

7/8/24 Monday

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IDF Soldiers Detail Policies of Shooting Civilians, Destroying Homes - Report

On Monday, Independent media outlet +972 Magazine released a report detailing interviews the outlet did with Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers, which describe a policy that allowed soldiers to virtually fire at will and required soldiers to burn the homes of Palestinians that they occupied.

The interviewees also alleged that the bodies of Palestinian civilians were allowed to rot in the street and were only hidden by the IDF before international organizations traveled through the area.

One soldier [testified](#) that soldiers often would fire indiscriminately to blow off steam during the operation. "They report it as 'normal fire,' which is a codename for 'I'm bored, so I shoot.'" Another soldier said there was "total freedom of action," for the IDF in Gaza. "If there is [even] a feeling of threat, there is no need to explain – you just shoot," the soldier described. "It is permissible to shoot at their center mass, not into the air. It's permissible to shoot everyone, a young girl, an old woman."

That same soldier claimed that "every man between the ages of 16 and 50 is suspected of being a terrorist."

The soldiers also described a policy of the IDF that would designate certain areas as "no-go zones," where any Palestinian entering would be shot. Some of those areas allowed international aid trucks to travel through, but any civilians trying to follow them would be shot. "This is the default. No civilians are supposed to be in the area, that's the perspective," one soldier explained. "We spotted someone in a window, so they fired and killed him."

As the bodies piled up, the IDF left them to rot, one soldier says, only removing them before international organizations arrived in the area.

"The whole area was full of bodies," he said, continuing later that "A D-9 [bulldozer] goes down, with a tank, and clears the area of corpses, buries them under the rubble, and flips [them] aside so that the convoys don't see it – [so that] images of people in advanced stages of decay don't come out."

"The feeling in the war room, and this is the softened version, was that every person we killed, we counted him as a terrorist," A soldier said, adding that while certain sensitive targets, like schools, hospitals, religious institutions and buildings of international organizations required higher authorization, it was almost always granted.

"I can count on one hand the cases where we were told not to shoot. Even with sensitive things like schools, [approval] feels like only a formality."

One soldier, Yuval Green, a 26-year-old reservist who was one of 41 IDF reservists who signed a letter declaring their refusal to continue serving in Gaza, was willing to go on the record with +972. He and another anonymous soldier described a policy of torching Palestinian homes after the IDF used them.

“If you move, you have to burn down the house,” Green said. Another soldier backed Green’s account and said orders to burn homes came from higher-ups in the IDF. “Before you leave, you burn down the house – every house,” The soldier said. “This is backed up at the battalion commander level. It’s so that [Palestinians] won’t be able to return, and if we left behind any ammunition or food, the terrorists won’t be able to use it.”

“We destroyed everything we wanted to,” Green said. “This is not out of a desire to destroy, but a total indifference to everything that belongs to [Palestinians]. Every day, a D-9 demolishes houses. I haven’t taken before-and-after photos, but I’ll never forget how a neighborhood that was really beautiful... is reduced to sand.”

According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, at least 38,200. However, a report in the British medical journal Lancet estimated that the actual death toll could be over 186,000, roughly 8% of Gaza’s population.

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Hillary Clinton, Kamala Harris Lead Trump and Biden - Poll

WASHINGTON, July 9 (Sputnik) – Former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Vice President Kamala Harris are leading both Donald Trump and US President Joe Biden amid widespread calls for a new Democratic presidential nominee, according to a Bendixen & Amadi poll shared with Politico.

The poll, which was taken after Biden’s disastrous performance during the recent presidential debate with Trump, found that Trump was ahead of Biden, 42% to 41%. Only 29% of respondents said Biden possessed the mental and physical fitness to serve another presidential term and only 33% said he should continue as the Democratic presidential nominee.

Moreover, Clinton and Harris were both ahead of Trump at 43% to 41% and 42% to 41%, respectively. A Clinton-Harris ticket was also found to beat Trump 43% to 40% - a wider margin than a Biden-Harris ticket.

Other Democrats said to have presidential ambitions polled behind Trump. California Governor Gavin Newsom trailed Trump, 37% to 40%, and Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer trailed Trump, 36% to 40%.

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Hurricane Beryl Kills 7 People in Texas, Louisiana - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 9 (Sputnik) – Hurricane Beryl has killed at least seven people in Texas and Louisiana, NBC News reported on Tuesday, citing local authorities.

At least six people died in Texas, and one death is confirmed in Louisiana, the report said.

Most people died after trees fell on them, according to the report. Three of the casualties were confirmed in Montgomery County in Texas.

Beryl also caused massive power outages in affected areas. As of Tuesday morning, more than

2.3 million customers have no power in Texas and over 40,000 in Louisiana and Arkansas, according to the poweroutage.us portal.

George Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston has canceled almost 300 flights, according to the flightaware.com website.

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RPT: PREVIEW - All Eyes on Biden as NATO Meets in Washington to Talk Ukraine, Indo-Pacific

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Founded at the onset of the Cold War, NATO marked its anniversary by expanding to 32 members after the addition of Sweden and implementing the largest reinforcement in a generation amid the Ukraine conflict.

During the three-day summit, NATO is expected to provide Ukraine with a "bridge" to membership, while stopping short of extending an official invitation to join its ranks.

SCHEDULE

On Tuesday evening, Biden will welcome his NATO counterparts at the Andrew W. Mellon Auditorium, the site of the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty that established the alliance on April 4, 1949.

On July 10, the president will welcome Sweden as the 32nd member of the alliance at a NATO leaders' meeting. Later in the evening, he will host his NATO counterparts for a dinner at the White House.

On July 11, NATO will hold a meeting with non-NATO guests - Australia, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand - to deepen their cooperation. On the same day, a NATO-Ukraine Council meeting will take place. Biden will also host an event with Volodymyr Zelenskyy and nearly two dozen countries that have signed bilateral security agreements with Kiev.

The US has also reportedly invited the foreign ministers of Israel and several Arab countries to the summit as the war in Gaza grinds on.

UKRAINE 'BRIDGE' TO MEMBERSHIP

Ukraine will not receive an invitation to join NATO at the upcoming summit, but will be provided with an institutional "bridge" to membership, White House National Security Council Director for Europe Michael Carpenter said in June. Washington is "very cautious" about how deeply NATO is engaged in Ukraine, Carpenter claimed.

The alliance, however, will make new "significant" announcements on bolstering its military, political, and financial support for Kiev.

The focus will be placed on strengthening Ukraine's air defense capability.

NATO during the summit will also take over the coordination of some of the assistance going to Ukraine as well as training, US envoy to the alliance Julianne Smith said last week.

In addition, NATO is expected to appoint a representative in Kiev who will oversee its efforts to modernize the Ukrainian armed forces.

GREATER ROLE IN INDO-PACIFIC

Global partnerships is another key topic on the summit's agenda.

The summit will seek to strengthen partnerships with countries in the Indo-Pacific region, including with Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea, outgoing NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg said last week.

Stoltenberg claimed that NATO needs to look to the Indo-Pacific in light of the growing cooperation between Russia, China, North Korea and Iran. He also labeled China as "the main enabler" of Russia's military operation in Ukraine.

The 32 allies and the Indo-Pacific partners will work closely on the situation in Ukraine as well as defense industry cooperation, Stoltenberg said.

NATO also plans to issue the first joint document on expanding cooperation with the four Indo-Pacific partners, Japanese daily Nikkei Asia reported last week.

BIDEN'S LEADERSHIP

Following the marathon summit, Biden will do a solo "big boy press conference," the White House said. The event could provide a chance for Biden to rally support for his candidacy in the wake of his shaky performance during the first presidential debate against Trump last month.

In response to calls on him to drop out, including from several sitting Democratic lawmakers, Biden admitted that he had a bad debate night but stated he can beat the presumptive Republican nominee.

Biden's performance has also raised concerns among US allies, particularly within NATO. Bloomberg reported last week that European officials are saying privately that Biden should quit the presidential race and make way for a different candidate from the Democratic Party.

They also reportedly have concerns about how he will host the NATO summit, during which his every move will be under scrutiny.

The White House has said that it sees no indications that its NATO allies have doubts about Biden's leadership and capability.

During the CNN hosted debate in Atlanta in June, Biden notably reiterated that the US's "strength lies in our alliances as well" and asked Trump: "You're going to stay in NATO or you're going to pull out of NATO?"

Trump tilted his head in a shrug. He also bragged that he got NATO allies to spend more on defense.

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Parkinson's Disease Specialist Visited White House At Least 8 Times Since 2023

WASHINGTON, July 9 (Sputnik) - A top Parkinson's disease specialist at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center has visited the White House at least eight times since August 2023, visitor logs released by the White House stated.

According to the released records, Dr. Kevin Cannard, a neurologist at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, met with White House physician Dr. Kevin O'Connor or other staff members at the White House throughout this period.

Cannard has visited the White House three times this year: January 17, January 26 and March

28, according to White House visitor logs. Moreover, he has visited the White House at least five other times from mid-2023 through the end of the year.

Earlier in the day, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said Biden has not been treated for Parkinson's disease.

Moreover, last week amid the speculation over Cannard's visit to the White House, Biden signed into law the Dr. Emmanuel Bilirakis and Honorable Jennifer Wexton National Plan to End Parkinson's Act, which helps provide further support in the fight against Parkinson's and related neurodegenerative diseases like Wexton's Progressive Supranuclear Palsy (PSP).

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Leidos Wins \$51Mln Contract to Boost North American Missile Defense System - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, July 9 (Sputnik) - Leidos has received a more than \$51 million US Air Force contract to enhance the North American defense command's missile warning system, the Department of Defense announced in a press release.

"Leidos [of] Reston, Virginia, was awarded a \$51,443,980 cost-plus-incentive-fee missile warning missile threat enhancement contract," the release stated on Monday.

The contract provides the North American Aerospace Defense Command located at the Cheyenne Mountain Complex-Integrated Tactical Warning and Attack Assessment (NCCMC-ITW/AA) system to obtain essential services to enhance the Combatant Commanders Integrated Command and Control Systems (CCIC2S) missile warning capabilities, the Defense Department explained.

Leidos "will also develop the capability within non-traditional source-processing and display to process, display, and evaluate high fidelity data from non-traditional data sources for integration into the CCIC2S enterprise," the release explained.

Work on the project will be performed in Colorado Springs, Colorado over the next five years and is expected to be completed by July 1, 2029, the Defense Department said.

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Tropical Storm Beryl Leaves 2Mln Texans Without Power, Outage Expected for Days -Officials

WASHINGTON, July 9 (Sputnik) - Tropical Storm Beryl has left at least 2.1 million residents in Texas without power, and recovery efforts may take several days for some residents, according to Texas officials.

"Hurricane Beryl has severely impacted the Houston area and there are currently more than 2.1 million electric customers without power," CenterPoint Energy said in a statement on Monday.

Galveston County officials neighboring the city of Houston said in a separate statement that utility providers are in the process of trying to restore power to homes and businesses as quickly as possible but warned they may be without power through this upcoming weekend.

Tropical Storm Beryl hit the Texas shore as a Category 1 hurricane earlier on Monday but was

downgraded later in the day.

At least three people have died because of the storm, media reported.

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Biden After Reports of Strikes on Kiev Reiterates Plans to Bolster Ukrainian Air Defenses

WASHINGTON, July 9 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said in a statement that the United States and its NATO allies will announce plans to bolster Ukrainian air defenses, following reports of recent Russian strikes on Kiev.

"Together with our allies, we will be announcing new measures to strengthen Ukraine's air defenses to help protect their cities and civilians from Russian strikes," Biden said on Monday. NATO is set to hold a summit in Washington this week. Earlier on Monday, the White House National Security Council said that the US will soon announce full details of its plans to strengthen Ukrainian air defenses.

The Russian Defense Ministry said that Ukrainian claims regarding the strikes on Kiev do not correspond with reality. Footage from Kiev shows that the destruction was caused by a fallen Ukrainian air-defense missile launched from a system in the city, the ministry said.

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US Army Orders \$99.1Mln More Mortar Fire Control Systems From DRS Network - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, July 9 (Sputnik) - DRS Network & Imaging Systems has won a nearly \$100 million US Army to provide hardware for mortar fire control systems, the Department of Defense announced in a press release.

"DRS Network & Imaging Systems LLC, Melbourne, Florida, was awarded a \$99,100,000 firm-fixed-price contract for FireCon-Pro Mortar Fire Control Systems hardware and training services," the release said on Monday.

Work on the contract is scheduled to last five years with an estimated completion date of July 28, 2029, the Defense Department said.

The US Army Contracting Command in Newark, New Jersey will oversee work on the project as its contracting activity, the Defense Department said.

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Draft of NATO Joint Statement May Claim Kiev's Path Into Alliance 'Irreversible' - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 9 (Sputnik) - A draft text of the NATO joint communique planned to be released later this week may state that Ukraine's path into the alliance is irreversible, CNN

reported, citing unnamed sources familiar with the matter.

The report said on Monday that this joint statement could send a strong signal to Kiev amid Russia's special military operation.

NATO leaders will convene in Washington from July 9-11 to discuss a range of issues, especially Russia's special military operation in Ukraine.

White House officials have said that significant deliverables are expected at the NATO leaders' summit this week, including announcements of additional security assistance for Ukraine. However, an invite to Ukraine to join the alliance has been ruled out.

In April, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg during a visit to Kiev said Ukraine has a rightful place in NATO and that the alliance is working on placing it on an irreversible path toward membership in NATO when the time may be right.

Russia has repeatedly said it stands against Ukraine's membership in NATO due to national security concerns, but never opposed Kiev's aspirations to join the European Union.

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US Announcing Second \$2Bln Foreign Military Financing Loan to Poland - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 9 (Sputnik) - The United States is entering a \$2 billion Foreign Military Financing direct loan agreement with Poland, US State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a statement.

"Poland is a stalwart US Ally, and this deal will further strengthen NATO's Eastern Flank. Poland is undertaking a major military modernization program, including purchases of US defense equipment such as F-35 aircraft, Patriot missile systems, and Abrams main battle tanks," the statement said on Monday.

The US is providing up to \$60 billion in Foreign Military Financing to subsidize the interest rate cost of the loan, the statement said.

The loan will help accelerate Poland's defense modernization by supporting urgent procurement of defense articles and services from the US, the statement added.

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US Oil Loses Most in Day in 2 Weeks, Hurricane Beryl Reinforces Demand Worries

NEW YORK, July 9 (Sputnik) - US crude prices fell the most in a day since late June as Hurricane Beryl shut down a number of domestic refineries on Monday, reinforcing worries about demand from fuel processors in the United States.

US West Texas Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude settled at \$82.33 per barrel, down 83 cents, or 1%, on the day. It was WTI's sharpest one-day drop since June 21. Despite that, the US crude benchmark remained up \$10.68 per barrel since the end of 2023, leaving it up 15% for this year.

UK-origin Brent crude settled at \$85.75, down 79 cents, or 0.9% on the day. Year-to-date, the global crude benchmark is up \$8.71 per barrel, or 11%.

Oil's 2024 rally began with threats to supply caused by geopolitical developments and output cuts by producers in the 23-nation OPEC+ alliance led by Saudi Arabia and Russia.

Lately though, the run-up in crude prices has been powered by bets that the summer season, the busiest for travel in the United States, will result in huge drawdowns in crude stockpiles as refiners race to make enough fuels to feed everything from cars to trucks, airplanes and ships.

Hurricane Beryl could dilute some of that demand optimism. Downgraded to a tropical storm upon making landfall in Texas, Beryl killed at least two people, knocked out power to more than two million homes and businesses and flooded streets.

More importantly for the oil industry, the storm forced the closure of major oil-shipping ports in Texas, which serves as the heartland of US energy. Shell and Chevron were among major names in oil that took precaution by evacuating workers from the Gulf of Mexico, which wraps around Texas.

Media reports suggested that those actions, put together, could impact not just the export of US crude to overseas destinations but also the transport of crude to domestic refineries, as well as the distribution of motor fuel to service stations.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, July 9 (Sputnik) -

NATO SUMMIT

* The United States sees no indications that its NATO allies have doubts about President Joe Biden's leadership and capability, White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said on Monday.

* NATO is not seeking to ask partners in the Indo-Pacific to join the alliance but instead hopes to strengthen cooperation with them, US Ambassador to NATO Julianne Smith said.

* US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said that he expects Ukraine to be in NATO's future.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* The death toll after the shelling of the Nikolskoe village in Russia's Belgorod Region on Monday increased to three, Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said.

* Russia will familiarize Ukraine and Western allies with the facts regarding the "missile attack on a children hospital in Kiev" during the upcoming meeting of the UN Security Council, Russian Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Dmitriy Polyanskiy said.

* Russia's Iskander missile systems have destroyed HIMARS launchers used by the Ukrainian

armed forces to attack Sevastopol on June 23, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

* The chemical laboratory that was discovered in Avdeyevka (also known as Avdiivka) has been used for the production of toxic substances, Lt. Gen. Igor Kirillov, the head of the Troops of Radiological, Chemical and Biological Defense of the Russian armed forces, said,

US PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

* US President Joe Biden doubled down on Monday on his intent for reelection, saying he was the only candidate the Democratic Party could count on to beat his challenger and former Republican president Donald Trump.

* Biden sent a letter to the Democratic members of Congress to reassure them that he is "firmly committed" to staying in the presidential race, despite his debate debacle.

* The US Republican National Committee adopted former President Donald Trump's 2024 platform, the Trump campaign said.

RUSSIA-INDIA TALKS

* Russian President Vladimir Putin and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi are holding an informal meeting in the Novo-Ogaryovo residence of the Russian leader on Monday.

* Putin congratulated Modi on his recent reelection during an informal meeting at the Novo-Ogaryovo residence.

* Modi said that he is looking forward to the official meeting with Putin on Tuesday, adding that the upcoming talks will further strengthen the friendship between the countries.

* Stronger ties between India and Russia will benefit the peoples of the two countries, Modi said.

RUSSIA-IRAN RELATIONS

* Moscow and Tehran effectively coordinate efforts to address pressing issues on the international agenda, Russian President Vladimir Putin told Iranian President-elect Masoud Pezeshkian in a congratulatory message, published by the Kremlin on Monday.

* Putin congratulated Pezeshkian on his election victory during a phone conversation, the Kremlin said.

* Moscow expects to continue close partnership relations with Tehran after the end of the presidential elections in the country, and bilateral relations show positive dynamics in the context of further development, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

UNREST IN FRANCE

* French President Emmanuel Macron asked French Prime Minister Gabriel Attal to remain in office after elections, BFM TV reported on Monday.

* Jordan Bardella, the leader of France's right-wing National Rally party, said on Monday that a year of "political instability" is expected after parliamentary elections, adding that the left-wing New Popular Front and Macron's supporters are to blame.

* Russia has been closely watching the French legislative elections, given their significance and the changing voting preferences, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

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Democrat US Congressman Smith Says Biden Should 'Step Aside' in Presidential Race

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - US Democratic Congressman Adam Smith on Monday said he thinks President Joe Biden should drop out of the 2024 presidential race and allow another Democratic candidate enter the run.

"I think he should step aside," Smith said in an interview with CNN. "I think it's become clear that he's not the person to carry the Democratic message."

Smith, the ranking member of the US House Armed Services Committee, said he believes Biden has done a great job throughout his presidency, but added that Democrats need someone who can effectively represent the Democratic party.

Smith mentioned that he thinks Vice President Kamala Harris would be a much better and stronger candidate than Biden.

Earlier on Monday, Biden sent a letter to the Democratic members of Congress to reassure them that he is "firmly committed" to staying in the presidential race despite his poor showing in

the first presidential debate last month.

Biden appeared confused and incoherent throughout his first debate with presumptive Republican nominee Donald Trump on June 27, reinforcing rather than refuting ongoing concerns about his cognitive abilities at age 81. His poor performance has led some Democratic politicians and donors to call for his removal as a candidate.

The main contenders expected on the ballot in the November 5 election are Biden and Trump, who have both won enough delegates' votes to be the respective Democratic and Republican parties' presumptive nominees. Trump and Biden are set to debate again on September 10.

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US Needs Wall-to-Wall Industry Effort to Outpace Russia, China - Lockheed Martin CEO

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - The US government should convene a conference or a convention for all US industry to agree on board standards and interoperability establishment and enforcement and then let the industry partners create it, Lockheed Martin Chairman and CEO Jim Taiclet said on Monday.

"5g.mil: We should have that," Taiclet told a Foreign Policy magazine Security Forum in Washington. "Industry should be setting up those standards with the engineers."

The US government and the Defense Department should convene the gathering to set up and enforce an overall structure and then let industry do the enforcement and cooperation on its own, Taiclet said.

Taiclet also cited the example of the Ukrainian private high-tech sector as a model for US industry to emulate in responding rapidly to previously unimagined threats and opportunities.

"The example of Ukraine creating a domestic drone industry in direct response to the outbreak of war with Russia, we need that [capability]. ... What we need is a parallel path for digital services," Taiclet said.

The US government and industry needed to cooperate in order to develop a deliberate plan for multiple, parallel, plural operations in the key regions of Asia and Europe, and especially in the countries where American military forces were deployed, Taiclet added.

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US Has Not Changed Policy Regarding Ukrainian Strikes Inside Russia – White House

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) – No changes have been made to the US policy regarding Ukrainian strikes on targets inside Russian territory, White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said on Monday.

Kirby made the remarks in when asked whether Washington was mulling policy changes following the alleged Russian missile attack on the Okhmatdyt National Children's Specialized Hospital in Kiev.

"There's been no change in our policy ... Ukraine can use US-supplied weapons to strike targets just over the border. That's still the case," Kirby said during a press briefing.

Earlier on Monday, the Russian Defense Ministry said that statements about a deliberate Russian strike on civilian targets in Ukraine do not correspond to reality, and that widely shared photography's and videos confirm the destruction was caused by a Ukrainian air defense missile.

Russia's Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy further said that Russia would present evidence to the UN Security Council on Tuesday that counters the Ukrainian and Western narratives regarding the incident.

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NATO Heads Could Discuss Polish Request to Shoot Russian Missiles in Ukraine - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - NATO leaders convening in Washington this week could discuss Poland's request to shoot down Russian missiles over Ukrainian airspace, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday.

Earlier on Monday, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed a 10-year security cooperation agreement in Warsaw on providing for the interception of Russian missiles and drones. The agreement includes a provision for shooting down Russian missiles and drones in Ukraine's airspace that are fired in the direction of Poland, but Warsaw would need to consult with NATO allies before it moves forward with this plan.

"I don't have any changes when it comes to either US policy or NATO policy to announce today, but obviously anytime a NATO member wants to raise a policy, they have the ability to do so and discuss it with other heads of state," Miller said. "They'll have a summit this week, and I'm sure that is something that could be discussed if [Tusk] he would like to do so."

Ukraine has signed security agreements with 17 countries, most recently with the US, Japan, Lithuania and Estonia since June. They are intended to serve as a guarantee of support for Kiev in line with the commitments made by NATO members at last year's summit in Vilnius.

White House officials have said that significant deliverables are expected at the NATO leaders' summit this week, especially announcements of additional security assistance for Ukraine. However, they have ruled out extending an invite to Ukraine to join the alliance.

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US Govt. Takes Los Angeles Mansion Owned by Former Armenia Tax Chief - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The US government has taken legal possession of a Los Angeles mansion previously owned by the former chief taxation officer of Armenia bought with loans that were allegedly a cover for bribe payments, the Justice Department said in a press release on Monday.

"The Justice Department reached a settlement for a civil forfeiture case against a mansion in the Holmby Hills section of Los Angeles belonging to the family of Gagik Khachatryan, a former government official in the Republic of Armenia," the release said.

In 2011, a trust benefiting Khachatryan's sons bought the property with funds provided by an Armenian businessman when Khachatryan was the most senior official in charge of taxes and customs in his country, the release said.

"The sons claimed that the funds were provided as loans by the businessman, while the United States alleged the loans, which were repeatedly extended without repayment, were covers for bribe payments. The payments are also the subject of pending criminal prosecutions in the Republic of Armenia," the release said.

Under the terms of the settlement, the mansion will be forfeited to the US government which will then sell the property at the highest obtainable market price and retain 85% of the net proceeds of the sale, the release added.

The remaining net proceeds of the sale will be delivered to Khachatryan's sons and a corporation they own, according to the release.

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US Needs to Copy Ukraine Drone Industry Start Up for Tech Expansion - Lockheed Martin CEO

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - US government and industry need to learn from the example of Ukraine's rapid creation of an impressive domestic unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) industry after going to war with Russia in order to develop a strategy for the rapid, ongoing mobilization and adaptation of US industry, Lockheed Martin Chairman and CEO Jim Taiclet said on Monday.

"[In] Ukraine they've created a drone industry to defend their country on the fly [and] there are cell phones taped to radio towers in Ukraine to alert for Russian drones going past," Taiclet told a Foreign Policy magazine Security Forum in Washington. "We end an acquisition that can scale [up] that to [producing] hundreds of thousands in six months."

US high-tech and defense industries had to radically revise their acquisition and production practices to anticipate and compensate for inevitable disruptions in the event of wars or other sustained conflicts with peer and near peer adversaries, Taiclet said.

"How do you build a resilient system that still functions when it is disrupted? One [answer is to] buy years of stocks [of equipment, weapons and spare parts years] in advance," Taiclet said.

US high tech and military industries needed to increase their antifragility resilience to inevitable disruptions and broad-based challenges by spreading their production around the world in allied nations, Taiclet added.

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US Has Own Assessment On Reports of 2 Patriot Systems Destroyed by Russia – White House

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) – The United States has its own independent assessment on reports referring to the destruction of two Ukrainian-operated Patriot air defense systems by Russia over the weekend, White House National Security Advisor John Kirby said on Monday.

On Sunday, the Russian Ministry of Defense said it took out two Patriot air defense systems and a radar station in the area of the Black Sea port of Yuzhny with Iskander-M ballistic missiles. Ukraine alleges Russia hit decoys.

“Yes, we do. I'm not going to talk about it,” Kirby said when asked whether the US had its own assessment of the reports.

Kirby said that more would be announced in the coming week during the NATO Summit in Washington, about what the US and its allies are going to do to enhance Ukrainian air defenses. The official however said it was important not to focus on just those systems, as Ukraine requires a variety of them.

“There's short range, there's medium range, and there's long-range air defense, and Ukraine needs all of it,” he said.

The Kremlin has consistently warned against continued arms deliveries to Kiev since the start of Russia's military operation in Ukraine in February 2022, saying it would lead to further escalation of the conflict. In April 2022, Russia sent a diplomatic note to all NATO countries on the issue of arms supplies to Ukraine. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has warned that any cargo containing weapons for Ukraine will become a legitimate target for Russian strikes.

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CIA Director Burns in Cairo for Further Gaza Ceasefire Talks - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - CIA Director William Burns is in Cairo to participate in ongoing talks to secure a ceasefire deal in Gaza, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday.

"We certainly hope there's a ceasefire in Gaza's future, and we are trying incredibly hard to achieve a ceasefire," Miller said during a press briefing. "Negotiations are ongoing and the CIA Director is in Cairo today working on those negotiations."

On Saturday, Egyptian broadcaster Al Qahera News reported that Egypt would receive delegations from Israel and the United States to discuss unresolved points of the ceasefire agreement in the Gaza Strip.

Axios reported that Burns is also scheduled to visit the Qatari capital of Doha next week to participate in further Gaza ceasefire talks.

Some 120 Israeli hostages are believed to be held by Hamas, including 40 who are presumed dead. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office recently said that his negotiators had received Hamas' comments on a prospective deal that would ensure the release of hostages in return for a ceasefire in Gaza.

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Pentagon Says Directed Air Force to Restructure Sentinel Program to Address Soaring Costs

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The US Defense Department has directed the Air Force to restructure the Sentinel intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) program to address a drastic cost overrun, the Pentagon said in a report released on Monday.

Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment William LaPlante "directed the Air Force to restructure the Sentinel program to address the root causes of the breach and ensure an appropriate management structure is in place to control costs in the future," the report said.

The modified Sentinel program to replace aging Minuteman III ICBMs is on track to cost \$140.9 billion, an increase of 81% compared to a 2020 estimate, according to the report.

US defense and military officials told reporters in a conference call that the restructuring phase would take about 18 to 24 months to complete, and there is no guarantee that costs will be reduced once it's complete. Moreover, the officials noted that decisions will be made further "down the road" about what defense programs will have their funding cut in order to make room for the costly Sentinel program.

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Biden to Host New UK Prime Minister on Wednesday - White House

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden will host new UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer on July 10, US National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said on Monday. "On Wednesday, President will host his first bilateral meeting with the new Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Keir Starmer, here at the White House," Kirby told reporters.

Biden will also meet with the 32 members of the alliance at the Convention Center in Washington, he added.

The White House is working on setting up some additional meetings, including bilateral talks, Kirby said.

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US State Department Says Expects Ukraine to Be in NATO's Future

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday that he expects Ukraine to be in NATO's future.

"Yes," Miller responded when asked if Ukraine would be part of NATO's future.

NATO leaders will convene for a summit in Washington from Tuesday through Thursday.

White House officials have said that significant deliverables are expected at the NATO summit this week, especially announcements of additional security assistance for Ukraine. However, they have ruled out extending an invite to Ukraine to fully join the alliance.

Russia has always stood against Ukraine's membership of NATO due to national security concerns, but never opposed Kiev's aspirations to join the European Union.

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White House Says No Reason to Doubt Biden's Lucidity, Grasp of Context

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) – White House National Security Advisor John Kirby said on Monday that US President Joe Biden has not given him any reason to question or doubt his lucidity and ability to grasp context over the past two years.

“I'm uncomfortable with these kind of questions. But to answer ... in my experience, the last two and a half years I have not seen any reason whatsoever to question or doubt his [Biden's] lucidity, his grasp of context ... the degree to which he is completely in charge,” Kirby said during a press briefing.

The official made the comment when asked for his assessment of Biden's mental abilities and whether he had encountered, at any time, a situation in which the president symptoms or affectations would be a cause for concern.

Biden's campaign has suffered since his first presidential debate of this year with Trump on June 27, when he appeared confused and incoherent throughout. That reinforced rather than refuted concerns about his cognitive abilities at age 81. His poor performance has led some Democratic politicians and donors to call for his removal as a candidate.

Biden, 81, is the oldest US president in the history of the United States and would be 86 at the end of a second potential term in the White House.

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White House Says Biden Has Not Been Treated For Parkinson's

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden has not been treated for Parkinson's disease, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said on Monday.

“Has the President been treated for Parkinson's? No. Is he being treated for Parkinson's? No. Is he taking medication for Parkinson's? No,” Jean-Pierre told reporters.

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Biden Will Not Announce Defense Spending Increase at Upcoming NATO Summit – White House

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden will not announce any new increase in the defense to GDP spending threshold at the coming NATO Summit in Washington, White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said on Monday.

“The President is not going to set a new bar or new level of GDP spending on defense here at this [NATO] Summit. The goal is 2%. It was a commitment everybody made 10 years ago,” Kirby

said during a press conference.

Several NATO member states have yet to reach the 2% benchmark and most, but not all, are working on reaching the targeted spending, Kirby said. He added that President Biden is focused on countries reaching their targets and on reminding those who have yet to reach them that they must work on it.

In February, Stoltenberg said that in 2023, defense spending across EU member states and Canada increased by 11%. He said he expected the trend would continue over the year and 18 member states would spend at least 2% of their respective GDPs on defense in 2024.

In mid-June, Stoltenberg informed that 23 out of 32 NATO countries had managed to reach the target.

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US House Working on Bill to Sanction China, Restrict Outbound Investment - Johnson

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives is working on legislation to sanction Chinese companies engaged with Russia and Iran and restrict outbound investment from the United States to China, House Speaker Mike Johnson said on Monday.

"We'll build our sanctions package, punish the Chinese military firms that provide material support to Russia and Iran, and we'll consider options to restrict outbound investments in China; we're working on a piece of legislation to move this fall to do that very thing," Johnson said during remarks at the Hudson Institute.

China is the greatest threat to global peace, Johnson said. As such, lawmakers must use all available tools to counter China, Johnson said.

House lawmakers will also vote on a series of bills to allow the next administration to target adversaries' economies on "day one," Johnson said.

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white house says biden has not been treated for parkinson's

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US Treasury Says Making It Harder For Foreigners To Own Property Near American Military

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The Treasury Department said on Monday it was expanding its authority to review foreign purchases of real estate near American military bases, as Chinese and other nationals begin to feel the heat of a crackdown aimed at protecting sensitive US assets.

The Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS), chaired by Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, is set to add 50 military installations across 30 states to some 170 US

installations already under its watch — a move it said would “vastly expand” its jurisdiction, aimed at maintaining national security.

“President Biden and I remain committed to using our strong investment screening tool to defend America’s national security, including actions that protect military installations from external threats,” Yellen said in a Treasury news release. “CFIUS plays an integral role in U.S. national security by thoroughly reviewing real estate transactions near sensitive military installations, and this proposed rule will significantly expand its jurisdiction and ability to accomplish this vital mission.”

The expansion of CFIUS authority comes after the committee earlier this year gave a Chinese-linked company and its partners 120 days to sell property purchased near an air force base in Wyoming that houses part of the US nuclear arsenal.

On a more granular level, the expansion announced on Monday would widen CFIUS’ jurisdiction over land deals within one mile of 40 additional US military sites and within 100 miles of 19 additional military installations.

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US House Speaker Says Hopes NATO Allies Will Plan Self-Sufficient Defense Industrial Base

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - US House of Representatives Speaker Mike Johnson on Monday said he hopes in the coming days NATO allies will be able to establish plans to create a self-sufficient defense industrial base that is less reliant on the United States.

"We're hopeful that in the days ahead we can push our friends in Europe to establish a self-sufficient defense industrial base that is less reliant on American assistance," Johnson said during a discussion hosted by the Hudson Institute.

Johnson also said that this initiative will be important to being able to counter Russia.

The NATO leaders' summit will take place in Washington from Tuesday through Thursday.

White House officials have said that significant deliverables are expected at the NATO summit this week, especially announcements of additional security assistance for Ukraine. However, they have ruled out extending an invite to Ukraine to join the alliance.

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White House Says Has No Indication NATO Doubts Biden’s Leadership, Capability

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) – The United States sees no indications that its NATO allies have doubts about President Joe Biden’s leadership and capability, White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said on Monday.

"We are not picking up any signs of that from our allies at all," Kirby told reporters.

The allies are excited about the upcoming NATO summit in Washington, he added.

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Names of Canadian Lawmakers 'Guilty' of Aiding Foreign Actors Should be Made Public - Poll

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - Close to seven in ten Canadians would prefer that the names of the lawmakers who allegedly helped foreign actors interfere in domestic affairs be made public, a Nanos poll revealed on Monday.

"Canadians are over twice as likely to prefer that the names of MPs who have been found to be "semi-witting or witting" participants in supporting foreign states interfering in Canadian political life be publicly released (68%) and they should have to publicly explain their actions, over them having the opportunity to privately defend themselves before the committee on foreign interference first (28%)," a report on the poll said.

When questioned on potential retaliatory measures against the lawmakers allegedly guilty of aiding foreign states, the two most favored punishments included criminal charges with jail time (65%), whereas slightly more than half (53%) said they should be removed from their respective political caucuses, the poll report said.

In addition, two thirds of Canadians support the establishment of a foreign agents' registry, the poll said. Close to 90% believe it is not or somewhat not appropriate for lawmakers to lobby in favor of a foreign actor, the poll report said.

In early June, the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians released its Special Report on Foreign Interference in Canada's Democratic Processes and Institutions, where it alleged some lawmakers had "wittingly assisted foreign state actors" shortly after being elected.

The report was released a month after a public inquiry found that foreign interference did not impact the outcomes of Canada's 2019 and 2021 federal elections, despite evidence that several international actors allegedly tried to meddle in the country's democratic processes.

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Parkinson's Disease Specialist Visited Biden White House Multiple Times - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - A neurologist specializing in movement disorders like Parkinson's disease visited the White House multiple times from last summer to this spring, the New York Times reported on Monday.

Dr. Kevin Cannard of Walter Reed National Military Medical Center visited the White House eight times over the course of eight months, the report said, citing White House visitor logs.

However, it is unclear whether Cannard visited the White House to discuss President Joe Biden's health or for other reasons.

Biden's cognitive abilities and general fitness to serve as president have come under scrutiny in recent days, following a lackluster debate performance against Republican challenger Donald Trump.

However, Biden and his campaign have insisted that they will continue his reelection bid,

despite concerns among some Democrats.

Biden has declined to take a cognitive exam as part of his routine presidential medical checkups. During the debate, Trump challenged Biden to take such an exam, claiming to have "aced" a pair of cognitive tests himself.

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UN Chief Condemns Russia's Alleged Missile Attacks on Civilian Infrastructure in Ukraine

UNITED NATIONS, July 8 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has condemned Russia's alleged missile attacks against civilian infrastructure in Ukraine, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Monday.

"The Secretary-General strongly condemns today's missile attacks by the Russian Federation hitting residential and civilian infrastructure across Ukraine, including in the cities of Kiev, Kryvyi Rih, Dnipro and Pokrovsk. The strike reportedly killed dozens of civilians, including children, and injured over 150 more," Dujarric said.

Guterres considers the incidents in which missiles hit the Okhmatdyt National Children's Specialized Hospital in Kiev and another medical facility in the capital's Dniprovsky district to be particularly shocking, Dujarric added.

Earlier on Monday, Russia's Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said that Russia will present the facts and counter the Ukrainian and Western narratives regarding the missile attacks.

The UN Security Council will convene a meeting on the "missile attack on a children's hospital in Kiev" on Tuesday morning, Polyanskiy said.

The Russian mission to the UN has assumed the presidency of the UN Security Council during the month of July.

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US Says Georgia Moves In Wrong Direction In Terms Of Euro-Atlantic Prospects - White House

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The United States considers that Georgia is moving in the wrong direction with respect to its Euro-Atlantic aspirations, White House National Security Council Director for Europe Michael Carpenter said on Monday.

"It is clear that over the course of the last few months, sadly, the Georgian government has moved in the wrong direction in terms of its Euro-Atlantic integration prospects," Carpenter said.

The United States has begun reviewing many elements of its cooperation with Tbilisi, including the Noble Partner military exercise, Carpenter said.

In addition, limiting the space for fundamental freedoms in Georgia is incompatible with Western values, Carpenter also said.

“We hope to see a change in strategic direction from the Georgian government,” Carpenter added.

The Defense Department said on Friday that the United States has indefinitely delayed the Noble Partner military exercise with Georgia as part of a comprehensive review of the bilateral relationship.

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US Republican Party Adopts Trump's 2024 Platform - Trump Campaign

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The US Republican National Committee adopted former US President Donald Trump's 2024 platform, the Trump campaign said on Monday.

“Today, the Republican National Committee Platform Committee adopted President Donald J. Trump's 2024 Republican Party Platform with overwhelming support – a pro-American agenda that stands in stark contrast to the record of weakness, failure, and dishonesty created by Joe Biden,” the Trump campaign said in a statement.

The United States is in serious decline, but Republicans will make the country great again, according to the text of the platform.

The platform includes commitments to secure US borders, end inflation, make the US the world's dominant energy producer and maintain the US dollar as the world's reserve currency.

The platform also includes commitments to “prevent World War Three,” strengthen and modernize the US military, keep men out of women's sports and require proof of citizenship to vote.

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FAA Orders Inspection of Over 2,600 Boeing 737 Jets Due to Oxygen Mask Issues - Statement

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) said on Monday that it has ordered inspections of more than 2,600 Boeing 737 airplanes given recently reported issues concerning oxygen masks.

"The AD [airworthiness directive] requires operators to inspect the PSU oxygen generators and perform corrective actions, if necessary, within 120 to 150 days. The compliance time depends on the airplane configuration. This AD affects 2,612 US-registered airplanes," the FAA said in a statement.

The directive affects Boeing 737-8, 9-, -8200, -700, -800 and -900ER series aircraft.

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NATO to Announce New Measures to Strengthen Ukraine Air Defense - White House

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The United States and its NATO allies will announce during their upcoming summit in Washington new steps to strengthen Ukraine's air defense, White House National Security Council Director for Europe Michael Carpenter said on Monday.

"We will announce in full detail later this week what we have in mind in terms of strengthening Ukraine's air defenses," Carpenter said.

Carpenter underscored the United States' and its allies' commitment to do more to help Ukraine strengthen its air defense, including by providing strategic air defense systems.

"Clear that allies need to step up and provide Ukraine with additional air defense systems," Carpenter said.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said last week that the alliance is expected to agree on a substantial military package for Ukraine at the summit on July 9-11.

Senior Russian officials have repeatedly said that the collective West supplying weapons to Ukraine will only serve to prolong the conflict without altering its outcome.

In addition, Russian President Vladimir Putin has said that NATO's expansion into Ukraine would create security risks for Russia and Ukraine's non-aligned status is one of the prerequisites for a ceasefire.

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Canada 'Firmly Opposes' New Israeli Settlements in West Bank – Foreign Ministry

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) – Ottawa is "firmly opposed" to the Israeli Government's decision to greenlight new settlements in the occupied Palestinian West Bank, Global Affairs Canada (GAC) said on Monday.

"Canada firmly opposes the Government of Israel's decision to approve new settlements in the West Bank," GAC's Foreign Policy said in a statement on the X media platform.

Taking unilateral actions such as the weakening of the Palestinian Authority and expanding the number of settlements in the West Bank is in contravention of international law, the statement added.

Through such decisions, Israeli authorities threaten the safety and security of Palestinians and Israelis alike, as well as others in the region, the statement said. It added that Ottawa urges Tel Aviv to reverse its decision and abstain from going down that path.

On Wednesday, the Israeli Government declared 12,700 dunams (nearly 3,140 acres) in the West Bank as state property, the largest amount of Palestinian territory designated for declaration in the past 30 years.

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US FAA Orders Inspections of More Than 2,600 Boeing 737 Airplanes Due to Issues With Oxygen Masks - Notice

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US House Democrats Schedule Meeting Tuesday Amid Concerns Biden Unfit for Reelection

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - Democrats in the US House of Representatives have scheduled a meeting on Tuesday morning amid concerns over President Joe Biden's capacity to serve another term as president, according to a notice sent to Democrat lawmakers on Monday. The meeting will reportedly take place at the Democratic National Committee headquarters in Washington.

Earlier on Monday, Biden sent a letter to the Democratic members of Congress to reassure them that he is "firmly committed" to staying in the presidential race despite his poor showing in the first presidential debate last month.

Biden appeared confused and incoherent throughout his first debate with challenger Donald Trump on June 27, reinforcing rather than refuting ongoing concerns about his cognitive abilities at age 81. Biden's dismal performance has led some Democratic politicians and donors to call for his removal as a candidate.

The US presidential election is slated for November 5. The main contenders expected on the ballot are Biden and Trump, who have both won enough delegates' votes to be their respective Democratic and Republican parties' presumptive nominees. Trump and Biden are set to debate again on September 10.

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UPDATE - Biden Says 'Not Going Anywhere' Despite Concerns About His Candidacy

(Modifies lede; adds comments, details and context in paragraphs 3-16)

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden doubled down on Monday on his bid for reelection, daring critics of his age and mental acuity to challenge him directly for the Democratic Party's candidacy if they believed he could not beat his opponent and former Republican president Donald Trump.

"Bottom line here is ... I am not going anywhere," Biden said, calling into the MSNBC network for a live interview. "I wouldn't be running if I didn't absolutely believe I was the best candidate to defeat Donald Trump."

The US presidential election is slated for November. The main contenders expected on the ballot are Biden and Trump, who have both won enough delegates' votes to be their respective Democratic and Republican parties' presumptive nominees.

Biden's campaign has suffered since his first presidential debate of this year with Trump on June 27, where he appeared confused and incoherent throughout. That reinforced rather than

refuted concerns about his cognitive abilities at age 81. His poor performance has led some Democratic politicians and donors to call for his removal as a candidate.

Biden lashed out against those critics, telling especially members of Congress who had been talking anonymously to media and within inside circles that he should step aside for a more able candidate to replace him at the Aug 19-22 Democratic Party convention.

"I'm getting so frustrated ... by the elites in the party," Biden said. "They were wrong about 2020, they were wrong in 2022 about the red [Republican] wave [in the midterm elections], and they will be wrong in 2024. [To] any of these guys [who] don't think I should run, run against me. Go ahead, announce (your candidacy) for president. Challenge me at the convention."

Painting Trump as a "liar" throughout his MSNBC interview, Biden said his Republican opponent had just been "riding around in a golf cart" and "talking with his wealthy friends" at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Palm Beach, Florida since their debate two weeks ago. Meanwhile he, as president, had been traveling across the nation and world, doing what was needed by America and its allies, Biden said.

He added that he had been clear over the past four years on why he wanted to be president, to change policies put in place by Trump.

"I ran because I never bought in on the trickle-down economic theory. I never bought into the notion that we have to walk away from the rest of the world and cave in to [Russian President] Putin or anybody else. I've never never believed any of that. I'm confident that's what the American people are [all about]. I wanted to make sure that there wasn't any slippage at all."

Earlier in the day, Biden sent a letter to the Democratic members of Congress to reassure them that he is "firmly committed" to staying in the presidential race, despite his debate debacle.

"I want you to know that despite all the speculation in the press and elsewhere, I am firmly committed to staying in the race, to running this race to the end, and to beating Donald Trump," Biden said in the letter.

He also pointed out that he understands people's concerns with regard to the race.

"I have heard the concerns the people have – their good faith fears and worries about what is at stake in this election. I am not blind to them," Biden said.

Biden emphasized that he and his team have the record, the vision, and the fundamental commitment to America's freedom. He also urged his supporters to come together and move forward as a unified party.

"We are standing up for American democracy. After January 6th, Trump has proven that he is unfit to ever hold the office of President," Biden said, referring to storming of the US Capitol building on January 6, 2021, by Trump supporters whom Democrats say were incited by Trump due to his inability to accept his defeat to Biden in the 2020 election.

Trump and Biden are set to debate again on September 10.

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UNSC to Hold Meeting on Tuesday on Attack on Kiev's Children's Hospital- Maltese Mission

UNITED NATIONS, July 8 (Sputnik) - The United Nations Security Council will convene a meeting on the "missile attack on a children's hospital in Kiev" on Tuesday morning, the spokesman of the Maltese Mission Adam Kuymizakis said on Monday.

"The Presidency will convene a briefing [on a missile attack on a children's hospital in Kiev] tomorrow 9 July at 10 AM," the spokesman told Sputnik.

Earlier on Monday, Dmitry Polyanskiy, Russia's Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN, stated that Russia would present the facts and counter the Ukrainian and Western narratives of the attack.

The Russian mission to the UN has assumed the Council's presidency for July. Lavrov is expected to join two key events in New York, namely, the Security Council sessions on July 16 and 17 on multilateralism and the Middle East respectively, the deputy foreign minister added.

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Biden Admin. Opposes US House Bill Requiring Proof of Citizenship to Vote - White House

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration opposes legislation proposed by US House Republicans to require people to present proof of citizenship to register to vote in US federal elections, the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) said on Monday.

"The administration strongly opposes H.R. 8281, the Safeguard American Voter Eligibility Act. It is already illegal for noncitizens to vote in Federal elections - it is a federal crime punishable by prison and fines," OMB said in a statement of administration policy.

The justification for the bill is based on "easily disproven falsehoods," the statement said. It is rare for non-citizens to break the law by voting in federal elections, the statement said.

The legislation, which the US House of Representatives is set to consider later this week, would require people to provide proof of US citizenship in order to register to vote in federal elections.

"With the over 7.2 million illegal immigrants that have come across our southern border thanks to President Biden's open border policies, including more than 350 people on the terrorist watchlist, it is vital we shore up our election security and ensure that only American citizens are voting in American elections," House Majority Leader Steve Scalise said in a statement on the bill.

Lawmakers who oppose the legislation are "traitors" to the United States, billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk said on Friday. Musk later said that people who disagree with the bill are seeking to cheat in elections.

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RPT - Over 100 People Shot, 19 Killed During Holiday Weekend in Chicago - Mayor

(Repeats to correct headline to read '19 killed,' not wounded)

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - More than 100 people were shot and 19 killed over the Independence Day holiday weekend in the city of Chicago, Mayor Brandon Johnson said on Monday.

"Over 100 people have been shot in this city, 19 have been killed this holiday weekend," Johnson said during a press conference on the shootings.

Chicago has historically experienced a spike in shootings around Independence Day.

The Chicago Police Department is working non-stop to catch the people responsible for the shootings, Johnson said.

Chicago must bolster efforts to remove firearms from the streets, Johnson added.

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CORRECTION - Over 100 People Shot, 19 Wounded During Holiday Weekend in Chicago - Mayor

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Russia to Refute Western Version of Missile Attack on Kiev Children Hospital - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, July 8 (Sputnik) - Russia will familiarize Ukraine and Western allies with the facts regarding the "missile attack on a children hospital in Kiev" during the upcoming meeting of the UN Security Council, Russian Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Dmitriy Polyanskiy said on Monday.

"The Westerners requested an urgent meeting of the UN Security Council in connection with the 'missile attack on a children's hospital in Kiev.' Our Presidency of the [UN Security] Council

plans to hold it tomorrow, July 9, at 10:00 New York time (17:00 Moscow time). Let us familiarize our colleagues with facts that categorically do not confirm the Ukrainian and Western version," Polyanskiy said via the social media platform Telegram.

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NATO Not Asking Indo-Pacific Countries to Join Alliance - US Ambassador

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - NATO is not seeking to ask partners in the Indo-Pacific to join the alliance but instead hopes to strengthen cooperation with them, US Ambassador to NATO Julianne Smith said on Monday.

"We're not talking to these countries in the Indo-Pacific about joining. We're talking about drawing them closer," Smith said during a discussion hosted by the Foreign Policy magazine.

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Biden Updated on Regular Basis on Hurricane Beryl Progression - White House

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden is receiving regular updates as Hurricane Beryl makes its way through the Texas coast, the White House said on Monday.

Earlier in the day, the National Hurricane Center (NHC) warned in an advisory about a potential life-threatening storm surge, complete with damaging wind gusts and flooding in eastern Texas.

"The President is receiving regular updates from his team on Hurricane Beryl as it moves east up the coast of Texas after making landfall this morning," the White House said in a statement.

"Senior White House officials remain in close contact with their state and local counterparts."

The United States Coast Guard and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) have prepositioned response personnel to Texas, among whom are search and rescue teams, the statements said.

FEMA has staged bottled water, meals, tarps and backup electric generators in case of need, the statement said.

Beryl made landfall on the island of Carriacou in the Caribbean Island nation of Grenada as a Category 4 storm last Monday, packing maximum sustained winds of 241 kilometers per hour (150 miles per hour). The NGC later upgraded it to a Category 5 with maximum sustained winds of 260 kilometers per hour.

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nato not asking indo-pacific countries to join alliance - us ambassador

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Russia at unsc meeting on 'attack on children's hospital in kiev' will discuss facts that refute Ukrainian, Western versions of incident - Polyanskiy

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US Authorizes Certain Exports of Liquefied Petroleum Gas to Venezuela – Treasury Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) – The US Treasury Department on Monday authorized certain transactions involving the exportation or re-exportation of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) to Venezuela, according to a notice published by the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC).

“Except as provided in paragraph (b) of this general license, all transactions related to the exportation or reexportation, directly or indirectly, of liquefied petroleum gas to Venezuela, involving the Government of Venezuela, Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A. (PdVSA) ... are authorized through 12:01 a.m. eastern daylight time, July 8, 2025,” OFAC said in a statement.

The authorization does not allow for payment-in-kind of petroleum or petroleum products or any other transactions otherwise prohibited by Venezuela Sanctions Regulations, OFAC said.

OFAC further noted that nothing in the newly issued authorization relieves individuals from compliance with the requirements of other federal agencies, including the Department of Commerce’s Bureau of Industry and Security.

In April, the United States reinstated some sanctions on Venezuelan oil and gas sector operations due to Washington's election-related concerns in Venezuela. The move came after the government of President Nicolas Maduro began cracking down on some opposition figures ahead of the July 28 elections over allegations that they are plotting against him.

The LPG license comes a few days after Venezuela’s National Assembly Speaker Jorge Rodriguez announced that Caracas and Washington had held direct talks in a remote format and agreed to continue their dialogue to strengthen trust and improve relations.

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US Treasury Removes 2 Russian Nationals From Specially Designated Nationals List

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The US government has removed two Russian citizens from its Specially Designated Nationals (SDN) list, the Treasury Department said on Monday.

"The following deletions have been made to OFAC's SDN List: Panferov, Alexey Valeryevich... Tsareva, Marina Igorevna," the Treasury Department said in a statement.

The Treasury Department did not provide the reasons for the removal of the two Russian nationals from the SDN list, the statement said.

The US government also added the Argo oil products tanker, sailing under the Iranian flag, as being subject to secondary sanctions, the statement added.

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Number of Republicans Backing US Withdrawal From NATO Decreased After Ukraine War - Gallup

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The polling company Gallup said on Monday that the number of Republicans who believe the United States should withdraw from the NATO alliance decreased after the war in Ukraine broke out.

"[In] 2022, when we asked this question, there was a sizable minority of Republicans, about 22%, who thought the US should pull out of NATO altogether. That number decreased since 2022 to 16%. So obviously, that core of the GOP [Republican Party] that's watching what's going on in Europe right now, watching what's happening with Russia and Ukraine, sees the value of NATO coming across," Gallup Principal of Global Analytics Dan Foy said at a conference hosted by Foreign Policy magazine.

However, Foy expressed concern about support for NATO after the war in Ukraine will come to an end.

"When Russia is no longer seen as the clear and present danger ... does the alliance persevere through that next phase?" Foy asked.

Foy pointed out that there had also been a "unifying effect" with respect to China but raised the question whether it would continue to serve to bring NATO members together over the long term.

NATO's ability to unite beyond threats in the European theater was critical for the alliance's resilience, Foy said.

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UPDATE - Biden Tells Congress' Democrats He is 'Firmly Committed' to Staying in Race

(Updates with details in paras 5-9)

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden sent a letter to the Democratic members of Congress on Monday to reassure them that he is "firmly committed" to staying in the presidential race, despite his debate debacle.

"I want you to know that despite all the speculation in the press and elsewhere, I am firmly committed to staying in the race, to running this race to the end, and to beating Donald Trump," Biden said in the letter.

He also pointed out that he understands people's concerns with regard to the race.

"I have heard the concerns the people have – their good faith fears and worries about what is at stake in this election. I am not blind to them," Biden said.

The president assured lawmakers of his ability to address all existing concerns. "I would not be running again if I did not absolutely believe I was the best person to beat Donald Trump in 2024," he said.

Biden emphasized that he and his team have the record, the vision, and the fundamental commitment to America's freedom. He also urged his supporters to come together and move forward as a unified party.

"We are standing up for American democracy. After January 6th, Trump has proven that he is unfit to ever hold the office of President," Biden said.

Biden appeared confused and incoherent throughout his first debate with Trump on June 27, reinforcing rather than refuting ongoing concerns about his cognitive abilities at age 81. His poor performance has led some Democratic politicians and donors to call for his removal as a candidate.

The US presidential election is slated for November. The main contenders expected on the ballot are Biden and Trump, who have both won enough delegates' votes to be their respective Democratic and Republican parties' presumptive nominees. Trump and Biden are set to debate again on September 10.

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Battlefield Stalemate Harms Ukraine's Support Among American People - US Congressman

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - A long-term stalemate on the battlefield between Russia and Ukraine harms Kiev's support from the American people, US Congressman Michael McCaul said on Monday.

"Without a victory – if all they have is a stalemate and a war of attrition – that, long-term, is not good, and they're going to lose the will of the American people. The American people want to see a victory," McCaul said during an interview with Foreign Policy.

In April, CIA Director William Burns said that Ukraine could lose to Russia by the end of 2024 if

US lawmakers do not continue to provide aid to Kiev.

Former US President and 2024 Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump said that he would quickly broker peace between Russia and Ukraine if reelected.

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Canadian Foreign Minister Travels to London to Meet With New UK Counterpart

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) – Canadian Foreign Minister Melanie Joly traveled to the United Kingdom on Monday to meet with her new counterpart, David Lammy.

Lammy was appointed Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs in the cabinet of Prime Minister Keir Starmer on Friday, following the Labour Party's victory in the general election.

"Today, I was in London to meet with my new counterpart from the [United Kingdom], @DavidLammy. We discussed the ways in which we can strengthen our partnership and how our countries can continue to work together to address some of the world's most pressing challenges," Joly wrote on X.

During her visit, the top Canadian diplomat is also set to meet with Commonwealth Secretary-General Patricia Scotland to discuss ongoing preparations for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting planned to take place in Samoa in late October, Global Affairs Canada said in a statement.

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Biden Says 'Not Going Anywhere' Despite Concerns About His Candidacy

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - US President doubled down on Monday on his intent for reelection, saying he was the only candidate the Democratic Party could count on to beat his challenger and former Republican president Donald Trump.

"Bottom line , I am not going anywhere," Biden said, calling into the MSNBC network for a live interview. "I wouldn't be running if I didn't believe I was the best candidate to defeat Donald Trump."

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