Russia roll over their voluntary supply cuts into 2024.

The two recently vowed to maintain their cuts until the end of 2023.

"The price weakness we are seeing means that it is increasingly likely that the Saudis will roll over their additional voluntary cut of 1MMbbls/d into early next year. Doing this should help erase the expected surplus and provide some support to the market," ING added.

Supporting prices on Friday was news that the US imposed sanctions this week on maritime companies and vessels for shipping Russian oil sold above the Group of Seven's price cap, potentially limiting oil supply.

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Trudeau Says 'Ceasefire Now' Protest in Vancouver 'Not About Me'

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Friday that the protest held while he dined in Vancouver was not about him but rather expressed the anger and despair of many regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"I appreciate the question, but it's not about me," Trudeau said. "I have been clear for weeks now that Canadians who are lashing out in anger at each other, whether it's a woman in a hijab getting spat on or a Jewish kid going to college campus, that's not feeling safe."

Trudeau amid the "terrifying rise in Islamophobia" alongside the "very troublesome rise in antisemitism," the grief and anger so many Canadians are feeling is bleeding over into each other.

Canadians should not be scared of one another, but should listen and be compassionate amid the ongoing crisis, Trudeau said.

"There's nobody who is rationally wishing ill on one of their neighbors regardless of what their religion is, or their story is, or their background," Trudeau added.

On Tuesday, the Vancouver Police Department deployed a hundred officers to a restaurant in the city's Main Street to safely escort Trudeau out after nearly 250 protesters had gathered to confront him over his stance on Israel's invasion of the Gaza Strip that has resulted in the killing of some 12,000 civilians.

The protesters accused Trudeau of assisting Israel conduct genocide against Palestinians. The police detained two individuals during the protest.

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White House Says 'Unacceptable' for Musk to Affirm Claims of Anti-White Jewish Agenda

(Adds details in paras 11-13)

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - The White House said on Friday that it is unacceptable for billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk to affirm claims of an anti-white agenda by Jewish communities, following similar backlash to the businessman's comments on social media.

On Wednesday, Musk replied to a post on social media platform X, which claimed that Jewish communities have pushed hatred against white people.

"You have said the actual truth," Musk said. Musk said that he is "deeply offended" by racism of any kind, including anti-white racism, which he claimed is pushed by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and other groups.

The ADL unjustly attacks the majority of the West because their tenets prevent them from attacking minority groups who represent their "primary threat," Musk said. Musk also clarified

that he does not believe that all Jewish communities promote anti-White hatred.

The statements drew criticism from the ADL, who accused Musk of spreading ideas frequently considered anti-Semitic.

"At a time when antisemitism is exploding in America and surging around the world, it is indisputably dangerous to use one's influence to validate and promote antisemitic theories," ADL chief Jonathan Greenblatt said in a statement.

The White House likewise issued a statement condemning Musk's comments and their timing, pointing toward the October 7 surprise attack on Israel by Palestinian Hamas militants.

"It is unacceptable to repeat the hideous lie behind the most fatal act of Antisemitism in American history at any time, let alone one month after the deadliest day for the Jewish people since the Holocaust," White House spokesperson Andrew Bates said.

The White House condemns the promotion of anti-Semitism and racist hatred in the strongest terms, Bates said.

All people have a responsibility to speak out against anyone who attacks the dignity of fellow Americans or compromises the safety of their communities, Bates added.

Musk's comments also sparked outrage among some advertisers on X, prompting Lions Gate Entertainment Corporation to pull their ads from the social media platform, Bloomberg reported on Friday.

Technology company IBM also reportedly suspended advertising on the platform following Musk's comments. IBM's decision to pull ads from Twitter also came after reports revealed that IBM ads were shown next to pro-Nazi posts.

X's content standards restrict monetization of violent content, content related to sensitive events, sexually suggestive content, and content involving criminal behaviors, with a number of exceptions, according to the social media platform's website.

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Trudeau, Xi Talked About Necessity of Creating Constructive Sino-Canadian Dialogue

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Friday that he spoke with Chinese President Xi Jinping about the necessity of creating a constructive dialogue between Ottawa and Beijing amid the current diplomatic rift.

Trudeau traveled to San Francisco to attend the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders' meeting held from November 15-17.

"I talked about how we need to keep our officials and teams working together to try and create constructive dialogue around issues that matter to us individually but also matter to the world," Trudeau said.

The Canadian prime minister emphasized that Xi acknowledged what he had said.

The necessity to have a constructive dialogue is part of the ongoing engagement Canada seeks to conduct around the world, including with the states Ottawa disagrees with, Trudeau said.

"Canada, of course, is in a challenging time in the relationship with China," Trudeau said.

However, Trudeau noted that no bilateral meeting took place between the Canadian and Chinese delegations on the sidelines of the APEC summit and these comments were made during a brief exchange.

Asked whether a bilateral meeting was not organized because of political risk amid the ongoing probe on China's alleged interference, Trudeau said his position on the issue remains unchanged.

The important thing is to find space for constructive exchange in a world where China is an important economic player, he said.

In addition, Trudeau positively assessed the meeting between Xi and US President Joe Biden, saying that it was "a good sign."

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Trudeau Says Foresees Vast Trade Opportunities for Canada in Pacific Region

SAN FRANCISCO, November 17 (Sputnik) - Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Friday expressed optimism about what he termed were Canada's substantial prospects for expanded trade along the Pacific region.

"There's huge potential for Canada and opening up more trade along the Pacific," Trudeau said during a press briefing during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit in San Francisco.

Trudeau said the launch of the Indo-Pacific strategy last year and the collaborative efforts of Canadian ministers with counterparts in the region will strengthen Canada's presence and forge new opportunities.

"But the very foundation of all this work must be built on peace and security. There's a lot of turbulence in the world right now," Trudeau added.

According to Global Affairs Canada, the Indo-Pacific region's 40 economies will play a critical role in shaping Canada's future over the next half-century.

The region offers significant opportunities for domestic economic growth for decades to come, Global Affairs Canada said.

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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Biden Discusses Need for Hostage Release, Humanitarian Assistance in Gaza with Qatari Emir

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden spoke on Friday with the leader of Qatar, Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, about the need for hostage release and humanitarian assistance in Gaza, the White House said.

"The two leaders discussed the urgent need for all hostages held by Hamas to be released without further delay. The leaders also discussed ongoing efforts to increase the flow of urgently needed humanitarian assistance into Gaza and Israel's decision to resume fuel deliveries for life-saving aid," the White House said in a statement.

The statement added that the two leaders agreed to remain in close contact, including through their teams, on these matters.

Qatar has taken on an active role in mediating the conflict between Israel and Hamas since the attacks on October 7, and, in concert with US efforts, has negotiated for the passage of foreigners trapped in Gaza through the territory's crossing with Egypt.

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#### Trump Campaign Says Court Should Reverse Gag Order in DC Case

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - The US District Court for the District of Columbia should reverse a gag order against former US President Donald Trump, the Trump campaign said on Friday.

The Trump campaign statement comes following a decision by a New York judge to lift a gag order in his civil fraud trial in the state.

"Just yesterday, the New York Appellate Division stayed a similar gag order against President Trump's core political speech. The unconstitutional Gag Order in the DC case should be speedily reversed," the statement said.

The gag order in the DC case enables an unelected federal judge to censor Trump just weeks before the Iowa caucuses, the statement said.

No court has ever upheld a gag order involving political speech at the height of a presidential campaign, the statement added.

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#### Semenova Released From US Prison, Avoids Deportation to Russia But Wants to See Mother

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - Russian national Natalia Semenova, who was sentenced by a US court this week to time served on drug-related charges, has been released from prison and returned to her home in Texas, Semenova's lawyer Alexey Tarasov told Sputnik on Friday.

"Natalia Semenova yesterday was released from confinement from Gregg County jail in Texas without being transferred into US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) custody. She was able to go back to her homestead," Tarasov said.

Semenova was very excited to return and to see all of her farm animals again, he added.

Tarasov pointed out that his client plans to stay in the US now but also wants to visit her elderly

mother in the Russian city of Stavropol.

"She has a mother who is 87, and she wants to see her again," he 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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US, Mexico Must Support One Another So That Migration Becomes Option - Obrador

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - The United States and Mexico should continue supporting one another so that migration becomes an option rather than an issue that is being imposed, Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said on Friday.

"We need to continue to support one another so migration is an option and not imposed," Obrador said. "We wish to assist the people in their countries of origin when they are forced to migrate. We are fully satisfied in holding this meeting."

Obrador also said during the meeting that Biden is the first US president in recent time who has not built walls on the US border with Mexico.

Obrador made the comments at the beginning of the bilateral meeting with US President Joe Biden in San Francisco. The meeting is held on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum.

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ANALYSIS - US Rhetoric, Policies Undercut Potential to Boost Ties With China After Biden-Xi Talks

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - Apparently cordial talks between US President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping were immediately undermined by the rhetoric of the American leader himself and US hubristic policies and sermonizing, experts told Sputnik.

The two men held their talks on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in San Francisco on Wednesday. Biden said important progress was made during his talks with Xi as both sides agreed to open direct military-to-military communications and begin to cooperate on AI.

However, within a few hours, Biden outraged the Chinese by describing President Xi in public as a "dictator." His comments drew an immediate furious response from Beijing. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning responded by calling Biden's comment "wrong and irresponsible."

"Our policies and rhetoric continue to increase tension versus easing tension," retired US Army Lieutenant Colonel Earl Rasmussen, political commentator and former vice president of the Eurasia Foundation told Sputnik. "Until we come out of our cave and realize that the world is changing and take on a cooperative view... not much will improve in relations and the world will move past the United States and their close allies."

In addition to "trashing" China and calling Xi a dictator, Rasmussen added, the White House's recap of developments underscored American hubris and belligerence.

"Based on the US readout, we continue to continual virtue signaling and that we are the all-powerful. Hitting all the buzz areas: Free and open Indo-Pacific; defense of Indo-Pacific allies; Freedom of navigation; Adherence to international law; maintaining peace and stability and not to forget support for Ukraine and Israel," Rasmussen said.

Former CIA analyst and station chief Philip Giraldi said Biden's decision to call Xi a dictator explains why the United States is in decline. Moreover, he added, there is nobody in Washington sensible enough to reverse the trajectory.

#### 'OUTDATED' WORLD ORDER

Canadian historian, political commentator and Canadian Patriotic Review Editor Matthew Ehret agreed that Biden's comments were the expression of a collapsing US political society in the American capital.

"The Xi-Biden meeting involved a glimpse into a senile and outdated primitive world order melting down under its own self-contradictions and trying desperately to stay relevant when placed into close proximity with a sane 21st century paradigm," he said.

Biden's political naivete and incompetence in his extreme old age went unchallenged because almost everyone else in the US political and media establishment thought and felt exactly the same way, Ehret explained.

"Biden represents the perfect embodiment of corruption, self-deceit and self-centeredness characteristic of the liberal intelligentsia of baby-boomers that have taken control of western policy making for the past 60 years while offering nothing approximating authenticity to the rest of the world," he said.

Xi, on the other hand, expressed the confidence and philosophical as well as political strength of China as she emerged on the world scene, Ehret pointed out.

The Chinese leader "is coming from a place of well-reasoned confidence and strength in embodying the ancient traditions of Chinese civilization, Confucian values and the largest rate of industrial and scientific progress in the world, which he knows presents the greatest salvation not only for the Chinese people, but the world at large," he said.

The United States needed to work constructively in cooperation with China to build a genuine new world order favorable to all, Ehret advised.

"If the United States itself is to survive the storms of war and economic collapse which it has largely brought on to itself, then it will be largely because of the creative efforts made by China to build a new system premised around cooperation, industrial growth and peace," Ehret said.

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### Biden Says Wants to Share Product of Talks With Xi on Fentanyl With Mexican President

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Friday that he wants to share products formed as part of his talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping earlier this week with Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO).

Biden said that he wants to share a "work product" from his Xi meeting on stemming the flow of fentanyl during bilateral talks with AMLO, according to a White House pool report.

AMLO said that he is fully aware of the danger that fentanyl poses to the United States, the report added.

Biden is participating in talks with AMLO on Friday, alongside other US and Mexican officials, including US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Mexican Foreign Affairs Secretary Alicia Barcena Ibarra. Biden met with Xi earlier this week in San Francisco.

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### Lockheed Martin Company to Maintain Landing Gear on Romania's F-16 Jet Fleet - Statement

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - A Lockheed Martin subsidiary has won a contract to work with a Romanian firm to maintain the landing gear of Romanian's US-supplied F-16 combat jets, Lockheed Martin announced in a press release on Friday.

"Derco, a Lockheed Martin Company, signed an agreement with Aerostar SA to repair landing gear, wheels and brakes in support of the Romanian Air Force F-16 fleet, reducing lead times and improving logistics for mission readiness," the release said.

Derco will provide specialized tooling, equipment, technical documentation and training to Aerostar in order to provide its workers with the skill sets necessary to repair F-16 components, the release added.

Earlier this week, the first European F-16 training Center was inaugurated at Fetesti Air Base in southern Romania, according to the release.

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### Republicans 'Growing Tired' of Endless US Spending in Ukraine Conflict - Congressman

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - Republicans are growing tired of endless US spending in Ukraine amid Russia's special military operation, Congressman Paul Gosar told Sputnik on Friday.

This week, President Joe Biden signed a short-term spending bill that included no additional funding for Ukraine as available funds are close to being completely depleted.

"House Republicans, like most Americans, are growing tired of the endless spending for a proxy war in Ukraine," Gosar said in a statement. "Additional expenditures for an indefinite and

needless war is not something Congress will rubber stamp for the Biden regime."

Last month, Biden submitted a \$106 billion supplemental request to Congress that includes \$61 billion for Ukraine.

The United States has provided Ukraine with \$113 billion in assistance since the start of Russia's operation in February 2022.

Congress will consider more funding for Ukraine in the coming weeks when they convene to approve full budgets for 2024. The White House has previously expressed confidence there is enough bipartisan support to get more funding through.

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White House Says US to Host Defense Industrial Base Conference With Ukraine on Dec. 6-7

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) – The United States will host a two-day US-Ukraine Defense Industrial Base Conference to find ways of military co-production and cooperation in Ukraine, National Security Council spokesperson Adrienne Watson said in a statement on Friday.

"The U.S. government will host a two-day Defense Industrial Base Conference on December 6th - 7th to convene U.S. and Ukrainian industry and government representatives to explore opportunities for co-production and other industrial cooperation in Ukraine," the statement said. The conference will aim to increase weapons production in a bid to support Kiev in its ongoing conflict with Russia, the statement said.

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UN Says Informed About Sudan Terminating UN Political Mission in Country

UNITED NATIONS, November 16 (Sputnik) - The government of Sudan has sent a letter to the United Nations informing it about their decision to terminate the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS), UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Friday.

"We have indeed received the letter from the Government of Sudan announcing the government's decision to 'terminate UNITAMS,' which is our special political mission in Sudan," Dujarric told a briefing.

The letter said Sudan wants to terminate the mission with immediate effect

The current mandate of the mission ends on December 3 of this year, Dujarric added.

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## White House Says 'Unacceptable' for Musk to Affirm Claims of Anti-White Jewish Agenda

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - The White House said on Friday that it is unacceptable for billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk to affirm claims of an anti-white agenda by Jewish communities, following similar backlash to the businessman's comments on social media.

On Wednesday, Musk replied to a post on social media platform X, which claimed that Jewish communities have pushed hatred against white people.

"You have said the actual truth," Musk said. Musk said that he is "deeply offended" by racism of any kind, including anti-white racism, which he claimed is pushed by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and other groups.

The ADL unjustly attacks the majority of the West because their tenets prevent them from attacking minority groups who represent their "primary threat," Musk said. Musk also clarified that he does not believe that all Jewish communities promote anti-White hatred.

The statements drew criticism from the ADL, who accused Musk of spreading ideas frequently considered anti-Semitic.

"At a time when antisemitism is exploding in America and surging around the world, it is indisputably dangerous to use one's influence to validate and promote antisemitic theories," ADL chief Jonathan Greenblatt said in a statement.

The White House likewise issued a statement condemning Musk's comments and their timing, pointing toward the October 7 surprise attack on Israel by Palestinian Hamas militants.

"It is unacceptable to repeat the hideous lie behind the most fatal act of Antisemitism in American history at any time, let alone one month after the deadliest day for the Jewish people since the Holocaust," White House spokesperson Andrew Bates said.

The White House condemns the promotion of anti-Semitism and racist hatred in the strongest terms, Bates said.

All people have a responsibility to speak out against anyone who attacks the dignity of fellow Americans or compromises the safety of their communities, Bates added.

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## REVIEW - Biden's Aid Request for Ukraine Could Take Weeks to Clear US Congress

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden's supplemental funding request, which includes more than \$61 billion in aid for Ukraine, could take weeks to clear Congress due to the holiday breaks and the resistance against such aid in the House of Representatives.

In October, the Biden administration sent a \$106 billion supplemental funding request to Congress, which would provide \$61.4 billion in aid for Ukraine; \$14.3 billion in aid for Israel; and billions more toward border security and humanitarian assistance.

The US House of Representatives passed a standalone Israel aid bill based on the Biden administration's request, but the Democrat-majority in the Senate rejected the legislation. The White House also opposed the standalone bill and issued a threat to veto it.

Congress was also working to pass a government funding measure before the November 17 government shutdown deadline while considering the supplemental funding request. Congress passed a temporary, two-step funding measure, which will keep the government open through the New Year.

Lawmakers will now attempt to pass full-year appropriations bills, with the supplemental funding request still under consideration.

"Keeping the government open is a good outcome, but we have a lot to do. We must finish passing [Biden's] supplemental with aid to Israel, Ukraine, humanitarian assistance for civilians in Gaza, funds for the Indo-Pacific. We must complete our work on the annual defense bill," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said earlier this week.

However, advancing the supplemental funding request could take weeks. Congress will resume work following the Thanksgiving holiday and then begin a break through the New Year starting on December 15 - a narrow timeframe to pass the legislation rather than push it into January.

The funding request faces opposition among some Republicans in the Senate and the House of Representatives, who have said that Israel and Ukraine aid should be considered as separate matters.

Nevertheless, US Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell and House Speaker Mike Johnson have both expressed support for Ukraine aid.

McConnell said last month that Ukraine aid remains a "major priority" for the upper chamber of Congress. He also said Biden's supplemental request will serve as a starting place for negotiations. Senate Republicans will likely seek a number of changes to the proposal, with a focus on border security, McConnell added.

Meanwhile, the Defense Department has warned that they are increasingly limited in their ability to assist Ukraine due to a lack of funding from Congress.

Deputy Pentagon Press Secretary Sabrina Singh said on Thursday that Ukraine requires continued and regular support for its counteroffensive against Russia.

The Defense Department urges Congress to pass Biden's supplemental funding request, Singh added.

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Raimondo in Meeting With Chinese Counterpart Says US National Security Not Negotiable

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo met her Chinese counterpart Commerce Minister Wang Wentao on the sidelines of the APEC summit in San Francisco and underscored that protecting national security interests is not negotiable, the US Commerce Department said on Friday.

"US Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo met yesterday with Minister of Commerce of the PRC Wang Wentao to discuss the US-China bilateral commercial relationship and to follow up on developments since the secretary's trip in August," the department said in a readout of the meeting. Secretary Raimondo also reinforced that protecting national security is not negotiable." During the meeting, the two officials also agreed to hold an in-person meeting in early 2024, the

release said.

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Two Texans Found Guilty of Attempt to Sell Iranian Petroleum in Violation of Sanctions-DOJ

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - Two men from Texas have been convicted this week for attempting to sell Iranian petroleum in violation of sanctions, the Justice Department announced in a release on Friday.

"Zhenyu "Bill" Wang, 42, of Dallas, and Daniel Ray Lane, 42, of McKinney, Texas, were convicted at trial on Nov. 15 on charges of attempting to violate the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), conspiracy to violate IEEPA, and conspiracy to commit money laundering in connection with their attempt to transact in sanctioned Iranian petroleum and launder the proceeds," the release said.

The Department of Justice explained that evidence showed that in 2019 and early 2020, the defendants engaged in a conspiracy to buy petroleum from Iran in violation of US economic sanctions under IEEPA.

"They then planned to mask the origins of the petroleum and sell it to a refinery in China," the release said. "The defendants also attempted to conceal their illegal transactions by obtaining foreign passports, engaging in sham contractual agreements, and conspiring to launder the proceeds of the sale through shell entities and offshore financial accounts."

The Department went on to say that Wang, Lane and three co-conspirators were originally charged by complaint in February 2020, and the defendants and two co-conspirators were indicted in August 2020.

Wang and Lane each face a maximum penalty of 45 years in prison and are scheduled to be sentenced on February 29.

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Kiev Regime Attempting to 'Cleanse Religious Space' in Ukraine - Russian Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, November 17 (Sputnik) - Kiev is trying to "cleanse the religious space" in Ukraine, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said on Friday.

"The Kiev regime is attempting to cleanse the religious space of the country and to free the hands of radicals of all stripes to perpetrate violence and lawlessness," Nebenzia said during a meeting of the UN Security Council.

The Russian ambassador noted that the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) has been facing takeovers of its facilities and forced liquidations of their parishes since 2019.

Nebenzia pointed out that Russia has repeatedly drawn these developments to the attention of the UN Security Council.

Over the past year, the Kiev regime has unleashed the thus far largest wave of persecution against the UOC by opening criminal investigations into the activities of its clergy and conducting aggressive searches.

In addition to the actions of the government, the local authorities in various regions of Ukraine have banned UOC activities, accusing the church of maintaining ties to Russia.

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UN Says Gaza Casualties 'Likely Much Higher' Than 11,000 Reported by Health Ministry

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) – A UN official said on Friday that the actual number of casualties in Israel's war on Gaza is "likely much higher" than the last reported figure of more than 11,000 due to a lack of updates following the collapse of communication networks in the territory.

"Casualties continue to mount, with the dead reportedly exceeding 11,000 people – the majority of them children and women. The actual total, however, is likely much higher as figures have not been updated for five days due to a collapse of communication networks in Gaza," said Martin Griffiths, under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs and emergency relief coordinator, at a General Assembly meeting on Gaza's humanitarian situation.

On Monday, Gaza's health ministry reported that 11,240 people had been killed, including 4,630 children. Its figures only include people recorded dead at hospitals and is almost certainly an undercount, not including the deceased who did not pass through a hospital or whose bodies have not been recovered from bombed sites.

The UN Security Council on Wednesday adopted its first resolution since the outbreak of the war, calling for "urgent and extended humanitarian pauses" in Gaza. The US and UK abstained from the vote because the resolution did not condemn Hamas' October 7 attack on Israel. Russia also abstained because the resolution did not demand a humanitarian ceasefire.

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US Embassy in Turkey Asks Diplomats to Minimize Public Engagements, Not Wear US Symbols

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - The US embassy in Turkey on Friday issued an updated security alert advising all of its diplomats to minimize their public engagements and refrain from wearing US symbols amid demonstrations against Washington's support for Israel's military operations in the Gaza Strip.

"Due to the rise in anti-American activities, US government personnel in Turkey have been cautioned to minimize public engagements and movements, not wear US-affiliated clothing, not draw attention to their nationality and not travel to the US consulate Adana consular district in

Southeastern Turkey," the security alert said.

The US consulate in Adana and the consular agency in Izmir will remain temporarily closed due to the ongoing protests, the alert added.

In October, the United States closed its consulate in Adana amid mass protests against the United States and Israel following a missile strike on the Al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza that killed dozens of people.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has called Israel a terrorist state and repeatedly condemned its military actions in Gaza that have resulted in the death of some 12,000 civilians. Erdogan also participated in mass protests against the US and Israeli policy in support of the war against the Palestinian people.

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US Imposes New Iran-Related Sanctions on 7 People, 1 Entity - Treasury

(Adds details in paras 4-6, edits throughout)

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed sanctions on seven individuals and one entity linked to Iran-backed paramilitary groups in Iraq, the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) said on Friday.

OFAC announced that it added the seven individuals to its Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons List for their ties to two Iraqi Shiite groups — Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH) and Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada (KSS) — allegedly supported by Iran.

OFAC also added KSS to the sanctions list as an entity.

"Today's action sends a message to Kata'ib Hizballah and all other Iran-backed groups that the United States will use all available measures to hold to account any opportunistic actors who seek to exploit the situation in Gaza for their own ends," US Under Secretary of the Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Brian Nelson said in a statement.

KH and KSS receive support from Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and have been involved in recent attacks on US forces in Iraq and Syria in the wake of the Hamas October 7 surprise attack on Israel, the statement said.

The US remains committed to security and stability in the Middle East and steadfast in its efforts to disrupt destabilizing activities, the statement said.

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Ukraine Has Failed to Probe Violence Against Orthodox Church, Protect Members - UN

UNITED NATIONS, November 17 (Sputnik) – Ukrainian law enforcement authorities have failed to sufficiently investigate violence against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) and take action to protect its members, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Ilze Brands Kehris said

on Friday.

“Regrettably, Ukrainian law enforcement response in these cases has been inadequate, failing to sufficiently investigate incidents and take action to protect members of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church,” Ilze Brands Kehris said at an UN Security Council meeting.

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OFAC explained that it added the seven individuals to its Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons List for their ties to two Iraqi Shiite groups - Kata'ib Hezbollah and Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada - allegedly supported by Iran.

OFAC also added the Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada group to the sanctions list as an entity.

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US House Subcommittee Chair Files Expulsion Resolution for Congressman Santos - Statement

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - US House of Representatives Investigative Subcommittee Chair Michael Guest said on Friday that he filed an expulsion resolution for Congressman George Santos.

"The evidence uncovered in the Ethics Committee's Investigative Subcommittee investigation is more than sufficient to warrant punishment and the most appropriate punishment is expulsion," Guest said.

On Thursday, the Investigative Subcommittee said it had found substantial evidence that Santos had 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 determined that Santos' conduct brought discredit upon the lower chamber of Congress and his actions warranted public condemnation.

Guest said he filed the expulsion notice despite the Investigative Subcommittees' ongoing probe and despite being the chairman of that panel.

Earlier this month, Santos survived an attempt to oust him from the House of Representatives but said he was not seeking re-election following the Investigative Subcommittee findings.

In May, Santos was indicted on 13 criminal charges, including that he used deception to win a seat in Congress and enrich himself. Santos admitted to fabricating portions of his biography on

the campaign trail but pleaded not guilty.

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Russia's Konoshchenok Complains About Detention Conditions in New York - Consul

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) – Russian national Vadim Konoshchenok, suspected by the United States of transporting US-origin export-controlled items from Estonia to Russia, has complained about his detention conditions in New York, Russian Consul General in New York Alexander Zakharov told Sputnik.

"On October 10, we visited our compatriot who is being held at the Metropolitan Detention Center. He complained about his worsening detention conditions and healthcare," Zakharov said.

Russian diplomats conveyed the information to prison authorities, he added.

The consul pointed out that Konoshchenok denies violating any export control regulations and is determined to defend himself in court.

"For our part, we will ensure that his rights are strictly observed and proper detention conditions are put in place," Zakharov said.

When asked to comment on whether the US could include Konoshchenok in a potential prisoner exchange, the consul said Russia sticks to "quiet diplomacy" with the United States when it comes to prisoner swaps.

Konoshchenok was extradited to the United States from Estonia in July. In the United States, the Russian citizen is accused of conspiring to circumvent sanctions, illegal purchases for the Russian defense sector, and related financial fraud.

The US District Court for the Eastern District of New York has scheduled the next status conference in Konoshchenok's case for January 23, 2024.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US Blacklists Four Entities for Supporting Russian Military, Maduro – Commerce Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) – The United States has blacklisted four entities for supporting Russia's military or representatives of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, according to a Commerce Department notice on Friday.

"In this rule, the Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) amends the Export Administration Regulations (EAR) by adding four entities under nine entries to the Entity List. These entities are listed under the destinations of Costa Rica (1), Ecuador (1), India (1) Panama (2), Spain (1), Russia (1), and Venezuela (2)," the notice stated.

The Commerce Department blacklisted Novax Group S.A., AeroFalcon S.L., and Zero Waste Global for allegedly circumventing US sanctions and supplying Maduro's representatives with

US-origin aircraft parts. AeroFalcon was blacklisted under the destination of Spain; Novax Group under Costa Rica, Ecuador, Panama, Venezuela, and Russia; and Zero Waste under Panama and Venezuela.

It also blacklisted Si2 Microsystems Private Limited under the destination of India for supplying "Russian consignees connected to the Russian defense sector with U.S.-origin integrated circuits after March 1, 2023."

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US, UK, Norway Condemn Sudan Violence, Call for Ceasefire – State Department

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) – The United States, United Kingdom and Norway condemned the growing violence and human rights abuses in Sudan, calling for a ceasefire and unfettered humanitarian access, according to a joint statement on Friday.

"Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States (The Troika), condemn the escalating violence and human rights abuses in Sudan, especially attacks by the Rapid Support Forces in West, Central and South Darfur," the statement said.

The statement also expressed concern over reports of violence in Jebel Aulia, on the White Nile River, where civilians are reportedly being targeted.

"We reiterate that there is no acceptable military solution to the conflict, and call for an end to the fighting. We urge the RSF and SAF to refrain from actions that would further divide Sudan along ethnic lines or draw other forces into their conflict.

The Troika also welcomed the recent resumption of talks in Jeddah, facilitated by the US, Saudi Arabia, and Intergovernmental Authority on Development.

Fighting has recently intensified in Sudan's Darfur region despite the Jeddah talks and announcements by the parties that they are ready to negotiate, UN Assistant Secretary General for Africa Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee said on Thursday.

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Anti-Russian Protests Outside Consulate in NY Draw Fewer People – Consul

NEW YORK CITY, November 17 (Sputnik) – Anti-Russian protests outside the Consulate in New York are drawing fewer people, Russian Consul General Alexander Zakharov told Sputnik.

The consul said it would not be correct to talk about "the abundance of opponents of Russian policy" in the United States.

"There are also many supporters, people who sympathize with our country and have an objective view of the situation in the world and Russia's principled foreign policy," Zakharov stated.

In the past, various protests took place outside the consulate once a week, but now diplomats

notice that fewer demonstrators are joining them, he added.

The consul said that the Russian consulate maintains close contacts with the New York field office of the State Department, the Diplomatic Security Service and the New York Police Department.