

7/1/24 Monday

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Hurricane Beryl Hammers Windward Islands, Heads Towards Jamaica

A historic hurricane smashed the Windward Islands on Monday, causing flooding and damage in what will likely go down as the area's most powerful recorded storm.

The Category 4 hurricane smashed several islands, including Grenada, Barbados and St Vincent and the Grenadines. The storm's winds reached 150 mph and flattened some buildings. "In half an hour, Carriacou was flattened," Grenadian Prime Minister Dickon Mitchell said, referring to the island that bore the brunt of Beryl's winds. Mitchell did not release a death toll from the hurricane but noted that the island's communication infrastructure had been damaged, which may slow reporting.

Powerful storms this early in summer are a rarity for the Atlantic. On Sunday, Beryl became the first Category 4 hurricane recorded in June. On Monday it surpassed Hurricane Dennis, which also hit Grenada in 2005 before affecting Jamaica, Haiti and the Southeastern United States. Videos posted on social media showed the damage on Union Island, in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

Jamaica remained under a hurricane watch as of Monday, with Beryl predicted to reach the island nation on Wednesday. Forecasters hope that the storm will drop to a category 2 storm by then and if it hits the island directly, it may weaken in intensity further. Other forecasts could have the storm heading toward Belize and Central America before hitting the Yucatan Peninsula. Another scenario has it moving through the Gulf of Mexico, which could see the storm intensify before heading towards the United States and Cuba, though forecasters say that scenario is less likely.

Beryl is the second named storm of the hurricane season, which runs from June 1 to November 30 in the Atlantic. This season is expected to be abnormally busy.

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The French People Tried Macron, Now They Want Him Gone

The French people tried life under President Emmanuel Macron and have decided they want him gone and that has become obvious to anyone who has paid attention to the past two elections in France.

Over the weekend, France held snap parliamentary elections in response to his party being walloped by the National Rally party headed by Marine Le Pen in the European Union elections in early June. It was widely believed that Macron hoped that increased turnout and fear of the National Rally would compel French voters to back his centrist coalition. Instead, his party finished in third, behind the National Rally and a coalition of leftwing parties called the New Popular Front (Nouveau Front Populaire).

Macron was never that popular with the French people, getting elected with only 25% of the vote in the first round, but he failed to capitalize on the chances that French voters gave him, leading to his party's downfall.

"[Macron] said it himself, he came out and said, 'I know you didn't vote for me, but because you didn't want Le Pen - the far right - then you accepted me as your president for the next term - I heard you,'" recounted veteran journalist Elijah Magnier [on Sputnik's Fault Lines](#). "Well, actually, he didn't hear anything."

After the first round of voting, the National Rally walked away with 33% of the vote. The New Popular Front came in second with 28% and Macron's centrist Ensemble alliance managed only 20%. Both the National Rally and the New Popular Front walked away with more than 50% of the vote in more than 30 districts each, making a second vote unnecessary in those areas. Turnout was also the highest since 1997, indicating that French voters were motivated to vote against Macron's party, much as they were motivated against Le Pen in 2022.

"In the last election [the French people decided] to vote for him because they didn't want Le Pen. This time, people rushed out to vote against him and they had to choose between the far-right and the far-left," explained Magnier, adding later that "Everything was inverted. So, in the presidential election, we had Macron, Le Pen and the leftists. Now, we have Le Pen, the leftists and then Macron."

Macron frustrated voters with austerity measures and a damaged economy, problems compounded by the government's focus on Ukraine and other failures overseas.

"If [the populist parties] are good or bad, they say we'll give it a try [because] they've tried Macron twice... and they really don't want him anymore. He failed in Africa. He failed in the Middle East. He failed in Europe. He dismantled the power of France. He failed domestically." Last year, France raised the retirement age from 62 to 64, causing mass protests. Early this year, farmers protested new regulations and the ending of fuel subsidies by blocking roads into Paris with tractors.

"These [establishment politicians in France] are born with a golden spoon in their mouth and they're not in contact with what the people think. They have only their own projection of what the people want," Magnier concluded.

The second round of elections will be held on July 7.

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Zelensky's New 'Plan' Possible 'First Step' To Negotiations - Analyst

Ukraine's illegitimate President Volodymyr Zelensky's recent promise to put forth a new "comprehensive plan" to end the conflict in Ukraine may be the first tentative steps by the regime to sit down at the negotiating table with Russia.

Zelensky announced on Friday during a press conference in Kiev that he was creating a new plan that should be "supported by the majority of the world." He also used the opportunity to, for the first time, admit high casualties on the battlefield. International relations and security expert Mark Sleboda told Sputnik's [Final Countdown](#) that while Zelensky's comments are still based in

the fantasy land that he can dictate terms to Russia while losing the war, the change in tone could represent the regime's first tentative steps towards admitting reality.

"The fact that he said he's willing to speak to Russia through an intermediary at some undisclosed point months in the future, I guess that is progress, but not much," Sleboda explained. "There is a possibility that this is a first tentative, one step forward, two steps back in the direction of eventual negotiations to end the conflict."

Zelensky made the comments not long after his so-called "peace summit" fell flat on its face, with China declining to attend and several influential countries outside of the West refusing to sign the final document, including Brazil, South Africa, India and Saudi Arabia. Iraq and Jordan asked for their signatures to be removed the day after they signed.

"Certainly, I think [Zelensky's] statement is representative of coming out of the failed Kiev regime war rally. Sentiment within the rest of the world outside of the West, i.e. the real international community - the global majority, that [said] they want real peace negotiations, and, perhaps, at least this is a nod in that direction," Sleboda speculated.

The change in Zelensky's tone is not just a reflection of the failed so-called "peace summit" but also the reality on the battlefield, where Ukraine is losing significant ground regularly. On Monday, the Russian Ministry of Defense announced that they had liberated Stepovaya Novoselovka in the Kharkov region and Novopokrovskoye in the Donbass People's Republic.

"Even if [Zelensky's comments] are a symbolic step in that direction [of negotiations], it is driven by the desperate state on the battlefield that the Kiev regime is facing," Sleboda argued.

"Once again, [Ukraine] stripped veteran troops from Toretsk in Nyu-York, they moved them to Kharkov. Russia knew about it immediately, of course, and launched a significant offensive in the area and has made significant progress. Now, the Kiev regime is scrambling and shuffling troops around again and again."

However, despite the largely symbolic nature of Zelensky's comments, he will have to tread carefully with Banderite factions in Ukraine, which have been steadfast in their opposition to peace going back to their violations of the Minsk Agreements. The ultra-nationalist groups in Ukraine still hold significant power and could try to overthrow the Kiev regime if they see Zelensky pushing toward peace. The groups also have the most to lose if Russian President Vladimir Putin's goal of de-nazifying Ukraine is completed.

Further complicating matters are legal issues between the two countries. In 2022, Zelensky signed a decree ruling out any possibility of negotiating with Putin. After Zelensky extended his term without elections using martial law earlier this year, Putin argued that Zelensky is no longer the legitimate leader of Ukraine and indicated he would only recognize the authority of the Ukrainian parliament.

Sleboda speculates that there "is no possibility of negotiations between the regime in Kiev and Russia," noting that he believes Russia "really needs to negotiate with the Kiev regime proxy's masters, which is the United States," adding that it won't happen while US President Joe Biden remains in office.

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Five Iranian Officials Facing Deportation Proceeding from Canada – Border Services

WASHINGTON, July 2 (Sputnik) – The Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) is holding deportation proceedings against five suspected members of the Iranian government who allegedly held senior positions and currently live within Canadian borders.

"As of June 3rd, 2024, under the designation of the Iranian regime ... 5 [deportation hearings] are ongoing," the agency said in its latest report.

A total of 15 individuals have been reported as inadmissible by CBSA for being senior officials in the Iranian government. The border services have requested the scheduling of seven of the reported cases, of which two have already been held, the report said. As a result, the individuals were declared inadmissible in Canada and one has already been deported, it added.

Other figures show that CBSA has reviewed approximately 17,800 Iran-related applications for potential inadmissibility which led Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to revoke a total of 82 visas and prompted the border services to launch 87 investigations. Of these, 43 were closed due to the individuals either not being in Canada or for having found no indication they were senior officials of the Iranian governments.

The individuals face deportation proceedings under the sanctions Ottawa adopted in the wake of Mahsa Amini's death, that prohibits thousands of Iranian officials and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps members from entering the country.

Since February, Canada's Immigration and Refugee Board has ordered the deportation of two high-ranking Iranian officials; Majid Iranmanesh, a director general at Iran's Vice-Presidency for Science and Technology and Iran's former deputy minister of interior Sayed Salman Samani.

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Biden Campaign Raises Record \$38Mln in Four Days After Debate - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 2 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden's reelection campaign said it had raised a record \$38 million in the four days since the first presidential debate that sparked widespread concerns about Biden's cognitive abilities, The Washington Post reported on Tuesday.

Campaign officials noted that on the day of debate and the day following it, Biden's reelection campaign achieved its highest and second-highest fundraising records, respectively, in terms of grassroots sources, such as online and mail donations.

They also said that nearly half of the post-debate grassroots donations came from first-time donors.

At the same time, Biden's poor performance during his first debate of the 2024 race with Republican frontrunner Donald Trump, has reportedly led Democratic politicians, donors, and other supporters to doubt his fitness to be the Democratic presidential nominee.

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US Awards Moderna \$176Mln to Develop Vaccine Against H5 Bird Flu

WASHINGTON, July 2 (Sputnik) – The US Department of Health and Human Services has awarded Moderna \$176 million to develop an mRNA vaccine against the H5 bird flu virus, the biotechnology company announced on Tuesday.

"Moderna, Inc. today announced a project award of \$176 million through the Rapid Response Partnership Vehicle (RRPV) to accelerate the development of mRNA-based pandemic influenza vaccines," the company said in a statement. "The project award will support late-stage development for an mRNA-based vaccine to enable the licensure of a pre-pandemic vaccine against H5 influenza virus."

The award also includes additional options to prepare and accelerate a response to future public health threats, the statement added.

The news comes amid a recent spike in bird flu virus rates across hundreds of dairy farms in the United States. According to industry experts, the virus poses high risks to individual farmers, although the impact on the national industry at the moment is minimal.

The bird flu is an infectious disease caused by the influenza A virus, which is widespread throughout the world. Many species of wild birds survive the infection without any obvious signs of harm to their health, but some, including domestic birds, develop the disease, which can also

be transmitted to mammals, including humans.

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Two Thirds of Americans Feel National Pride – Poll

WASHINGTON, July 2 (Sputnik) – Two thirds of Americans say they are "extremely" or "very" proud to be American, slightly above the record low of 63% from 2018, according to a Gallup poll released on Tuesday.

Forty-one percent of Americans surveyed said they were "extremely proud" and 26% said they were "very proud." In contrast, from 2001-2017, at least 75% of respondents shared either sentiment.

Still, only 5% of Americans in the latest poll said they were "not at all proud."

Republicans surpassed Democrats in national pride, with 59% saying they were "extremely proud" compared to 34% of Democrats.

The latest poll was conducted from June 3-21.

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Biden Doubts Trump Will Face Trial This Year Over January 6 After Immunity Ruling

WASHINGTON, July 2 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump is highly unlikely to face a trial this year in connection to his role in the January 6 events after the Supreme Court ruled in his favor on the question of presidential immunity, President Joe Biden said during a press conference.

"The public has a right to know the answer about what happened on January 6, before they are asked to vote again this year. Now, because of today's decision, that is highly, highly unlikely," Biden said on Monday.

Earlier in the day, the Supreme Court ruled that Trump could claim immunity from prosecution on election subversion charges as it relates to official acts as president, although he could still face prosecution for unofficial acts. The case has been sent back to a lower court to handle.

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US Investor Roger Says Future of BRICS Countries Bright, But Bloc Unlikely to Survive

WASHINGTON, July 2 (Sputnik) - Renowned US investor Jim Rogers told Sputnik that he believes that the future of BRICS member countries is good, but he is unsure whether the bloc will survive.

"Brazil is not going to disappear. China's not going to disappear ... The BRICS don't have much in common, except that they are big countries on a map. But those countries do have good

futures," Rogers said. "All of them have a lot of natural resources. Most of them do not have huge debt. I see the future of those countries is not bad. But I don't know if BRICS will survive. But I do know that those countries are going to be okay in the future."

On June 4, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said that Ankara would like to join BRICS and would monitor the developments in the organization. Several other countries, including Thailand and Bolivia, have also voiced their interest in joining the group of nations.

BRICS was established in 2009 as a cooperation platform for the largest emerging economies, uniting Brazil, Russia, India and China. South Africa joined the group in 2010. Russia assumed the bloc's rotating presidency on January 1. On the same day, BRICS expanded its membership to include Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates. Saudi Arabia has not formalized its participation but has been taking part in BRICS meetings.

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US Air Force Pays Boeing \$70Mln More to Sustain Air Launched Cruise Missile - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, July 2 (Sputnik) - Boeing has received a more than \$70 million US Air Force contract to provide further engineering services to maintain the Air Launched Cruise Missile (ALCM), the Department of Defense announced in a press release.

"The Boeing Company [of] Oklahoma City, Oklahoma has been awarded a \$70,617,859 ...contract for Air Launched Cruise Missile engineering services," the release stated on Monday.

The contract provides for systems engineering and logistics analysis services in support of the Air Launched Cruise Missile, the defense department explained.

"The ...support activities include ...configuration and data management, laboratory support, design tools support [and] supportability analyses," the release said.

They will also include Diminishing Manufacturing Sources and Material Shortages impact analyses, technical surveillance, technical inquiries, and support for six flight tests a year, the

Defense Department added.

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Biden After Trump Immunity Ruling Says Sets Dangerous Precedent, No Limits on Presidents

WASHINGTON, July 2 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden said during a press conference that the US Supreme Court's ruling on former President Donald Trump's immunity sets a dangerous precedent that places no limits on a US president's actions.

"Today's decision almost certainly means that there are virtually no limits on what the president can do, this is a fundamentally new principle, and it's a dangerous precedent," Biden said on Monday. "Dangerous precedent because the power of the office will no longer be constrained by the law."

Earlier in the day, the Supreme Court ruled that Trump could claim immunity from prosecution on election subversion charges as it relates to official acts as president, although he could still face prosecution for unofficial acts.

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US Air Force Pays Northrop \$94M In Boost to Complete Two Polar Satellites - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, July 2 (Sputnik) - Northrop Grumman Systems has received an almost \$94 million US Air Force contract extension to continue work on Next Generation Overhead Persistent Infrared Polar Space Vehicles 1 and 2, the Department of Defense announced in a press release.

"Northrop Grumman Systems Corporation, Space Systems Division [of] Redondo Beach, California has been awarded a \$93,832,830 contract modification ...for Next Generation Overhead Persistent Infrared Polar Space Vehicles 1 and 2," the release stated on Monday.

Work on the project will be performed at Redondo Beach, California over the coming three months and is expected to be completed by September 30, 2024, the Defense Department said.

"Total cumulative face value of the contract is \$2,262,128,864," the Defense Department said.

Work on the project will be supervised by the Space Systems Command at Los Angeles Air Force Base, California, the release said.

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US Federal Court Blocks Biden's Temporary Pause on New LNG Exports - Court Documents

WASHINGTON, July 2 (Sputnik) - A federal US court has blocked President Joe Biden's temporary pause on new exports of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), court documents revealed.

"As to the Motion for Preliminary Injunction, the Court finds that the Plaintiff States are entitled

to the Injunctive Relief requested as to the LNG Export Ban. Accordingly, the Court will grant Plaintiffs' Motion for Preliminary Injunction, and order that the LNG Export Ban be stayed in its entirety, effective immediately," US Judge James Cain wrote in his ruling on Monday.

In January, Biden paused the approval of new LNG exports in the United States, citing a need to better assess climate, health, and economic considerations of pending licenses.

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US Navy Pays Phoenix Group \$165Mln to Simulate Threats to East, West Coasts - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, July 2 (Sputnik) - The Phoenix Air Group has won a more than \$165,732,375 US Navy contract to prepare and present electronic warfare (EW) simulations of airborne threats on both coastlines of the United States to prepare defenders for enemy electronic attack operations, the Department of Defense announced in a press release.

"Phoenix Air Group [of] Cartersville, Georgia is awarded a \$165,732,375 ...contract ...[that] procures flight minutes using 10 contractor-owned, contractor-operated aircraft for electronic warfare (EW) simultaneous presentations," the release stated on Monday.

Six of the presentations will be carried out for the US East Coast and four for the West Coast, the Defense Department said.

The purpose of the exercises will be "to simulate a wide variety of airborne threats to train, test and evaluate shipboard and aircraft squadron weapon systems operators and aircrew on fleet air defense and counter potential enemy EW and electronic attack operations," the release explained.

The Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division at Patuxent River, Maryland will oversee the presentations as their contracting activity, the Defense Department said.

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US to Help Panama Deter Illegal Migration Through Notorious Darien Jungle - White House

WASHINGTON, July 2 (Sputnik) - The United States is partnering with Panama to help deter the flow of US-bound migrants going through the notorious Darien Gap in South America, the White House said in a press release.

The Darien Gap is a treacherous corridor between Colombia and Panama that hundreds of thousands of US-bound asylum-seeking migrants have crossed through in recent years.

"Today, the United States and Panama signed a Memorandum of Understanding designed to jointly reduce the number of migrants being cruelly smuggled through the Darien, usually en route to the United States," the release said on Monday.

The United States will support Panama's efforts to immediately begin deportations of migrants who do not have a legal basis to remain in Panama, the White House said.

These deportations will help deter further illegal migration in the region and at the US-Mexico border, according to the release.

Panama's new president Jose Raul Mulino has vowed to stop migration through the Darien Gap.

Migrants have previously told Sputnik that the Darien Gap is an extremely exhausting days-long journey that has claimed the lives of many migrants.

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US Marshals Service Finds 200 Missing Children in National Operation - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 2 (Sputnik) - The US Marshals Service and other law enforcement partners found 200 missing children during a six-week national operation, the US Justice Department said in a statement.

"The US Marshals Service, along with federal, state, and local agencies in seven federal judicial districts and geographical locations across the United States, led a six-week national operation that resulted in finding 200 critically missing children, which includes endangered runaways and those abducted by noncustodial persons," the statement said on Monday.

The operation was conducted from May 20 to June 24 and focused on areas with high clusters of critically missing children, the statement said. The operation received assistance from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, the statement said.

The operation resulted in the recovery and removal of 123 children from dangerous situations, while 77 missing children were found in safe locations, the statement also said.

Of the 200 children, 173 were endangered runaways, 25 were considered otherwise missing, one was a family abduction and one was a non-family abduction, the statement said. The youngest recovered child was five months old, the statement added.

The operation was conducted in parts of Arizona, California, Florida, Michigan, North Carolina, New York and Oregon, according to the statement.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, July 2 (Sputnik) -

RUSSIA'S PRESIDENCY AT UN SECURITY COUNCIL

* Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will participate in debates at the United Nations Security Council on July 16-17, the Russian Foreign Ministry said on Monday.

* Russia is committed to its obligations in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and takes a responsible stance, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said, adding that Moscow urges other countries to do the same.

* Lavrov will chair a UN Security Council debate on July 16 on multilateral cooperation as there is high demand for discussions on strategic security in the world, Russian Ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia said.

* Lavrov will chair an open debate at the UN Security Council later in mid-July on the escalation in Gaza and Russia is encouraging ministerial-level participation, Nebenzia said.

GLOBAL ECONOMY

* The World Bank announced on Monday that it has moved Russia from the upper-middle income level category to the high income one.

* Palestine became the only country that moved down in the World Bank's classification of countries by income level after its nominal GDP lost 9.2%, the World Bank said.

* The share of high-income countries in Europe and Central Asia slightly decreased in 2023 compared with 1987, the World Bank said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* Seven civilians, including one child, have been injured in a Ukrainian shelling of Russia's Belgorod Region, governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said on Monday.

* The so-called peace formula of Volodymyr Zelenskyy is a non-starter, and Russia will not even discuss it, Russian Ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia said.

* Russian air defense is repelling a missile attack on Sevastopol on Monday, and fragments of one downed target fell in the coastal area of the city, governor Mikhail Razvozhayev said.

* Russian forces have taken control of the settlements of Stepovaya Novosyolovka (also known as Stepova Novoselivka) in the Kharkov Region (also known as Kharkiv) and Novopokrovskoe (also known as Novopokrovskoe) in the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) over the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

MIDDLE EAST

* A potential decision by Israel on sending Patriot missile systems to Ukraine may have political consequences, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said on Monday.

* Not a single directive out of the latest UN Security Council resolution on Gaza has been implemented, Nebenzia said.

* Israel is close to completing the phase of eliminating military capabilities of Hamas in the Gaza Strip, but strikes on its remnants will continue, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said.

* Israel may launch a military operation against the Hezbollah movement in southern Lebanon in the second half of July, the German Bild newspaper reported, citing sources.

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Latino Vote in US No Longer Monolithic Democrat, Up for Grabs in Election - Rights Group

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - The Latino vote in the United States is no longer monolithic Democrat and will be up for grabs in the upcoming presidential election, League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) National President Domingo Garcia told Sputnik on Monday.

"I think the Latino vote is up for grabs and is not as monolithic Democrat as it used to be," Garcia said.

Latino voters and other minority groups played a key role in President Joe Biden's win in the

2020 presidential election.

Garcia said he expects that a majority of Latino voters will still support Biden in the battleground states, but he's noticed a shift towards former President Donald Trump.

"Trump has made some inroads, especially with Latino men in states like Arizona and Nevada that Biden won four years ago," Garcia said.

The most outstanding issue Latino voters are struggling with leading up to the November vote is high inflation, Garcia said.

"People are finding it hard to pay for groceries, gasoline and bills on a month to month basis, so I think that's the number one issue, getting the economy and wages up," Garcia also said.

Illegal immigration on the US southern border has had an impact on Latino communities in the United States and can be expected to play a key role in swaying some Latino votes in this year's presidential election, Garcia added.

In June, advocacy group Voto Latino released a poll that found that Biden leads Trump 59% to 39% among Latino voters in swing states, but Biden's support falls to 47% and Trump's to 34% when third party candidates are included. This is short of the amount of support Biden received from the Latino community in the 2020 election, according to the group.

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Oil Bulls Continue Ponderous Run As 2nd Half 2024 Begins

NEW YORK, July 1 (Sputnik) - The rally in crude prices continued as the second half of 2024 began, with oil bulls holding the edge over bears in a market underpinned by supply worries.

US crude finished the first six months of the year with a 14% gain, with 6% of that coming in June alone.

It extended that run-up as trading for July began, with US-origin West Texas Intermediate crude settling up \$1.84, or 2.3%, at \$83.38 a barrel on Monday.

The peak for the day — \$83.52 — was also the highest for the US crude benchmark since the end of April.

Like US crude, UK-origin Brent crude also gained 14% in the first half of the year, with 6% of that achieved in June. In Monday's trade, Brent gained a further \$1.60, or 1.9%, to settle at \$86.60.

The strength in crude prices, however, hasn't been reflected in recent oil demand data released by the US Energy Information Administration.

The northern hemisphere summer, which began June 20, marks the busiest time for travel in the United States, the world's biggest oil consumer. US demand for oil usually spikes a couple of weeks before the official start of summer.

Despite that, the Weekly Petroleum Status Report for the week ended June 21 showed US crude stockpiles rising — not falling — by 3.591 million barrels. Energy analysts on Wall Street had forecast a decline of 2.6 million barrels.

In gasoline, there was an increase of 2.654 million barrels during the same week, versus the forecast 1.1-million-barrel drop. Gasoline is the primary motor fuel in the United States and makes up the largest component of the country's energy mix.

While there is “a ton of optimism on stock draws in July through September,” oil traders still need to buy into that idea, said Scott Shelton, crude futures analyst at ICAP in Durham, North Carolina.

“I think we have to draw heavily to support prices,” Shelton told ICAP clients in an email. To avoid sending US crude and Brent back below \$80 per barrel, “we just need to get everyone long before someone decides to pull the rug out from under the market.”

Notwithstanding demand, the oil rally has been driven by supply worries.

Caution over the Israel-Hamas war and other tensions in the Middle East, including in Lebanon, could impact supplies from the world’s most prolific oil-producing region, analysts have warned.

OPEC+, meanwhile, has committed to removing some 2.2 million barrels per day from the market through 2025 via the joint production of the 23 nations in the oil-producing alliance. The alliance groups the 13-member Saudi-led Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries with 10 other oil-producing nations steered by Russia.

These factors have periodically helped US crude rise above \$80 and Brent test highs near \$90.

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NATO to Announce New Senior Civilian Position for Ukraine at Washington Summit - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - NATO plans to station a new senior civilian official in Kiev and will announce the move during the alliance’s upcoming summit in Washington to facilitate long-term support for Ukraine, the Wall Street Journal reported on Monday.

In addition, the alliance is creating a new command in Wiesbaden, Germany, that will coordinate the provision of military equipment to Ukraine and will include nearly 700 US and other allied personnel, the report said.

The command will take over most of the functions that have been performed by the US military since 2022.

NATO has been planning these steps for a long time, but significantly accelerated their implementation after US President Joe Biden’s dismal performance in the debate with his challenger Donald Trump last week, and out of fear that providing military aid to Ukraine would be more difficult if Trump is reelected.

At the upcoming NATO summit, the alliance’s members may also announce an annual financial pledge of military support to Ukraine while the terms are still being worked out.

The 75th NATO summit will take place from July 9-11 in Washington.

According to reports, the United States and its allies have yet to reach a consensus on how much they will commit to Ukraine’s NATO membership.

Earlier in June, President Vladimir Putin said that Russia would immediately cease fire and begin negotiations with Ukraine after Kiev withdraws troops from the regions incorporated into Russia in 2022 and officially abandons plans to join NATO.

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Europe, Central Asia Have Lower Share of High-Income Countries Compared to 1987

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) – The share of high-income countries in Europe and Central Asia slightly decreased in 2023 compared with 1987, the World Bank said on Monday.

"Europe and Central Asia has a slightly lower share of high-income countries in 2023 (69%) than it did in 1987 (71%)," the World Bank said in a new report.

In 1987, 20 countries in the region were classified as high-income, while six had upper-middle income, two were called low-middle income states, and the other 30 were not classified, according to the report.

The data from 2023 showed that 40 states had a high income level, 15 were classified as upper-middle, and three as low-middle income countries, according to the report.

The World Bank also pointed out that the Middle East and North Africa had a higher share of low-income countries in 2023 (10%) than in 1987, when no countries were classified in this category.

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Democrats Could Select Biden as Nominee Early Following Poor Debate Performance - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - The Democratic National Committee could officially nominate US President Joe Biden as its 2024 presidential nominee as soon as mid-July to quell discussions about potentially replacing him after a poor performance on the debate stage against challenger Donald Trump, Bloomberg reported on Monday.

The Democratic convention's credentials committee could nominate Biden at a virtual meeting on July 21, the report said, citing people familiar with the matter.

The move would come in advance of the Democratic National Convention in Chicago on August 19, where the party typically selects its nominee.

Democrats already intended to nominate Biden ahead of the convention so that he could appear on the ballot in Ohio, which requires candidates to be certified by August 7, the report said.

Last week, Biden debated Trump at a CNN-hosted event in Atlanta. Biden's performance reportedly sparked talks among Democrats about replacing him as the nominee.

However, Biden campaign communications director Michael Tyler said that there have been no conversations about replacing Biden.

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Democrats Fear Losing Black Voters if Harris Not Tapped to Replace Biden - Analyst

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - Democrats may stick with President Joe Biden as their candidate in the November election as they fear losing key black support, especially among African American women voters, if they replace the incumbent with a white male or female candidate and not Kamala Harris, ret. US Marine Maj. Donald Vandergriff, a military historian and political analyst, told Sputnik.

"The Democrats by pushing DEI [diversity, equity and inclusion] and eliminating meritocracy, have put themselves in a dilemma," Vandergriff said. "If they get rid of Biden and try to replace him with a white male or female - California Governor Gavin Newsom or Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer - while ignoring Vice President Kamala Harris, will enrage their strongest base, the black females."

Discussions on how soon Biden may either resign or be forced to step down for medical reasons erupted across even the US mainstream media publications and web platforms following the president's poor performance in his Thursday night debate with former President Donald Trump.

If Biden does depart, his key loyal constituency among African American women may not vote for Republican candidate Donald Trump, but they will just not vote, Vandergriff said.

"They [Democrats] have also doubled down on policies that both scientifically and historically, fail and go against human nature. They will do the same with Biden," he explained.

Trump had successfully outmaneuvered the Democrats' political strategists by agreeing to do a CNN debate with Biden in Atlanta, Georgia on Thursday night, Vandergriff said.

"The Democratic evil games of lying are coming back to destroy them. Everyone but myself kept saying how Trump accepting to do a debate on CNN was crazy. But I saw the strategic foresight of Trump's decision," he said. "There was no way that [the Democrats and CNN] as Trump haters could cover up Biden's weakness as a man and president. It worked."

Following Biden's debate disaster, the Democrats will use "their brainwashed MSM and their extreme base to continue their attacks against Trump," especially on abortion, Vandergriff said.

"That is all they have. They are now on the extreme hope method," Vandergriff said.

Vandergriff also foresaw that Biden and his family would be reluctant to leave the White House.

"They want power because the walls are coming down against all the Bidens, and they can protect themselves only as long as Joe stays in power," Vandergriff said.

The Democrats would face even worse prospects if Vice President Kamala Harris succeeded him in office, Vandergriff warned.

"Will Kamala Harris take over? She is worse and more unpopular than Joe, and she doesn't even have any mental issues (that we know of). Even if they did replace Joe with Kamala, she would get beaten worse than Joe," he said.

The Democrats do not have any plausible candidates to replace Biden, Vandergriff observed.

"Who are the frontrunners for the Democratic convention in August if [Biden] goes before then? The bench for the Democrats is horrible as more and more people have begun to finally see the truth after nine years of Democratic propaganda against Trump, and gas lighting the US public on failed Democratic policies," he said.

While there is still short term strength in the Democrats unified under talking points, they have no broader reach as they could not tolerate diversity of opinion within their own ranks,

Vandergriff stated.

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World Bank Moves Russia From Upper-Middle-Income to High-Income Category

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - The World Bank announced on Monday that it has moved Russia from the upper-middle income level category to the high income one.

"This year, three countries - Bulgaria, Palau and Russia - moved from the upper-middle income to the high income category," the World Bank said in a new report.

Economic activity in Russia was influenced by a large increase in military-related activity in 2023. The growth was also boosted by a rebound in trade (+6.8%), the financial sector (+8.7%) and construction (+6.6%), the report said.

"These factors led to increases in both real (3.6%) and nominal (10.9%) GDP, and Russia's Atlas GNI per capita grew by 11.2%," the report added.

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Palestine Only State to Move Down in World Bank List of Countries by Income Level

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - Palestine became the only country that moved down in the World Bank's classification of countries by income level after its nominal GDP lost 9.2%, the World Bank said on in a new report Monday.

"West Bank and Gaza was the only country whose classification moved downward this year. The conflict in the Middle East began in October 2023 and while the impact on West Bank and Gaza was limited to the fourth quarter, its scale was nonetheless sufficient to lead to a 9.2% drop in nominal GDP (-5.5% in real terms)," the report said.

Since the economy was close to the threshold, these declines brought Atlas GNI [gross national income] per capita back down to the lower-middle-income category, the report added.

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US Victims of October 7 Attack Sue Iran, Syria, DPRK for Alleged Hamas Aid - Lawsuit

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - Over 125 victims of the October 7 attack on Monday filed a lawsuit in a US court against Iran, Syria, and North Korea, accusing them of providing material support to Hamas and demanding at least \$4 billion in damages, according to the lawsuit.

"Plaintiffs, by and through their undersigned counsel, bring this action against Defendants the Islamic Republic of Iran ('Iran'), the Syrian Arab Republic ('Syria'), and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea ('North Korea,' and, collectively with Iran and Syria, 'Defendants') seeking money damages for their personal injury and/or wrongful death claims arising out of the October 7 Attack – a coordination of extrajudicial killings, hostage takings, and related horrors for which the Defendants provided material support and resources," the lawsuit published by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and the law firm Crowell & Moring LLP said.

The lawsuit seeks at least \$1 billion in compensatory damages and \$3 billion in punitive damages against the defendants.

On October 7, 2023, the Palestinian organization Hamas launched an attack on Israel, killing nearly 1,200 people and abducting some 240 others. Israel subsequently began military operations in the Gaza Strip, which have killed more than 37,800 people and wounded more than 86,900 others, according to local authorities.

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Biden May Resign After Trump Debate Disaster But Decision Must Come From Him - Analyst

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden may yet be persuaded to step down within the next two weeks following his catastrophic performance in the debate with Donald Trump but the decision will have to be his own, political commentator Earl Rasmussen said on Monday.

"I think we will see something in the next two weeks," Rasmussen said. "But, it needs to be the president's choice and he needs to choose to step away from the campaign. Biden can be very stubborn quite often and argumentative."

Biden's performance in the 90-minute-long debate broadcast from the CNN studios in Atlanta, Georgia, on Thursday night was so poor and he appeared so disconnected that even prominent Democratic strategists admitted afterwards that they were appalled by it.

Since then, leading corporate media outlets have carried stories suggesting that Biden will step down soon and exploring who may eventually succeed him.

However, the long and cumbersome US selection and nomination process for the two major

national parties has already locked the president into place for his party's re-nomination.

Rasmussen pointed out that Biden already has the primary votes needed for the nomination but he needs to decide to step down and withdraw.

"If he does, then it will be thrown into the convention. This will open the nomination up to all and a lot of backroom politicking will take place until the necessary votes are obtained on the floor," Rasmussen said.

Otherwise, Biden could delay and go through the convention, accept the nomination then withdraw, where he or the vice presidential nominee would then go forward through the election, he said.

DRMOCRATIC PARTY THROWN INTO CHAOS, PANIC

Rasmussen said the Democratic Party leadership has been thrown into confusion and even panic by Biden's poor debate performance, and would face the dilemma to choose as his putative successor risked alienating key elements of support.

"Any of these cases is not good," he said. "Do they bypass [Vice President] Kamala Harris? Do they go with [Governor Gavin] Newsom from California or perhaps with [Governor Gretchen] Whitmer from Michigan? How do you balance the equity cards and not upset any part of the electorate and party?"

The Democrat Party leaders would probably seek to replace Harris with another candidate for the November election, even if she had temporarily succeeded Biden into the Oval Office before then, he said.

"That is a touchy subject and complicates the situation, especially if Biden withdraws later versus earlier or if not at all. I believe that they will try to ease someone else into the position. Ideally this should be done at the convention," Rasmussen said.

Other candidates would also be in the running if the August convention decided to bypass Harris as well as Biden, he said.

"I think Newsom and Whitmer will be leading the pack but other contenders include: Harris, [Secretary of Transportation Pete] Buttigieg, [Senator Amy] Klobuchar, [former Senator Mary] Landrieu and [Illinois Governor Jay] Pritzker. I would tend toward a woman, swing state and from the Midwest," Rasmussen said.

Whatever the choice, the Democratic convention in Chicago in August would make some unprecedented decisions and choices for the first time in nearly 100 years, he said.

Whomever the Democrats chose as their candidate, the outcome of the November election was still far from certain, Rasmussen said.

"No matter which direction the Democrats choose, they will have a close fight on their hands. Trump still is a vintage Trump but actually was slightly more controlled and confident [in last week's debate]," Rasmussen added.

First Lady Jill Biden pledged on Monday that the president would stay in the White House and fully contest the election campaign.

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State Dept. Says Aware of Reports IS Linked Group Smuggled Migrants Via Southern Border

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - The State Department is aware of reports that a network linked to the Islamic State terror group (outlawed in Russia) smuggled a few hundred migrants through the US southern border and works closely with partners in Central Asia on counterterrorism matters, State Department Deputy Press Secretary Vedant Patel said on Monday.

"We're aware of this report...Let me just say, though, that we work very closely with international counterparts, including our partners in Central Asia, on issues like counterterrorism partnerships, exchange information on potential threats and as well as improving screening capabilities," Patel said during a press briefing.

Last week, NBC reported that the Department of Homeland Security has identified over 400 immigrants who recently came to the United States from Central Asia and elsewhere as "subjects of concern" because they were brought by a smuggling network affiliated with the Islamic State.

The report said many of the more than 400 migrants crossed the US southern border and were released into the United States by US Customs and Border Protection because they were not on the government's terrorism watchlist.

More than 150 of these migrants of concern have been arrested, but the whereabouts of more than 50 others remain unknown, according to the report.

US Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said that these media reports are inaccurate.

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Man Stabbed at DC's Metro Center Station, Suspect in Custody - Metro Transit Police

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - A man was stabbed on a platform at the Metro Center station in Washington on Monday following a dispute, the DC Metro Transit Police Department (MTPD) said in a statement shared with Sputnik.

"Today, just before 12:40 p.m., MTPD officers responded to Metro Center for the report of a stabbing on the platform following a dispute. Preliminary investigation shows the victim, and the suspect were involved in an altercation when the suspect stabbed the victim multiple times," the statement said.

The suspect also threw a bicycle onto the tracks, with which a train collided, the statement said. Police detained the adult male suspect, the statement added.

The victim received critical but non-life-threatening injuries and was transported to a local hospital for treatment, the statement said.

Trains are single-tracking due to the ongoing investigation into the incident, the statement said.

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US Sees No Reason to Follow Arab League's Move to Remove Terror Label From Hezbollah

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - The United States has no intention of removing its terror organization designation from Hezbollah, US State Department Deputy Press Secretary Vedant Patel said on Monday.

On Saturday, the Arab League announced that it no longer classifies Hezbollah as a terrorist group.

"We believe that there is no reason to take steps to remove such a designation, and we have continued to urge governments around the world to designate, ban or restrict Hezbollah," Patel said during a press briefing.

The State Department is looking into the Arab League's decision, Patel said, adding that Hezbollah remains a dangerous terrorist organization and a destabilizing force in the Middle East.

Earlier on Monday, the German newspaper Bild reported that Israel may launch a military operation against Hezbollah in southern Lebanon in the second half of July.

On June 18, Israel announced it had approved operational plans for an offensive in Lebanon. Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz later said that Israel was very close to a decision to "change the rules" against Hezbollah and Lebanon, threatening to destroy the movement in an all-out war and to severely hit Lebanon.

Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah said that the movement could invade northern Israel if the confrontation intensifies further.

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Nebenzia Expects No Probe Outside Russia After ATACMS Attack on Sevastopol

UNITED NATIONS, July 1 (Sputnik) - No country except Russia will look into the deadly attack on Sevastopol that was carried out by Ukraine with ATACMS missiles containing a cluster payload and resulted in civilians deaths, Russian Ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia said on Monday.

"I do not expect any investigation outside of Russia," Nebenzia said during a UN briefing.

On June 23, Ukrainian forces attacked Sevastopol – the largest city on the Crimean Peninsula – using ATACMS missiles with cluster warheads provided by the US. Four of the missiles were shot down and one deflected, causing it to detonate over the city.

The attack claimed four lives, including two children, and injured 153 people, including 27 children.

The next day after the attack, Russia summoned US Ambassador in Moscow Lynne Tracy to express protest. The United States bears equal responsibility with Kiev for the missile strike on the civilian population of Sevastopol, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

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No Change in Status of US Missions in Europe Amid Military Bases Threats - US State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - US diplomatic missions in Europe have not changed their operating status despite potential threats to US military bases in the region, US State Department Principal Deputy Spokesperson Vedant Patel said on Monday.

"There has been no change in operating status of missions in the region," Patel said during a press briefing, in response to a question about the potential threats.

US European Command is redoubling efforts to stress vigilance during the summer months due to a combination of factors potentially impacting the safety and security of service members and their families stationed in the region, a US military official told Sputnik on Sunday.

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Ukraine Does Not Have Enough Troops to Launch Offensive - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - Ukraine does not have enough troops to launch a major offensive of any kind against Russian forces, the Wall Street Journal reported on Monday.

The report cited an intelligence official as saying that Ukraine has been able to replace losses on the battlefield and has some reserves, but it would need several times more personnel to launch any kind of major offensive against Russian forces.

Predicting any major moves on the battlefield by Russia can sometimes be difficult because throughout the conflict the Russian military has launched attacks that standard military doctrine would not foresee, the intelligence official said.

However, a senior US defense official said Ukrainian forces are "holding their own" through strategic strikes and movements despite Russia still making incremental battlefield gains.

Last week, former US President Donald Trump said during the first presidential debate that Ukraine is not winning the war and added that it is running out of soldiers.

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Nebenzia Says Int'l Community Has to Deal With Taliban as De-Facto Authorities

(Adds Taliban designation in lede, background in paras 3-4)

UNITED NATIONS, July 1 (Sputnik) - The Taliban (under UN sanctions for terrorism) are the de-facto authorities of Afghanistan and the international community should recognize it and deal with them, Russian Ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia said on Monday.

"Taliban is the de-facto authorities of Afghanistan. We have been saying consistently that you have to recognize this fact and deal with them as such," Nebenzia said during a UN briefing.

"This movement [Taliban] is running the country now."

The United Nations will continue to engage with the Taliban in Afghanistan while not decreasing its interactions with Afghan women and civil society, UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo said earlier in the day.

DiCarlo made the remarks after participating in the third UN-led meeting of special envoys on Afghanistan that was attended by the Taliban for the first time.

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Zelenskyy's Peace Formula Non-Starter, Russia Will Not Even Talk About It - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, July 1 (Sputnik) - The so-called peace formula of Volodymyr Zelenskyy is a non-starter, and Russia will not even discuss it, Russian Ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia said on Monday.

"To solve the problem on the basis of Zelenskyy peace formula, we will not even talk about it," Nebenzia said. "It's a non-starter."

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Nebenzia Says Trump's Claim Very Subjective, Ukraine Crisis Cannot Be Resolved in One Day

UNITED NATIONS, July 1 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump's claim that he can bring the Ukraine conflict to an end in one day is subjective as this crisis is much more complicated, Russian Ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia said on Monday.

"The Ukrainian crisis cannot be solved in one day, that's subjective," Nebenzia said during a UN briefing.

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Nebenzia Says Int'l Community Has to Deal With Taliban as De-Facto Authorities

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"This movement [Taliban] is running the country now."

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Nebenzia on Israel Sending Patriots to Ukraine: Decision May Have Political Consequences

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - A potential decision by Israel on sending Patriot missile systems to Ukraine may have political consequences, Russian Ambassador to the United

Nations Vassily Nebenzia said on Monday.

Last week, the Financial Times reported that the United States is in talks with Israeli and Ukrainian officials to send Patriot missile systems from Israel to Ukraine.

"We are discouraging all countries, that have not yet done so, from providing arms for Ukraine," Nebenzia said. "The destiny of the weapons that will be eventually exported to Ukraine, from wherever, the destiny is clear, they will be destroyed as the other weapons that the west, the US are supplying Ukraine with, but I presume that the decision that might be taken on the issue may of course have certain political consequences."

A US Defense Department spokesperson contacted by Sputnik on Thursday was unable to verify reports claiming that the United States was in talks with Israel about supplying Ukraine with additional Patriot air defense systems.

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Lavrov to Chair UNSC Debate on Gaza Escalation, Disastrous Consequences - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, July 1 (Sputnik) - Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will chair an open debate at the UN Security Council later in mid-July on the escalation in Gaza and Russia is encouraging ministerial-level participation, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said on Monday.

"Our second signature event is the open debate on the Middle East on 17 July. We anticipate Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Tor Wennesland will brief the [UN Security] Council," Nebenzia said. "The focus of the open discussion will be, as we envisage, on the continued escalation in Gaza and its disastrous consequences."

Nebenzia said both meetings - on July 16 and 17 - will be chaired by Lavrov.

"We encourage the Ministerial-level participation of other delegations too," Nebenzia added. Russia presides over the UN Security Council's rotating presidency during the month of July.

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Lavrov to Chair UNSC Debate on Truly Just World Order Parameters - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, July 1 (Sputnik) - Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will chair a UN Security Council debate on July 16 on multilateral cooperation as there is high demand for discussions on strategic security in the world, Russian Ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia said on Monday.

"On 16 July we will host our first signature event - Open Debate on the Maintenance of International Peace and Security: Multilateral Cooperation in the interest of a more just, democratic and sustainable world order," Nebenzia said during a UN briefing. "Both meetings - on 16 and 17 July - will be chaired by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. We encourage the ministerial-level participation of other delegations too."

Nebenzia added that there was a high demand in the international community for a strategic

discussion on the future security architecture beyond the current crisis. They proposed discussing the parameters of a truly just world order and the possible role of the UN in its establishment and maintenance.

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No Elements of US Adopted UN Resolution on Gaza Have Been Implemented - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, July 1 (Sputnik) - Not a single directive out of the latest UN Security Council resolution on Gaza has been implemented, Russian Ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia said on Monday.

“As Russia repeatedly warned, not a single element of the most recent resolution [on Gaza] adopted by the Council at the US initiative – 2735 – has been implemented, and it is still unclear what are the final parameters of the proposal and whether the parties agreed to accept it,” Nebenzia said during a UN briefing.

Russia is kicking off its UN Security Council presidency for the month of July.

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Israel Not Doing Enough to Develop Post-War Plans for Gaza – Blinken

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Monday that the US expected Israel to develop their own post-war plans for Gaza, but it had “not seen enough of that” so far.

“We’ve told the Israelis that we expected them to develop their own plans, their own ideas, and we’ve not seen enough of that from Israel,” Blinken said at a Brookings Institution event.

Blinken emphasized that a post-war plan must be in place before the conflict ends to prevent an unacceptable vacuum in Gaza, which could lead to Hamas leadership, Israeli occupation, or lawless chaos.

Blinken noted that the plans should cover governance, security, and reconstruction.

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FBI Says Not Tracking Any Credible Threats to NATO Summit Next Week

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - The FBI is not aware of any credible threats to the NATO leaders' summit that will be held in Washington next week, FBI Intelligence Analyst in Charge Nikki Flores said on Monday.

"At this time, we are not tracking any credible threats to the events themselves," Flores said during a press conference.

The FBI will evaluate any information it receives leading up to and during the summit and will

work with law enforcement partners to quickly respond to any issue, Flores said.

Flores noted that the US capital on a normal day is a target rich environment for potential threats so the public is encouraged to be vigilant and report any suspicious activity to law enforcement.

The Washington Metropolitan Police Department said there will be several demonstrations taking place in the city during the week of the summit.

The NATO leaders' summit will take place from July 9 to 11 at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center.

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Pentagon Confirms Austin Will Host Ukrainian Counterpart for Talks on Tuesday

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin will host his Ukrainian counterpart Rustem Umerov at the Pentagon on Tuesday for a bilateral meeting, a US Defense Department spokesperson confirmed to Sputnik on Monday.

"Yes, I can confirm," the spokesperson said.

The meeting will take place on Tuesday, but no details about the topics of the planned discussions were available.

Last week, Austin and Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov held a phone conversation and exchanged views on the situation around the Ukraine conflict.

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US Believes Neither Israel Nor Hezbollah Wants War at Present - Blinken

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - Neither Israel nor the Hezbollah movement want to engage in a full-scale war at present, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Monday.

"At this moment, at least in our judgment, none of the main actors actually want a war," Blinken said during a discussion at the Brookings Institution.

However, if a war does take place Lebanon will be the main victim, Blinken said.

The secretary of state also said that Iran is allegedly not interested in seeing Hezbollah being destroyed in a war.

Earlier on Monday, the German newspaper Bild reported that Israel may launch a military operation against Hezbollah in southern Lebanon in the second half of July.

On June 18, Israel announced it had approved operational plans for an offensive in Lebanon. Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz later said that Israel was very close to a decision to "change the rules" against Hezbollah and Lebanon, threatening to destroy the movement in an all-out war and to severely hit Lebanon.

Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah said that the movement could invade northern Israel if the confrontation intensifies further.

The situation on the Israeli-Lebanese border worsened after the start of Israel's military

operations in the Gaza Strip in October 2023. The IDF and Lebanese Hezbollah fighters fire at each other's positions in areas along the border on a daily basis. The Lebanese Foreign Ministry said that some 100,000 residents in the border areas had to leave their homes while the Israeli Foreign Ministry said that more than 80,000 Israelis did the same.

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US House Judiciary Panel Says Suing Garland for Defying Biden Interview Tape Subpoena

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - The US House Judiciary Committee said on Monday that it is suing US Attorney General Merrick Garland for refusing to comply with a subpoena to turn over audio recordings of President Joe Biden's interview with Special Counsel Robert Hur as part of a probe into Biden's mishandling of classified materials.

The panel released a complaint for declaratory and injunctive relief filed in the US District Court for the District of Columbia. The panel seeks the release of a recording of Hur's interview with Biden, as well as with the ghostwriter of his 2017 memoir, Mark Zwonitzer.

"The Committee ... asks this Court to overrule the assertion of executive privilege and order that Attorney General Garland produce the audio recordings of the Special Counsel's interviews with President Biden and Mr. Zwonitzer to the Committee," the filing said.

Earlier this month, the US House of Representatives passed a measure recommending that Garland be held in contempt of Congress for defying the subpoena to turn over the recording. However, the Justice Department, which Garland leads, said that it will not prosecute the attorney general for contempt of Congress.

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Boeing Delivers 1st Upgraded C-47F Chinook Heavy Lift Helicopter to US Army - Statement

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - Boeing announced on Monday that it has delivered the first of its latest block of Chinook CH-47 modernized heavy lift helicopters to the US Army.

"In support of ongoing US Army modernization efforts, Boeing delivered the first CH-47F Block II Chinook," Boeing said in a release. "The aircraft is one of up to 465 in the Army's fleet that will be modernized to the new Block II configuration."

The Block II program improves aircraft sustainment and the improved reliability of the helicopter's new rotor system minimizes unscheduled maintenance, the release said.

"The CH-47F Block II provides capability improvements allowing the US Army to lift more, fly farther and maintain their aircraft better than ever before," the release added.

The upgraded CH-47F Block II is equipped with an improved drivetrain, a reinforced airframe and enhanced fuel system, allowing it to carry an additional 4,000 pounds (1,814 kilos) of maximum gross weight while extending its mission radius for nearly all payloads, according to the release.

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Blinken Says US Will Compete Vigorously Against China's Global Aspirations

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Monday that the United States disagrees with China's vision for the future and will vigorously compete to shape it.

"We disagree and we're going to compete very vigorously to make sure that we're the ones who are effectively shaping that future," Blinken said during a discussion at the Brookings Institution.

Blinken made the remark in response to a question by Brookings Institution Foreign Policy Director Suzanne Maloney whether China seeks to compete or to dominate.

Blinken said China's vision for the future differs significantly from that of the United States and other countries.

China aims to become the leading global power in the economic, military and diplomatic realms over the coming decades, Blinken added.

Chinese President Xi Jinping said on April 26 that China is not afraid of being engaged in a competition but such a contest should be aimed at achieving common progress rather than become a zero-sum game.

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UPDATE 2-US Supreme Court Says Trump Immune From Prosecution for Official Acts, Not Unofficial Acts

(Update 2: adds details in paras 10-11)

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - The US Supreme Court said on Monday that former US President Donald Trump can claim immunity from prosecution on election subversion charges as it relates to official acts as president, although he could still face prosecution for unofficial acts.

"Held: Under our constitutional structure of separated powers, the nature of Presidential power entitles a former President to absolute immunity from criminal prosecution for actions within his conclusive and preclusive constitutional authority. And he is entitled to at least presumptive immunity from prosecution for all his official acts. There is no immunity for unofficial acts," the Supreme Court said in a ruling.

Lower courts denied Trump's motion to dismiss the election subversion indictment against him based on claims of presidential immunity and declined to decide on whether the indicted conduct involved official acts. The Supreme Court vacated the rulings and remanded the case.

Certain allegations in the case against Trump are readily categorized while others present "more difficult questions," the ruling said.

The ruling is a "big win" for the US Constitution and democracy, Trump said in a statement via social media platform Truth.

The court has recognized presidential immunities and privileges as rooted in the constitutional

tradition of the separation of powers and supported by US history, the ruling said. The threat of trial and imprisonment could distort presidential decision-making, the ruling said.

Justice Sonia Sotomayor said in a dissenting opinion that the majority's reasoning could allow a president to assassinate a political rival or launch a coup to retain power using US military forces.

"When he uses his official powers in any way, under the majority's reasoning, he now will be insulated from criminal prosecution. Orders the Navy's Seal Team 6 to assassinate a political rival? Immune. Organizes a military coup to hold onto power? Immune. Takes a bribe in exchange for a pardon? Immune. Immune, immune, immune," the dissenting opinion said.

The immunity recognized by the court extends to the "outer perimeter" of the president's official responsibilities, covering actions so long as they are not "manifestly or palpably" beyond the authority of the office, the ruling said.

The ruling does not "change the facts" about Trump's alleged involvement in the January 6 US Capitol riot, US President Joe Biden's 2024 campaign said in a statement.

Trump believes he is above the law and is willing to do anything to gain and retain power, the statement said.

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US Supreme Court Says Trump Immune From Prosecution for Official Acts

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Blinken Says People Worldwide 'Like' Policies Biden Pursuing Over Three and Half Years

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - People around the world are looking at what US President Joe Biden has done over the past three and a half years and not during just one debate night,

and most of them are in favor of the policies and choices he has been pursuing, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Monday.

"I think what the world knows, the world has experienced over 3.5 years, not one night, is exactly the kind of leadership that he's brought to bear on problems that are common for so many countries, particularly so many of the democracies around the world," Blinken said in the wake of Thursday's first US presidential debate, when asked what American friends and foes should know about US leadership today. "What I'm seeing, what I'm hearing is, again, people are looking at the last 3.5 years, they're looking at policies, they're looking at policy choices. And for the most part, they like the choices and the policies that this President is pursuing."

Blinken said he sees a desire and thirst across the world for US engagement and leadership. "Even when we have disagreements with countries, they still want us in this and even leading to try to get to a better place. And they've seen a president who's reinvested America, reinvested America in the world, reinvested in these alliances in these partnerships, in ways that they seek and want," Blinken said during an event at the Brookings Institution in Washington.

Blinken also stated that surveys around the world show that confidence in American leadership has gone up dramatically over the last three and a half years.

"That doesn't just happen. It's the product of choices, it's the product of policies that we pursue as the product of our engagement," he added. "And they see President Biden having led the way in all of those different areas, and in ways that are bringing people together and focused in the same way on the challenges that we have before us and that are common to so many other countries."

Biden appeared confused and incoherent throughout his first debate with Republican frontrunner Trump last Thursday, reinforcing rather than refuting ongoing concerns about his cognitive abilities at age 81. His poor performance has led some Democratic politicians, donors, and other supporters to call for him to step aside.

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Canada's Unknown Soldier of World War I Buried at National War Memorial in Newfoundland

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - Canada's Unknown Soldier of World War I on Monday was placed at his final resting place at the National War Memorial in St. John, Newfoundland.

Members of the Canadian Armed Forces buried the coffin of the Unknown Soldier at the memorial during a ceremony dedicated to Canada Day and the 100th anniversary of the memorial.

"Today, we commemorate the very long journey. One that began more than 100 years ago," Newfoundland's Premier Andrew Furey said during the ceremony.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and other cabinet members laid flowers to commemorate all Canadian soldiers who lost their lives.

Canadian Armed Forces chaplain Lt. Col. Shawn Samson said during the ceremony that the gathered bear witness to the end of a pilgrimage that has brought the earthly remains of a Newfoundlander to his final resting place.

Thousands of Canadians and dozens of military veterans attended the gathering to pay their

respects despite the rainy weather.

"We give thanks for the freedom we enjoy, freedom to think, freedom to speak, freedom to choose and to make choices every day. We remember those who bought this freedom for us," one of the veterans said.

The procession was accompanied by a 19-rifle salute that lasted 19 minutes.

On July 1, 1916, 780 members of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment went on the offensive at Beaumont-Hamel in France during World War I and 110 soldiers survived. The engagement marked the beginning of the Battle of the Somme.

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Taliban Raised Issue of Sanctions at UN Meeting, Up to Member States to Discuss - DiCarlo

UNITED NATIONS, July 1 (Sputnik) - The Taliban (under UN sanctions for terrorism) raised the issue of sanctions during a UN-led meeting on Afghanistan in Qatar, but the matter is up to member states to decide, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo said on Monday.

From June 30-July 1, Doha hosted the Third Meeting of Special Envoys on Afghanistan attended by the Taliban for the first time. The UN was represented by DiCarlo.

"The sanctions issue - obviously it was raised, it's a concern for the Taliban. We didn't really elaborate on it. Again, on sanctions - it's a member state issue, whether they're going to continue certain sanctions or not," DiCarlo told journalists.

Therefore, there was no in-depth discussion on the topic, she added.

The first two Doha meetings, chaired by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and attended by special envoys on Afghanistan from several countries, took place in May 2023 and February 2024 in the absence of Taliban representatives.

The Taliban came to power in Afghanistan in August 2021, toppling the US-backed government as US and NATO troops were leaving the country after almost 20 years of military presence there. Numerous countries and international organizations responded to the militant takeover by cutting aid to and ties with Kabul.

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UPDATE - US Supreme Court Says Trump Immune From Prosecution for Official Acts, Not Unofficial Acts

(Updates to add details in paras 5-9)

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"Held: Under our constitutional structure of separated powers, the nature of Presidential power

entitles a former President to absolute immunity from criminal prosecution for actions within his conclusive and preclusive constitutional authority. And he is entitled to at least presumptive immunity from prosecution for all his official acts. There is no immunity for unofficial acts," the Supreme Court said in a ruling.

Lower courts denied Trump's motion to dismiss the election subversion indictment against him based on claims of presidential immunity and declined to decide on whether the indicted conduct involved official acts. The Supreme Court vacated the rulings and remanded the case.

Certain allegations in the case against Trump are readily categorized while others present "more difficult questions," the ruling said.

The ruling is a "big win" for the US Constitution and democracy, Trump said in a statement via social media platform Truth Social.

The court has recognized presidential immunities and privileges as rooted in the constitutional tradition of the separation of powers and supported by US history, the ruling said. The threat of trial and imprisonment could distort presidential decision-making, the ruling said.

Justice Sonia Sotomayor said in a dissenting opinion that the majority's reasoning could allow a president to assassinate a political rival or launch a coup to retain power using US military forces.

"When he uses his official powers in any way, under the majority's reasoning, he now will be insulated from criminal prosecution. Orders the Navy's Seal Team 6 to assassinate a political rival? Immune. Organizes a military coup to hold onto power? Immune. Takes a bribe in exchange for a pardon? Immune. Immune, immune, immune," the dissenting opinion said.

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Democrats Fear Losing Black Voters if Harris Not Tapped to Replace Biden - Analyst

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - Democrats may stick with President Joe Biden as their candidate in the November election as they fear losing key black support, especially among African American women voters, if they replace the incumbent with a white male or female candidate and not Kamala Harris, ret. US Marine Maj. Donald Vandergriff, a military historian and political analyst, told Sputnik.

"The Democrats by pushing DEI [diversity, equity and inclusion] and eliminating meritocracy, have put themselves in a dilemma," Vandergriff said. "If they get rid of Biden and try to replace him with a white male or female - California Governor Gavin Newsom or Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer - while ignoring Vice President Kamala Harris, will enrage their strongest base, the black females."

Discussions on how soon Biden may either resign or be forced to step down for medical reasons erupted across even the US mainstream media publications and web platforms following the president's poor performance in his Thursday night debate with former President Donald Trump.

If Biden does depart, his key loyal constituency among African American women may not vote for Republican candidate Donald Trump, but they will just not vote, Vandergriff said.

"They [Democrats] have also doubled down on policies that both scientifically and historically, fail and go against human nature. They will do the same with Biden," he explained.

Trump had successfully outmaneuvered the Democrats' political strategists by agreeing to do a CNN debate with Biden in Atlanta, Georgia on Thursday night, Vandergriff said.

"The Democratic evil games of lying are coming back to destroy them. Everyone but myself kept saying how Trump accepting to do a debate on CNN was crazy. But I saw the strategic foresight of Trump's decision," he said. "There was no way that [the Democrats and CNN] as Trump haters could cover up Biden's weakness as a man and president. It worked."

Following Biden's debate disaster, the Democrats will use "their brainwashed MSM and their extreme base to continue their attacks against Trump," especially on abortion, Vandergriff said.

"That is all they have. They are now on the extreme hope method," Vandergriff said.

Vandergriff also foresaw that Biden and his family would be reluctant to leave the White House.

"They want power because the walls are coming down against all the Bidens, and they can protect themselves only as long as Joe stays in power," Vandergriff said.

The Democrats would face even worse prospects if Vice President Kamala Harris succeeded him in office, Vandergriff warned.

"Will Kamala Harris take over? She is worse and more unpopular than Joe, and she doesn't even have any mental issues (that we know of). Even if they did replace Joe with Kamala, she would get beaten worse than Joe," he said.

The Democrats do not have any plausible candidates to replace Biden, Vandergriff observed.

"Who are the frontrunners for the Democratic convention in August if [Biden] goes before then? The bench for the Democrats is horrible as more and more people have begun to finally see the truth after nine years of Democratic propaganda against Trump, and gas lighting the US public on failed Democratic policies," he said.

While there is still short term strength in the Democrats unified under talking points, they have no broader reach as they could not tolerate diversity of opinion within their own ranks, Vandergriff stated.

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UN to Continue Engaging With Taliban Without Decreasing Involvement With Women - Official

UNITED NATIONS, July 1 (Sputnik) - The United Nations will continue to engage with the ruling Taliban in Afghanistan but will not decrease its interactions with women and civil society, UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo said on Monday.

"I think we have a way forward for continued engagement and we will do so," DiCarlo said. "We certainly are not going to decrease in any way our involvement with women, civil society, minority groups on the ground."

DiCarlo said the United Nations has a mission to engage with the people of Afghanistan and that mission has been implemented on the ground for more than 20 years.

DiCarlo made the comments during a press conference following the third meeting of special

envoys on Afghanistan in Doha, Qatar.

The first two meetings, chaired by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, took place in May 2023 and February 2024 but were not attended by Taliban representatives.

The Taliban came to power in Afghanistan in August 2021 after it toppled the US-backed government. At the time, the US and NATO troops were leaving the country after almost 20 years of military presence there.

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US Supreme Court Tosses Challenges to State Laws on Online Content Moderation - Ruling

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - The US Supreme Court on Monday threw out legal challenges to state-level laws in Florida and Texas that restrict online platforms' ability to moderate content.

Florida and Texas passed laws in 2021 that limit platforms' capacity to filter, prioritize and label content. The laws were challenged by two groups who claimed that the laws violate the First Amendment of the US Constitution, which enshrines rights to freedom of speech and the press.

District courts in both states entered preliminary injunctions. The Eleventh Circuit upheld the injunction of Florida's law, whereas the Fifth Circuit reversed the injunction of Texas' law.

"Held: The judgments are vacated, and the cases are remanded, because neither the Eleventh Circuit nor the Fifth Circuit conducted a proper analysis of the facial First Amendment challenges to Florida and Texas laws regulating large internet platforms," the Supreme Court said in a ruling.

The courts did not address the full range of activities covered by the laws or measure the constitutional against the unconstitutional applications, the ruling said.

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Elon Musk Calls Out Kamala Harris for Lying About Trump's 'Plan' to Ban Abortion

WASHINGTON, July 1 (Sputnik) - Billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk on Monday called out US Vice President Kamala Harris for lying on his social media platform about former President Donald Trump's alleged plans to ban abortion nationwide if he wins reelection.

"When will politicians, or at least the intern who runs their account, learn that lying on this platform doesn't work anymore?" Musk said in an X post.

On Sunday, Harris wrote in an X post that Trump "would ban abortion nationwide" while incumbent US President Joe Biden will do everything to prevent him from doing that.

After Harris published her post, an X user added a community note with context citing five articles in major news outlets, including CNN, Associated Press, and BBC, that prove that Trump has repeatedly said he will not sign a national abortion ban.

Last week, Harris also accused Trump of being responsible for allowing states to limit women's access to abortion. Trump appointed three justices to the US Supreme Court as president, all of whom joined in the June 2022 decision to return the right to regulate abortions to the states.

In April, Trump released a statement outlining his position on abortion, which drew criticism from both pro-abortion and anti-abortion activists. Trump said that it is up to states to enact varying abortion policies as they see fit.