

8/22/23 Tuesday

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GOP Pack-Leader Trump to Miss Debate as There's 'Less to Lose by Not Showing Up'

Former US President Donald Trump had already planned to miss the first Republican primary debate since he is unquestionably the leading GOP candidate, but his impending arrest in Georgia the following day adds a new layer of volatility to the already-fragile state of US politics, a prominent commentator told Sputnik.

The first Republican presidential primary debate for the 2024 US election race is set to air on Wednesday evening on Fox networks. Eight candidates are expected to attend the Milwaukee, Wisconsin, event, but missing will be the clear pack leader, former US President Donald Trump. The candidates expected to appear are Florida Governor [Ron DeSantis](#); North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum; former US ambassador to the United Nations [Nikki Haley](#); former US Vice President Mike Pence; former New Jersey Governor [Chris Christie](#); former Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson; US Sen. Tim Scott of South Carolina; and New York-based entrepreneur [Vivek Ramaswamy](#).

Just hours after the debate, Trump is set to [surrender himself](#) to authorities in Fulton County, Georgia, in connection with federal charges that he illegally sought to overturn his loss in the Peach State in the 2020 election.

Ajamu Baraka, international human rights activist, organizer, political analyst, and the national organizer for the Black Alliance for Peace, [told](#) Radio Sputnik on Tuesday that Trump's absence could potentially be read as good or bad by his supporters, but that it was certainly bad for the legitimacy of the US political system for Trump to be facing such transparently political charges designed to stop his participation in politics.

"There could be a backlash from either supporters of Trump if they believe this represents a certain kind of arrogance or it could be the opposite, that people believe that what the Republican candidates should do is to rally around the presumptive nominee of their party," Baraka said.

"For Trump and his campaign, it's understandable that he would not want to subject himself to the possibility of having to deal with some aggressive responses or comments coming from some of his opponents," he noted. "There's really a lot to lose in doing that and so they may have calculated that there's less to lose by not even showing up."

Baraka said it was clearly "the predominant thinking within the Republican Party" that the nomination was Trump's to refuse at this point, leaving little room for the other candidates to make a separate name for themselves at the Wednesday night debate. Indeed, [the Iowa Poll](#), widely seen as the most reliable early poll for the primary race, found that Trump has by far the most solid support of any candidate: 68% said they won't vote for anyone else.

"What the Democrats seem not to understand is - the perception is that these prosecutions are politicized," he explained. "This is an attempt on the part of Democrats and

Democratically-connected institutions and structures to undermine the ability of Donald Trump to run again.”

“I think that narrative is extending beyond the hardcore Trump supporters. People are raising questions around what appears to be a sort of piling-on, and indictments that have such a political character to them. We know they’re being framed as just some objective legal issues. And we know that the judge in Georgia, for example, claimed that she’s going to try this case without the politics. But very few people are in fact buying that. And it’s really a very dangerous situation because that perception is really helping to continue to undermine the legitimacy of US institutions.”

“It’s a very dangerous strategy, but one in which Democrats believe that, in some kind of way, they’re going to create a condition or situation where someone, one of the Republican candidates, will then break from the pack,” he said. “That seems to be the thinking of many of the Democratic Party strategists.”

Baraka said that the Democratic officials in Georgia had displayed a “political inclination to make” Trump’s prosecution “into a spectacle” by treating him as if he is a flight risk and imposing limitations on his speech.

“The main thing is: they want to degrade” Trump, he said. “They want those pictures, for example,” of Trump surrendering to authorities.

“They have this belief that this is going to somehow undermine Trump. I think it’s going to have the opposite effect,” Baraka asserted.

He accused them of having a kind of one-sided moral “blindness” that would inevitably lead to “political errors” on par with the second attempt to impeach Trump following the January 6, 2021, insurrection by his supporters at the US Capitol.

“It’s all part of the process of the degeneration of politics in the US. It is incredibly dangerous because of the deepening economic crisis that we are facing. When you have the delegitimization of all of the US institutions then there’s no telling what may happen in terms of the politics here in this country. It’s very, very dangerous.”

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Photos: India’s Chandrayaan-3 Orbiter Snaps Images of Moon’s Far Side Ahead of Landing

To prepare for its scheduled landing on the Moon’s south pole on Wednesday, India’s Chandrayaan-3 spacecraft has snapped new, high-definition photos of the lunar surface. Chandrayaan-3 is set to deploy its Vikram lander early on Wednesday morning, which will attempt to touch down near the Moon’s South Pole just days after Russia’s Luna 25 probe. The four photos were published on the X social media site by the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO), India’s space agency.

The crisp black-and-white photos were snapped by the “hazard detection and avoidance” camera as Chandrayaan-3 entered its lowest lunar orbit yet, reaching just 25 kilometers of altitude at its lowest point. They are of the Moon’s far side, which never faces the Earth due to tidal locking.

"This camera that assists in locating a safe landing area - without boulders or deep trenches - during the descent is developed by ISRO at SAC," ISRO said.

Vikram also carries a rover called Pragyan, both of which have a battery life of 14 Earth days, or one lunar day.

If the landing attempt is successful, India will be the first nation to put a spacecraft on the lunar south pole and the fourth country overall to achieve a soft landing on the Moon after the United States, Soviet Union, and People's Republic of China.

India previously landed its Chandrayaan-1 probe on the Moon in 2008, although that was a deliberate crash-landing. Chandrayaan-2 also crashed into the Moon in 2019, although that was due to an error during an attempted soft landing, also on the lunar south pole.

Just days before Vikram's scheduled landing, Russia's Luna 25 probe also attempted to touch down in the Moon's south pole region, but [crashed after encountering](#) an unexpected problem. A lunar lander dispatched by a private Japanese company, ispace, also [crashed onto the Moon](#) this past May due to a computer glitch.

Right on the heels of Luna 25 and Chandrayaan-3, however, is the Smart Lander for Investigating Moon (SLIM), built by the Japanese Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA), which will blast off from Tanegashima Space Center on Friday. SLIM could be Japan's first soft lunar landing, but it will be in Shioli Crater, near the lunar equator on its near side, not near the poles.

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F-16's For Ukraine Can't Carry Storm Shadows: Experts Say Mishap 'More of Same' From NATO

According to reports in US media, the plan to supply Ukraine with US-made F-16 Falcon fighter jets has hit a snag, since the aircraft are not presently compatible with the British-made Storm Shadow cruise missiles previously given to Ukraine to enhance its long-range aerial strike capability.

That has raised a new question among politicians: should the US send compatible cruise missiles to Kiev alongside the F-16, such as the AGM-158 Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile (JASSM) with its 575-mile range?

Alexander Mikhailov, head of the Bureau of Military-Political Analysis, told Sputnik on Tuesday that the situation exposes the unplanned and haphazard way in which NATO is scrambling to send Kiev any weapons they can find, but especially older ones.

"It seems to me that both the British and aviation armaments [industries] will find a technical opportunity to place their missiles on the F-16," he said. "I think the issue here is quite technically solvable. It seems to me that, in general, we need to wait for the delivery of aircraft."

"We are again dealing with promises to assist in the supply of weapons, promises to establish training for pilots. But we don't see specific products," he said.

"This story is very similar to the story of American tanks, which started in November of last year, when the Americans first promised their Abrams tanks and simultaneously dragged European partners into these promises, then they themselves stalled the supply of tanks, citing a lack of a

structural base, a lack of a repair base, a shortage of all this in Poland or on the territory of Ukraine,” Mikhailov noted. “And at this time, the German Leopard tanks were already burning and the image of the German defense industry was burning and a lot of other troubles that Europe received which, as it were, followed the lead of the Americans with their eternal divorce.” “Now it’s a very similar story. The Americans would very much like European planes to fly to Ukraine. Moreover, the same Germans have third-generation Tornado aircraft, Europeans have Typhoons, Mirages, Rafales, and Gripens. And in principle, there is plenty to choose from, especially if the Europeans are more loyal. But the Europeans are no longer fooled by these American promises. Because after the story with the Abrams, when even the Challenger tanks arrived in Ukraine and several Leopards were sent to Ukraine and even participated in the hostilities, the Abrams did not appear in Ukraine.”

Dmitry Kornev, founder of the MilitaryRussia.ru portal, told Sputnik that the Ukrainians would likely solve the technical problems themselves if given enough time, but warned that the F-16 “is no miracle weapon,” regardless of which weapons it brings to the battlefield.

“The bombs and missiles that the F-16 can carry are likely to be received by the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Here, you need to understand that if the Armed Forces of Ukraine receive the F-16 - and this is a difficult issue that has been resolved for a very long time, and has not yet been finally resolved - then all the weapons of the F-16 are already trifles,” he said.

However, he highlighted a sharp disconnect between not just the vast equipment demands being made by Kiev on NATO, but also a likely incongruence between NATO’s promises and what will actually be shipped to Ukraine. For example, while Amsterdam has said it will send Kiev all 42 F-16s in its arsenal, he predicted they will actually send no more than 12 - a single squadron. Meanwhile, Kiev has demanded 128 aircraft. He did not discount the possibility that Washington could send more, though.

“You need to understand that if they get 128 F-16s, then this will probably not even happen in 2024, but 2025 or 2026. If deliveries of the F-16 begin, then no one will bother the Armed Forces of Ukraine with the issue of obtaining other third or fourth-generation aircraft, which have been decommissioned by European countries that received the F-35. For example, German, Italian, and British Tornado aircraft. These planes can definitely carry any European missiles,” he noted.

“If European missiles can be hung on the Su-24, I think that they will also be able to hang on the F-16. Well, this is a fairly simple and technologically advanced aircraft. It will take two or three or four months. So far, these months are there. Today, one of the leaders of Ukraine named a figure: six-to-eight months separate today from receiving the F-16. But we are talking about the fact that pilot training will last from six to eight months, which has supposedly already started. This is quite a long time to adapt the aircraft to anything. Unlike Western corporations, which could not solve the issues of such integration and adaptation for their own interests, I’m afraid the Armed Forces of Ukraine are doing very well when it comes to motivation. They will solve this issue, because technically it can be solved,” he predicted.

“All delays in the delivery of the F-16 rest on the need to train Ukrainian pilots. If there are pilots in the world who are ready to act on the side of the Armed Forces of Ukraine as a mercenary, then this solves the problem. But the question here is probably that the appearance of a certain number of F-16s is unlikely to radically change the situation on the battlefield. There is no such

thing as a miracle weapon,” he said, noting that if they trickle into Ukraine in small numbers, then “there is a high probability that we will not even notice it.”

“This will certainly increase the burden on our air defense and on our aerospace forces, but most likely we will fight this and will adapt and compensate for the appearance of these aircraft. When their number begins to increase and becomes palpable it will have to be dozens or even more than 100 units. Then it will be unpleasant, but it will not happen instantly.”

Kornev noted that if the West does try to compensate for the pilot training issue by sending so-called “mercenary” pilots, they would be treated as “full-fledged combatants” by Russian forces.

“Russia will, of course, have a negative attitude towards this. And Russia will, I hope, highlight such situations in every possible way and try to influence them, including through diplomatic means,” he said, adding that the situation would be “about the same as how we now sometimes say that these planes or these missiles will be legitimate targets for the Russian Armed Forces. As soon as they cross the border of Ukraine, they become legitimate targets. In any case, any pilots of any country who sit at the helm are a legitimate target for any of our actions.”

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Biden Reinstates Offshore Drilling Rules Designed to Prevent Deepwater Horizon Disaster

The Biden administration has restored a set of offshore drilling safety regulations put in place in the wake of the 2010 Deepwater Horizon disaster, which his predecessor, Donald Trump, had removed. The move comes as the White House looks to buttress domestic oil production due to its boycott of Russian energy exports.

The US Department of the Interior [announced on Tuesday](#) it was restoring the “final well control rule,” which requires a series of safety practices designed to prevent another disaster like that which befell Deepwater Horizon, a [BP oil rig that exploded](#) in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, killing 11 people and leading to the largest oil spill in history.

The rule requires blowout preventer systems (BOPs) to always be able to close and seal the wellbore on an offshore oil rig up to the maximum anticipated surface pressure, along with several related safety practices, and requires operators to report their test results, analyses and investigations to the DoI’s Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE).

“Finalizing this rule will enable BSEE to continue to put the lives and livelihoods of workers first, as well as the protection of our waters and marine habitats,” BSEE Director Kevin Sligh said in the release. “This rule strengthens testing and performance requirements for blowout preventers and other well control equipment, provides for timely and robust analyses and investigations into failures, and clarifies reporting requirements to ensure we have appropriate visibility over information and data critical to maintaining well integrity.”

The rule was made in 2016, following a [report by the US](#) Chemical Safety Board that determined a blowout preventer failure was a major part of the Deepwater Horizon disaster. It was removed by the Trump administration in 2019 as part of a massive rollback aimed at

maximizing US domestic petroleum production. It argued the safety rules were an undue burden on oil and gas companies.

Jackie Savitz, the chief policy officer for ocean conservation nonprofit Oceana, told US media that reinstating the rule was “a big step in getting us back on track,” but noted offshore drilling would always be dangerous.

“There is no way we can do enough to prevent an oil spill, it is an inherently risky business and it’s not a matter of if, but when we will have another one. So a big part of prevention has to be to stop selling new leases,” she said.

The American Petroleum Institute ([API](#)) [blasted Biden’s move](#), claiming it would “weaken US security.”

“The recommended actions are not justified by existing data nor operational experience, would impose significant burdens on the men and women currently working in the region, and unfairly single out oil and gas traffic in an area that is one of the most used maritime areas in US waters,” said API Vice President of Upstream Policy Holly Hopkins.

Ironically, the Biden administration has adopted the new rules as it is pushing petroleum companies to expand their production after he instituted a boycott of Russian energy exports last year, which accounted for 9% of US oil and gas imports.

According to [new federal projections](#) released earlier this month, the US is expected to exceed 12.8 million barrels of oil per day in domestic production before the end of the year - its highest-ever average, about 500,000 more barrels per day than during the previous maximum in 2019, set under Trump.

That outpaces even Saudi Arabia, which produces roughly 10 million barrels of oil per day, [according to OPEC](#).

Hunter Kornfeind, oil market analyst at Rapidan Energy Group, told US media “there’s a narrative out there that US production is dead or dying,” adding that it’s “maturing, it’s not dead.” Indeed, Biden’s critics and challengers in the Republican Party who seek to supplant him in the 2024 presidential election have claimed his energy policies are a disaster for the petroleum industry.

"Inflation was caused, in my opinion, by energy, because it's so big," [Trump said in a US television](#) interview last week. "It's like all encompassing, everything. You make donuts in the ovens and the trucks that deliver them, and no matter what you do, it's so much about energy." "They cut it off, and again, we were drilling much more. We were a bigger force than Russia and Saudi Arabia individually," he continued. "In a year and a half, we would have been a bigger force than them combined and we would have made so much money. We would have been paying off debt, we would have been doing things that nobody's ever seen this country do."

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Severe Storm Brings Heavy Rain to Texas as Officials Warn of Flash Flooding, Tornadoes

As California and Nevada deal with the aftermath of Tropical Storm Hilary, Texas will be experiencing a similar cyclone this week, with officials warning residents flash flooding and potential tornadoes.

Residents in Texas have been urged to seek shelter and follow statewide alerts as a severe storm brought with it heavy rains and strong winds across the US' southern coastline.

The US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) stated the storm made landfall at around 10 a.m. local time on Texas' Padre Island in the Gulf of Mexico with 50 miles per hour (MPH) winds and detailed the core of the storm would impact the inland areas of south Texas.

Although the watchdog's latest advisory indicates Tropical Storm Harold has since weakened into a tropical depression, forecasters warn heavy rains remain a threat to the Lone Star State. The storm is expected to continue moving inland in a west-northwest direction at about 21 mph, before eventually fading out by Wednesday. The system's winds were initially predicted to sustain near 45 MPH, with the latest advisory underscoring "gusty winds" were due.

Earlier releases indicated that Falfurrias, Texas, which is located in southern Texas, had already reported sustained wind speeds of 35 mph, with a gust of 60 mph.

More than one million Texans have been placed under tropical storm warnings.

Flash flooding is expected in parts of south Texas, as well, as rainfall bears down on the region bringing 2 to 4 inches of rain, with some areas seeing 6 inches of rain. Places from Sargent to Baffin Bay, Corpus Christi Bay, and Matagorda Bay may experience 1 to 3 feet of flooding above ground. Flash flood warnings have been implemented by officials.

An earlier NOAA advisory stated a "couple" tornadoes were possible for portions of south Texas, as residents in counties located in south-central Texas were warned to stay indoors and be cautious of flying debris.

Beginning on Tuesday, Harold will bring with it about 2 to 4 inches of rain across parts of Mexico's states in the north and the northeast, while 10 inches of rain will fall on parts of northern Coahuila and northern Nuevo Leon. That rain will continue into Wednesday, the agency said. Flash flooding will be scattered throughout these regions.

While the Lone Star State braces for rain and flash flooding, the US states of California and Nevada are currently dealing with the aftermath of Tropical Storm Hilary, which brought with it mudflows toppling trees, downed power lines, and trapped cars.

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Just 22 People Needed to Colonize Mars But One Personality Type Should Stay Out - Study

The simulation tested four different personality types to see how each would fare in the colony—one in particular stood out to researchers.

New findings have revealed that a substantially low number of people are required for the amount of colonists needed to occupy Mars.

Studies have previously attempted to guess just how many people are needed to colonize the red planet. In 2020, one [study](#) by professor Jean-Marc Salotti at Bordeaux Institut National Polytechnique (INP) found that 110 people would be necessary for fulfilling duties on Mars. However, this most recent study found that a much smaller number of people is necessary for colonizing Mars. Researchers determined that the magic number was just 22 people. Officials came to the conclusion after running multiple 28-year simulations and using 10 to 170 "people" to start their "colonies." The simulation also differed from the study in 2020, because it assumed that the colony had already been constructed and that food, air, and water could be produced locally. The authors also assumed power was being generated in their simulation. But the researchers also delved deeper into the complexity of their simulated individuals. Researchers additionally created four different personality types for their simulations, including: Agreeables, who are not very competitive nor aggressive; Socials, who are extroverted and require social interaction; Reactives, who have a "competitive interpersonal orientation" and are "fixated on stringent routines"; and Neurotics, who are very competitive and aggressive, and are also unable to take on boredom as well as change to routine. "We wanted to show that if we neglect the social, behavioral and psychological aspects of space explorations, we can err grossly in our estimations, predictions and projections," Anamaria Berea, co-author on the study, told one [outlet](#). The researchers found those who were "neurotic" were the most likely to die. They were also the most likely to suffer while living on the colony, and, the colony even improved when fewer Neurotics existed. "While the members of the settlement have an equal probability of being affected by lack of settlement resources, habitat accidents, or earth shipping disasters, Martians with the 'neurotic' psychology die at a much higher rate than those of other psychologies," the team wrote. "Once their population reaches a low enough level, the settlement population stabilizes." "Martians with neurotic psychology and a high coping capacity benefit the least from interaction with other Martians, and are penalized the most if they have a low coping capacity. Our results suggest that this effect is a driver of the Martian population decline, and once minimized or removed, can produce a stable settlement," they added. The study comes as one real-life simulation constructed by NASA began in late June; four volunteers entered a simulated Mars habitat in Houston, [Texas](#), and are expected to remain there for 378 days. The individuals include a structural engineer, an emergency medicine physician and a microbiologist, however, none of the volunteers are trained astronauts. The preprint paper, titled "An Exploration of Mars Colonization with Agent-Based Modeling," was published to the server [arXiv](#).

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Trump-Less Debate - Cartoon

Trump's absence from the looming GOP debate does not appear to be simply a political stunt; in fact, many have suggested it's part of a revenge tactic against the hosting Fox network.

Former US President Donald Trump has [confirmed](#) he will not participate in the first GOP debate on Wednesday, explaining the American public already "knows" who he is and how he intends to handle the presidency in his second White House bid.

However, it remains unclear if Trump plans to skip all future political debates, or just the first scheduled televised event on Wednesday.

Insiders have noted the former commander-in-chief's decision is causing anxiety amongst other GOP candidates, who are trailing Trump poorly in the [polls](#). Despite facing 91 felony counts and four criminal trials, Trump now leads with 62%, while his closest opponent, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis (R) trails him by 16%.

As senior Republican [officials](#), strategists, and GOP candidates see Trump as a weak opponent against President Joe Biden for the 2024 election, Republicans also fear being left in the lurch in trying to take back control of the Senate.

Skipping the debate has not been entirely backed by Trump supporters: a recent poll found 77% of participants would like to see Trump participate in the debate.

Instead of just skipping the debate, Trump has reportedly already sat down for an interview with ex-Fox News host Tucker Carlson, which is expected to be aired on Wednesday. Critics have said the interview may drive a stake further into the heart of the Fox News company, as Carlson is still under a contract with Fox and continues to be paid by the network.

Last month, Fox News President Jay Wallace and CEO Suzanne Scott reportedly traveled to Trump's New Jersey golf club and desperately pleaded the former president to take part in the debate. However, Trump's alleged disdain for the network, and for chairman Rupert Murdoch, appears to run deep as he [reportedly](#) sniped in private that Murdoch and the network have been "disloyal" after turning their attention to DeSantis.

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McCarthy Vows to Launch September Impeachment if Biden Fails to Provide 'Requested' Docs

House Republicans have been calling for impeachment proceedings against US President Joe Biden for months over allegations of financial misconduct during the Obama years. While initial calls were dulled, new reports suggest the initiative may be picked up once Congress comes back in session.

US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) threatened, yet again, on Tuesday to launch an impeachment inquiry in September if the Biden administration fails to turn over documents said to be tied to an alleged bribery scheme involving the Biden family.

It's not clear, however, which documents McCarthy is seeking, nor from whom. Additionally, reports have suggested the so-called 'missing' files were not exactly requested by lawmakers. "The thing that holds up whether we do impeachment inquiry, provide us the documents we're asking," McCarthy said in an interview with Larry Kudlow. "The whole determination here is how the Bidens handled this."

"If they provide us the documents, there wouldn't be a need for impeachment inquiry. But if they withhold the documents and fight like they have now to not provide to the American public what

they deserve to know, we will move forward with impeachment inquiry when we come back into session,” he added.

The House speaker did clarify that they were looking for bank statements, as well as credit card statements.

“The bank statements, the credit card statements and others. Show us where the money went, show us were you taking money from outside sources? And that would clear most of this up, but they seem to fight it every step of the way,” he added.

Republicans have for months been making calls for an impeachment inquiry against US President Joe Biden over a pay-to-play scheme that is alleged to have taken place when the commander-in-chief served as vice president under the Obama White House. It's alleged Hunter Biden used his father's role as a means to get kickbacks at the time.

When asked about the impeachment inquiry into the president, McCarthy reportedly raised several allegations about Biden's involvement in his son's business dealings. In addition, he also criticized the decision to [appoint](#) a special counsel to oversee the ongoing probe into Hunter Biden.

US Attorney for the District of Delaware, David Weiss, was earlier appointed by Attorney General Merrick Garland to oversee the Hunter Biden case, a move that has prompted GOP attacks against Weiss as a result.

McCarthy is presently claiming that the US House could also push forward an impeachment inquiry into Biden should Weiss refuse to hand over certain information to Congress. It's worth noting that prior to the appointment announcement, reports indicated that Weiss had initially been blocked from the post.

“If they use this special counsel to say that they can't provide us the information, then it just shows more politics. And it will not stop us. Then we would move to impeachment inquiry and we would be able to still get the documents that we need as we move forward,” McCarthy explained.

McCarthy first floated the idea of an impeachment inquiry against Biden in July, explaining then that the motive was rooted over allegations that the US president was a willing participant in financial misconduct.

However, the early summer initiative only came after the House speaker initially opted to shut down earlier impeachment calls that were being encouraged by the hard-right Republicans of the House Freedom caucus.

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Canada to Send International Trade Minister to G20 Ministerial in India – Global Affairs

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) – Ottawa will be represented by its Minister of International Trade Mary Ng at the G20 Trade and Investment Ministerial Meeting in India, Global Affairs Canada (GAC) said on Wednesday.

“This week, the Honourable Mary Ng, Minister of Export Promotion, International Trade and Economic Development, will participate in the G20 Trade and Investment Ministerial Meeting in

Jaipur, India,” the ministry’s statement said.

Under India’s presidency of the G20, Canada hopes to further promote its international trade priorities, the statement said, such as the promotion of an inclusive and strong global economy.

GAC added that Ng will hold several meetings on the sidelines of the Ministerial with her counterparts to discuss trade and investment opportunities between Canada and other member states.

Following her attendance at the Ministerial in Jaipur, the minister will travel to New Delhi where she will meet with Canadian businesses attending the Business 20 event, the statement added.

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House May Seek Biden Impeachment Inquiry Next Month – Speaker McCarthy

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) – The US House of Representatives will seek to impeach US President Biden after returning from summer recess next month if the Biden family does not produce the documents that Republican investigators seek, Speaker Kevin McCarthy said.

“If they withhold the documents and fight like they have now to not provide to the American public what they deserve to know, we will move forward with an impeachment inquiry when we come back into session,” McCarthy said in an interview with Fox Business late Wednesday.

Amid talk of an impeachment inquiry, House Republicans have been gathering evidence to try to show that Biden engaged in wrongdoing through the business dealings of his son Hunter.

McCarthy said that an impeachment inquiry would give Congress heightened power to subpoena Biden for documents like bank and credit card statements that would indicate whether he was taking money from foreign sources.

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Trump Says Will ‘Proudly’ Be Arrested on Thursday Afternoon in Georgia

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) – Former US President Donald Trump said on Wednesday that he will be “proudly” arrested on Thursday afternoon in Fulton County, Georgia on charges of election interference.

“Nobody has ever fought for election integrity like President Donald J. Trump. For doing so, I will proudly be arrested tomorrow afternoon in Georgia. God Bless the United States of America,” Trump said in a Truth Social post.

Trump is expected to be released after being booked, as an Atlanta judge on Monday agreed to release him on \$200,000 bail, but restricted him from speaking with co-defendants and witnesses about the case.

A Fulton County grand jury indicted Trump on 13 felony counts related to his alleged attempts

to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election. Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis told reporters that the grand jury had issued arrest warrants for Trump and 18 co-defendants named in the indictment, and they all have until August 25 to voluntarily surrender.

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Two in Five Canadians Say Trudeau Government Responsible for Housing Crisis – Poll

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) – The government of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is being blamed for the country’s ongoing housing crisis by 40% of Canadians, a Léger poll revealed on Wednesday.

Léger conducted the poll through a web survey between August 18-20, with the participation of 1537 Canadians aged 18 or older. The respondents had the choice of their favored official language.

According to the poll’s figures, 40% of Canadians consider that Trudeau’s government is to be blamed for the nationwide housing crisis, 32% pointed fingers at their provincial authorities, and 6 percent at municipal ones.

Among said percentage, homeowners were more likely to say the federal government was responsible for the situation with 43% blaming them, the poll said, adding that even though over a third (35%) of renters also were of that opinion, 37% of them saw the provincial authorities as the culprits.

The poll also found out that 55% of Canadians who have a mortgage or rent on their primary residence are worried about being able to pay either of them, something two-thirds of younger Canadians aged 18-34 are even more afraid of.

Moreover, nearly one hundred percent (95%) of the polled expressed the belief that increasing rental prices and lack of affordable housing are serious problems, 66% of those characterizing the situation as “very serious”, the poll said.

Respondents expressed 79% of their support for incentivizing housing developers, 79% for supporting affordable housing, and 77% for tighter controls on rents.

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One Out of Four Young Canadians Would Relocate Over Wildfire Smoke, Fumes – Poll

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) – Amid a historically severe wildfire season in Canada 24% of young Canadians affected by fire smoke and fumes would consider relocating somewhere else, an Angus Reid poll revealed.

On Tuesday, the polling institute said that almost a quarter (24%) of young Canadians would settle somewhere else due to the smoke and fumes, both consequences of wildfires. This is

almost twice the proportion of overall inhabitants who expressed consideration for relocating (13%).

Moreover, the poll found that fifty-five percent of Canadians expect to experience worse fire conditions in the future, whereas slightly above a quarter (26%) said they believe this year's historic wildfires will become the new normal.

In addition, nearly 60% of Canadians attributed the magnitude of this wildfire season to the effects of climate change, with a third disagreeing with that possibility, the poll added.

The Institute also found that three out of five Canadians believe climate change has become a "crisis" that swiftly needs to be addressed by society, something 10% of the polled considered as a missed opportunity.

Eleven percent of the polled said the situation is fine and nothing needs to be done.

Angus Reid carried the poll between August 8-11 helped by two online surveys on a randomized sample of 1606 Canadian adults' who are members of the Angus Reid Forum.

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RPT: PREVIEW - Republicans Hold First Debate of 2024 US Election Season, Trump to Skip Amid Lead in Polls

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - Eight Republican Party candidates will take the stage on Wednesday during the first primary debate of the 2024 US presidential election cycle, although former US President Donald Trump will not be alongside them amid his lead in the polls.

The Fox News-moderated debate will take place in Milwaukee, Wisconsin at 9:00 p.m. EST on Wednesday. The event is set to last two hours, during which time eight presidential hopefuls will attempt to rally support for their campaigns ahead of the primary season.

The Republican National Committee (RNC) required that candidates receive at least 1% support in several polls and the backing of at least 40,000 individual campaign donors. In addition, the RNC required candidates to vow to back whomever the party ends up nominating.

The eight candidates on the stage will include: Florida Governor Ron DeSantis; businessman Vivek Ramaswamy; former US Vice President Mike Pence; US Senator Tim Scott; former US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley; former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie; former Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson; and North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum.

DeSantis, Ramaswamy and Pence hold the highest support of the candidates on the debate stage, according to FiveThirtyEight primary poll averages. DeSantis stands at 14.5% support, Ramaswamy at 8.9% and Pence at 4.2%. However, the three trail behind Trump, who stands at 52.2% support.

TRUMP

Trump opted to skip the debate amid his significant lead in the primary polls, instead reportedly planning to release an interview with former Fox News host Tucker Carlson as counterprogramming to the event.

"People know my Record, one of the BEST EVER, so why would I Debate?" Trump said via social media platform Truth.

Trump's lead in the polls has remained despite several criminal indictments against the former president.

On Thursday, Trump will surrender himself to authorities in Fulton County, Georgia over charges linked to alleged efforts to overturn the 2020 election results.

It is also unclear whether Trump signed the RNC's vow to support whomever ultimately receives the party's nomination.

DESANTIS

DeSantis has proven to be Trump's biggest threat, and target, of the primary phase. In January, DeSantis received an average support of up to 40%, but his numbers have since dwindled amid increasing attacks by Trump and other political opponents.

DeSantis has also taken aim at Trump, appearing to refer to the former president's supporters as "listless vessels" in a recent interview. The comment prompted the Trump campaign and supporters to condemn DeSantis' statement and call for an apology.

However, the fact that DeSantis leads the candidates on the stage in terms of support could also make him the main target during the Wednesday debate.

RAMASWAMY

Among the candidates who could go after DeSantis on Wednesday evening is Ramaswamy, a tech entrepreneur who has styled himself as an "America First" candidate in the vein of Trump.

Ramaswamy specifically told conservative operatives during a call in the early days of his campaign that he could impact DeSantis' viability as a candidate, US media reported.

Ramaswamy averaged approximately 1-2% support after launching his campaign in February, since rising to nearly double digits.

He has pitched foreign policy stances such as negotiating an end to the conflict in Ukraine and improving ties with Russia to pull them away from an alliance with China.

The tech entrepreneur also proposed that US defense commitments to Taiwan should depend on whether the United States has achieved semiconductor independence.

PENCE

Ramaswamy's foreign policy positions stand in contrast to Pence, who is seeking to beat out his former running mate in the Republican primary. Pence has been an ardent supporter of Ukraine and continued US aid for the regime in Kiev.

Pence visited Ukraine earlier this year, where he met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. The former vice president believes Ukraine should be granted NATO membership once the conflict with Russia is settled.

Several experts told Sputnik that the conflict in Ukraine is not likely to be a major factor in the minds of US voters. However, former CIA analyst and station chief Philip Giraldi said that Republicans could potentially end up criticizing Biden for mishandling the conflict.

Pence has also distanced himself from Trump despite their previous ties, following his decision to speak out against the former president's actions after the 2020 US presidential election.

VOTERS

The first Republican primary debate comes ahead of primary and caucus races, set to start early next year. States including Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina, Nevada and Michigan are set to hold their races in January and February, followed by so-called Super Tuesday on March 5, during which a number of states will hold races.

Trump holds 42% support among likely Republican caucusgoers in Iowa, compared to 19% for

DeSantis, according to a Des Moines Register/NBC News/Mediacom Iowa poll released Monday. All other candidates received less than 10% support.

Iowa is often viewed as a bellwether state for the general political direction of the US ahead of national elections.

The debate Wednesday evening and future events like it are critical for candidates to establish momentum heading into those races, especially when squaring off against a contender with the recognition of Trump.

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WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - A proposal to allow prospective US military recruits to use calculators during entrance exams will not boost enlistment numbers when the root cause of the problem is America's role in unending wars and poor leadership, experts told Sputnik.

The Department of Defense is considering permitting prospective enlistees to use electronic calculators to enable them to pass the demanding math tests required of recruits, Fox News reported on Monday. The proposed move is part of efforts to increase the flow of new recruits, the report said. The US Army, Navy and Air Force are all expected to miss their 2023 recruiting goals, the report said.

"Anyone who thinks calculators will change what is a 50-year trajectory of decay and rot is, in my opinion, smoking rope," former Pentagon analyst Chuck Spinney told Sputnik. "The fundamental retention problems magnifying the recruiting dilemma stem from forever wars and [poor] small unit leadership."

Moreover, the establishment of the All Volunteer Force (AVF) a half century ago, he added, has not fixed issues at the top that were evident in the draftee military.

"The AVF has not changed the central fact that the self-centered, careerist officer corps needs to be fundamentally reformed and what is left of the middle class and the rich need to have skin in the game to ensure that this happens. Otherwise... we will continue increasing bonuses and qualification reductions to keep the game going," Spinney said.

Meanwhile, the poor and underclass still make up the bulk of the inductees and become the eventual cannon fodder, Spinney said.

Spinney also said after Vietnam the problems of readiness, retention, and professionalism were blamed erroneously on budget reductions. In fact, he added, budget increases the Pentagon received almost every year since the 1970s changed nothing.

"Throwing money at the Pentagon has made these fundamental leadership problems worse. So the shift from the corrupt draft to the All-Volunteer Force meant that the deeper human causes of our string of collective failures since Vietnam have not been addressed," Spinney said.

Covert Action Magazine managing editor and military analyst Jeremy Kuzmarov said Americans are not willing to die in avoidable conflicts for a government they mistrust.

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Former US Army Military Intelligence officer and political commentator Philip Giraldi, Founder and Chair of the Council for the National Interest, warned that the recruitment crisis was likely to get even more severe as US national educational standards continued to plummet.

"Note particularly how West Virginia University is dropping foreign language courses and creative writing, a trend that will be accelerating throughout the college and university system," Giraldi said. "Uncle Sam wouldn't be interested in having public education produce well-educated critical thinkers in any event. They might rebel."

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Lockheed Martin Wins \$606.8Mln F-35 Contract - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - The US military awarded Lockheed Martin a contract worth more than \$600 million for materials in support of maintaining on-time production of 173 F-35 jets, the Defense Department said in a press release.

"Lockheed Martin Corp., Lockheed Martin Aeronautics Co., Fort Worth, Texas, is awarded a not-to-exceed \$606,800,000 fixed-price incentive (firm-target) undefinitized modification... for long lead time materials, parts, components, and efforts in support of maintaining on-time production and delivery of 173, Lot 19, F-35 Joint Strike Fighter aircraft for Foreign Military Sales (FMS) customers and non-US Department of Defense (DOD) participants," the release said Tuesday.

The release said most of the work will be performed in Texas and California, in addition to other US locations, along with the UK and Italy.

The work is expected to be completed in January 2028, the release added.

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McCarthy Rips Impacts of 'Bidenomics' on US Parents Shopping for New School Year

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden's economic policy is costing parents in the United States shopping for back-to-school supplies for their children, US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy said in a statement.

"The price of school supplies has risen by nearly 24 percent since President Biden took office. Packing your child's backpack has never been more expensive," the statement said on Tuesday. "While Democrats refuse to address rising costs, Republicans will continue to fight to make education more affordable, attainable, and accessible."

So-called Bidenomics has resulted in parents spending an average of over \$100 more per household on back-to-school supplies compared to 2020, the statement said, citing National Retail Federation estimates.

In addition, gas prices are \$1.46 higher than they were on Biden's first day in office, making getting to school more expensive as well, the statement said.

On Monday, McCarthy also issued a statement calling on the US Senate to pass the Parents

Bill of Rights legislation, which the House of Representatives passed earlier this year. McCarthy said he plans to release a third statement ahead of the new school year on how "woke curriculums" are failing US students.

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US Judge Approves Request to Televisе Trump's Georgia Arraignment - Filing

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - A US judge will allow former President Donald Trump's arraignment in Georgia to be televised later this week when he makes an appearance in court to face charges for his alleged involvement in a scheme to turn over the 2020 presidential election results in the state, court documents revealed.

US Judge Scott McAfee approved a request on Tuesday to allow four local broadcasters in Atlanta to record Trump's arraignment whenever he may appear in court in the coming days, according to the court document.

Trump is expected to turn himself in over to the authorities at the Fulton County jail on Thursday as part of charges brought by the district attorney related to alleged efforts to overturn the 2020 US presidential election results in the state.

The court set Trump's bail at \$200,000 and restricted him from speaking with co-defendants and witnesses about the case.

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US Military Recruiting Woes Stem From Unending Wars, Not Likely to End Soon - Experts

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Blinken, Egyptian Foreign Minister Discuss Niger, Sudan, Libya - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry discussed situations in Niger and Sudan, as well as recent developments in Libya, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a statement.

"Secretary Blinken and Foreign Minister Shoukry discussed ongoing efforts to address the conflict in Sudan and the need to find a diplomatic solution in Niger," Miller said on Tuesday.

They also talked about recent developments in Libya and UN support for holding free and fair elections, he added.

Blinken welcomed Cairo's decision to release human rights activist Ahmed Douma and his colleagues. He also highlighted the importance of human rights progress to strengthen the US-Egypt partnership, according to the statement.

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Raimondo, China Envoy Discuss Issues in Commercial Relations - US Commerce Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo and Chinese Ambassador Xie Feng discussed issues in the two countries' commercial relations ahead of Raimondo's upcoming trip to China, the US Commerce Department said in a readout of the conversation.

"Secretary Raimondo raised issues of importance to the United States and American businesses and workers and discussed issues relating to the US-China commercial relationship, challenges faced by US businesses, and areas for potential cooperation," the readout said on Tuesday.

The talks were characterized as "productive," the readout said.

Earlier on Tuesday, the Commerce Department announced that Raimondo will visit Beijing and Shanghai from August 27-30, where she will meet with senior government officials and US business leaders.

National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said that Raimondo will discuss the rationale behind President Joe Biden's executive orders to restrict US investment in China.

Sullivan said Raimondo will also exert pressure on China regarding some of its economic policy and national security decisions - including on the so-called counter-espionage rule to the alleged lack of transparency on economic data - so the United States can understand where they are coming from.

On Monday, the US Commerce Department announced it would remove 27 Chinese companies from its Unverified List, after it determined that they had legitimate end-use reasons for receiving US exports.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) -

BRICS SUMMIT

* The cooperation among the BRICS member states is based on equality and support among partners, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Tuesday.

* The BRICS countries have to solve complex and difficult issues due to market volatility, inflation pressures and irresponsible actions of some countries, Putin said.

* Russia's trade with other BRICS member states has exceeded \$230 billion, Putin said.

* China will continue strengthening the partnership within the BRICS group, promoting democratization of international affairs and a multipolar world, Commerce Minister Wang

Wentao cited President Xi Jinping as saying.

SYRIA DEVELOPMENTS

- * The Russian aerospace forces attacked a command post of the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham terrorist group (banned in Russia), Russian Defense Ministry's Center for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in Syria deputy head Vadim Kulit said on Tuesday.
- * Two Israeli F-16 fighter jets fired eight cruise missiles at Damascus outskirts on Monday from airspace above the Golan Heights, Kulit said.

BLACK SEA GRAIN INITIATIVE

- * Negotiations between Russia and its partners from Africa regarding the supply of grain free of charge are almost over, President Vladimir Putin said on Tuesday.
- * Russia is ready to return to the Black Sea Grain Initiative if all obligations toward Moscow are fulfilled, Putin said.
- * Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan will pay a visit to Russia to hold talks with Putin and discuss the grain deal, the Yeni Safak newspaper reported, citing sources in Erdogan's administration.

SITUATION IN LIBYA

- * A Russian delegation headed by Deputy Defense Minister Yunus-Bek Yevkurov on Tuesday arrived in Libya at the invitation of Libyan National Army Commander Khalifa Haftar, the Defense Ministry said.
- * The United States will continue to "shine a spotlight" on the presence of the private military company Wagner Group and its impact in Libya as well as in other African countries, US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

- * A Ukrainian sabotage group unsuccessfully tried to breach the state border of Russia's Bryansk Region near the Klimovsky District, Governor Alexander Bogomaz said on Tuesday.
- * Ukraine has lost up to 240 military both killed and injured in the South Donetsk direction over the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said.
- * A Russian aircraft destroyed the second in one day US-made Willard Sea Force boat with Ukrainian military on board near Zmiinyi Island in the Black Sea, the Defense Ministry said.
- * Russia scrambled fighter jets on Tuesday to prevent MQ-9 Reaper and TB2 Bayraktar drones from crossing into Russian airspace when they were engaged in reconnaissance near the Crimean peninsula, the Defense Ministry said.

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Biden Administration Approves Fourth Major Offshore Wind Project - US Interior Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration has launched its fourth major offshore wind project as part of its green energy drive, adding around 700 megawatts of electricity potentially from the initiative to be located offshore Rhode Island, the Department of the Interior said in a news release on Tuesday.

The administration said its goal is to deploy 30 gigawatts of offshore wind energy capacity by 2030 and it had previously approved wind projects offshore Massachusetts, Rhode Island and New York as well as New Jersey.

"The latest project will have an estimated capacity of 704 megawatts of clean energy, capable of powering nearly 250,000 homes," the release said. "The project is expected to create an estimated 1,200 local jobs during the construction phase."

Biden's economic agenda has attracted more than \$500 billion in private sector manufacturing and clean energy investments, including in the offshore wind industry, the release said.

"Since the president took office, companies have announced 18 offshore wind shipbuilding projects as well as investments of nearly \$3.5 billion across 12 manufacturing facilities and 13 ports to strengthen the American offshore wind supply chain, representing thousands of new jobs," the release added.

With the latest wind project, the Interior Department's Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) remains on track to complete reviews of at least 16 offshore wind project plans by 2025, representing more than 27 gigawatts of clean energy, according to the release.

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Pentagon on Ukraine's Counteroffensive – 'Battle Not Over Until It Is Over'

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - Commenting on the slow pace of the Ukrainian counteroffensive, Pentagon spokesperson Pat Ryder said that "the battle is not over until it is over" amid the mounting number of reports with negative assessment of Kiev's military tactics.

"A combat by its very nature is really dynamic is very fluid and it's unpredictable, and any student of history would know that the battle is not over until it's over," Ryder said during a press briefing after being repeatedly asked to explain why the Ukrainian counteroffensive is not making much progress.

Earlier on Tuesday, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan also had to explain to reporters why the Ukrainian counter-offensive, which had been talked about in Western media and political circles before it even began, is essentially not working. According to Sullivan, Ukraine did not listen to its Western partners, but acted in its own way when planning a special operation, while the reality on the battlefield appeared to be much different from what was planned in Kiev.

A Tuesday report by The New York Times cites US and Western officials who accuse the Ukrainian military of misallocating troops by dividing them between the east and south instead of concentrating them in the south as was advised by American planners of the counter-offensive.

The American military strategists prioritized the capture of Melitopol in Zaporizhzhia oblast by

concentrating a large number of Ukrainian troops and Western equipment, but Kiev chose different tactics, according to the report.

Western officials argue that only a change in current tactics, coupled with a dramatic move on the battlefield, can speed up the stalled Ukrainian counteroffensive, according to the report.

Ukraine launched its much-touted counteroffensive in early June after multiple postponements. According to the Russian Defense Ministry, Ukrainian troops continue to try but are failing to advance in three directions — South Donetsk, Bakhmut, and Zaporizhzhia, with the latter being the primary focus.

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Pentagon Says Cannot Comment on Status of Musk's Security Clearance Amid Reported Drug Use

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - Pentagon spokesperson Pat Ryder said on Tuesday that the US Defense Department cannot comment on the status of businessman Elon Musk's security clearance, amid reports of the tech billionaire's use of the drug ketamine.

"For privacy reasons, per policy, we don't discuss particular individuals' security clearances," Ryder said during a press briefing, when asked about Musk's alleged use of ketamine. "I'd refer you to Mr. Musk's company to talk about that."

Musk uses ketamine, an anesthetic drug used recreationally and to treat depression, and his use of this drug has increased in recent years, the New Yorker reported on Monday.

In 2018, Musk prompted a NASA safety review after smoking cannabis on an episode of Joe Rogan's podcast.

The use of illegal drugs can disqualify individuals from receiving security clearances from the US government. However, Musk regularly engages with the Defense Department through his aerospace company SpaceX and his Starlink satellite internet service, which has been provided to Ukraine.

Ryder said the Defense Department will continue to work with a wide variety of companies such as SpaceX, and has well-developed contract procedures that are "personality independent."

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Former Puerto Rico Mayor Sentenced to 3 Years Jail on Bribery Charges - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - A judge sentenced the former mayor of a town in Puerto Rico to more than three years in prison for accepting \$27,000 in bribes, the Department of Justice announced in a press release on Tuesday.

"The former mayor of the municipality of Humacao, Puerto Rico, was sentenced today to three years and one month in prison for his involvement in a bribery scheme in which he received

cash payments for awarding municipal contracts to two companies," the release said.

According to court documents, starting in 2021 Reinaldo Vargas-Rodriguez, 49, the mayor and highest-ranking government official in the municipality of Humacao was involved in a bribery conspiracy in which he received and accepted cash payments from two businessmen in exchange for awarding municipal contracts for waste disposal services, asphalt and paving services, and debris removal, the Justice Department said.

"Vargas-Rodriguez received at least \$27,000 in cash bribes from January 2021 through July 2021 from the two businessmen," the release said.

The case was part of the Justice Department's ongoing efforts to combat public corruption by municipal officials in Puerto Rico, the release explained.

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UN Says Only Providing Tech Assessment Through IAEA in Fukushima Water Release

UNITED NATIONS, August 22 (Sputnik) - The United Nations' only involvement in the Japanese matter of dumping water from Fukushima into the sea is through the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), UN Spokesperson Stephan Dujarric said Tuesday.

"As far as the situation regarding the release around Fukushima, the only UN involvement is technical assessment done by the only UN agency that has the the technical capacity and oversight on this and that's the IAEA, and we defer to them on their decision... They've made the recommendation and I would refer you to IAEA, Dujarric told a briefing.

"We have no comment on the Japanese government's decision," he added.

The plant's operator has collected more than 1 million tonnes of wastewater, which Japan plans to start dumping into the Pacific Ocean this week, more than a decade after a massive tsunami triggered a meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi plant in March 2011.

Fishermen in the Fukushima prefecture and in the neighboring countries fear this treated but still radioactive water could undermine consumer confidence in their catch. This is despite the UN atomic agency, IAEA, concluding in July that Japan's plan was consistent with its safety standards.

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Blast in Canada's British Columbia Leaves Three Hospitalized - RCMP

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - Three individuals have been hospitalized, one with serious injuries, after a blast rocked downtown Prince George in Canada's province of British Columbia, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police said on Tuesday.

"Northern Health had confirmed that three people were transported to hospital this morning, only one of whom had serious injuries. It is still too early into this event to determine any cause,"

Media Relations Officer for the Prince George RCMP, Cpl. Jennifer Cooper said in a statement obtained by Sputnik.

Hydro has been shut down in the area and will remain as such for an unknown amount of time, Cooper added.

The areas comprised between the Third and Fifth Avenues, from George and Dominion Streets up to Queensway in the city's downtown have been closed until further notice, Cooper said, to both pedestrian and vehicular traffic.

The Officer further noted the number of casualties remains unknown but further updates will be provided as information becomes available.

Earlier today, first responders were dispatched near the fourth Avenue and Dominion Street for an explosion that occurred around 7:00 a.m local time. The RCMP called on the public to stay away from the area and give room for safe operations.

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US, Ukraine Aware of Russian Defenses' Thickness Ahead of Counteroffensive - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - Ukraine and the United States were aware of the thickness of Russia's defenses ahead of Kiev's counteroffensive and will continue to monitor the situation to see what the outcome will be as the weeks unfold, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan on Tuesday.

"Ukrainians were aware, we were aware of the thickness of the Russian defenses, but at the end of the day, there is a massive difference between planning and reality when it comes to any conflict," Sullivan said. "The Ukrainians are doing it their way. We're continuing to provide them the tools to be able to do it. We'll see where things end up as the weeks unfold."

Sullivan said the US government does not assess the conflict in Ukraine to be a stalemate.

Ukraine launched its much-touted counteroffensive in early June after repeatedly delaying the campaign due to lack of sufficient military supplies from its Western donors.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy recently admitted that progress in the counteroffensive has been slower than desired.

The Russian Defense Ministry says Ukrainian troops have been trying - but failing - to advance in the South Donetsk, Bakhmut and the Zaporizhzhia sectors.

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Recent High-Level US Visits to China Not Aimed At Changing Beijing's Policies - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - Recent high-level travel by senior US administration officials to China in recent months is not part of a broader effort to change Beijing's policies, but instead focused on stabilizing the competitive relationship between the two countries, White

House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Tuesday.

"We are not sending cabinet officials to China to change China, nor do we expect these conversations to change the United States," Sullivan said during a press briefing. "Rather, we each have the opportunity through this high-level engagement to ensure that there is a basic stable foundation in the relationship even as we compete intensively in a number of domains."

These high-level engagements between US and Chinese officials provides the United States an opportunity to explain its policies, Sullivan said.

Sullivan mentioned the purpose of Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo's visit to Beijing and Shanghai next week for a series of meetings.

According to Sullivan, Raimondo will discuss with Chinese officials the rationale behind President Joe Biden's executive order restricting US investment in China that was issued last week. investment executive order the President Biden issued earlier this month.

Sullivan said Raimondo will also "press" China on some of its economic policy decisions and other national security decisions, from the counter-espionage rule to an alleged lack of transparency on economic data, so that the United States can understand where they are coming from.

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Hundreds of Migrant Workers Evacuated Amid Ongoing Wildfires in British Columbia - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - Hundreds of seasonal migrant workers located in Canada's province of British Columbia have been forced to evacuate farmlands amid the threat posed by advancing wildfires, Global News reported on Tuesday.

An estimated 600 migrant workers have been evacuated from the Okanagan region and another 80 are obliged to stay in the country despite their contracts having finished due to the airports closure, the report said, citing Migrant Rights Network member Byron Cruz.

The situation is further exacerbating an already complicated situation of overcrowded housing units and is raising questions about the increasingly unsafe working conditions caused by the smoke levels, the report said.

Dozens of migrants had to immediately leave their workplaces, ending up in overcrowded houses and some faced lack of food as several organizations keep them fed, the report said.

Although the seasonal workers were successfully evacuated, some now face financial-related problems, such as 30 Salvadoran workers who ran out of money for food, the report said.

There is significant air pollution throughout the province and some workers are refusing to work in a smoke-filled environment, the report also said.

As of Monday, more than 27,000 individuals were under mandatory evacuation order in the province of British Columbia and 35,000 more are on an evacuation alert.

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Sullivan Says Discussed With Brazilian Advisor Possibility of Biden-Lula Meeting at UNGA

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Tuesday that he discussed with his Brazilian counterpart Celso Amorim the possibility of the presidents of the United States and Brazil meeting on the margins of the UN General Assembly debate next month.

"We did talk about the possibility that the two presidents will see one another on the margins of the UN General Assembly and carry forward work that they're both interested in on workers rights and a global labor agenda," Sullivan said during a press briefing.

Sullivan noted that he did not discuss with Amorim a possible visit by Biden to Brazil or the BRICS summit held in Johannesburg, South Africa, set for this week.

The United States does not see BRICS evolving into a geopolitical rival to the United States, Sullivan said.

The United States will continue to work on the strong positive relationships that it has with Brazil, India and South Africa - all founding members of BRICS, Sullivan added.

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US to Continue 'Shine Spotlight' on Wagner Group Presence in Libya - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, August 22 (Sputnik) - The United States will continue to "shine a spotlight" on the presence of the private military company Wagner Group and its impact in Libya as well as in other African countries, US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield said on Tuesday.

"We will continue to shine a spotlight on the Wagner group's pernicious impact in Libya, and across Africa," Thomas-Greenfield said during a UN Security Council meeting on Libya.

The US ambassador said the Wagner Group's presence in various countries makes them poor, weaker and less secure.

"We see that in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Sudan," Thomas-Greenfield added.

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China Calls on Warring Parties in Libya to Maintain Ceasefire - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, August 22 (Sputnik) - China is calling on all parties to the conflict in Libya to exercise restraint and maintain the ceasefire, Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Dai Bing said on Tuesday.

Clashes erupted in Libya after the Special Deterrence Force, which operates as a police force

in Tripoli, detained the commander of the 444th brigade affiliated with the Libyan Defense Ministry.

"The recent intense clashes in Tripoli have caused casualties. China calls on all parties in Libya to exercise restraint, avoid escalating actions and maintain the ceasefire," Dai said in a meeting of the UN Security Council on the situation in Libya.

China also welcomes the results achieved during the meetings between the UN Special Representative for Libya Abdoulaye Bathily and the 5+5 Joint Military Committee that resulted in making progress on unifying the country's security forces and in establishing a nation-wide ceasefire, Dai said.

The diplomat emphasized that China supports Libya in its attempts to strengthen communication and cooperation with regional countries as it begins to evacuate the external armed forces operating there - an important factor affecting regional security.

The international community should assist Libya in promoting political reconciliation and support the country's reconstruction, Dai said.

Libya is currently ruled by two contending governments. The country's western part is controlled by the UN-backed Government of National Accord sitting in Tripoli, while the eastern part is under the rule of the Government of National Stability, which is supported by the Libyan National Army.

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US Not Sending \$6Bln to Iran, But to Restricted Account Outside of Country - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - The United States is not sending \$6 billion directly to Iran, but rather will transfer them from one restricted account to another restricted account outside of the country, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Tuesday.

"We're not sending \$6 billion to Iran. We are transferring funds from one restricted account outside of Iran to another restricted account outside of Iran to operate under supervision to ensure that those funds are spent on non-sanctionable transactions," Sullivan said during a press briefing.

On August 10, US media reported that Tehran and Washington had reached an agreement on a prisoner exchange. Under the terms of the deal, the Biden administration will unfreeze approximately \$6 billion in Iranian oil revenue. The money is expected to be directed towards humanitarian purposes. The funds will be transferred from the Iranian government's account in a South Korean bank to a secure Iranian account in a bank in Qatar.

On the same day, White House National Security Council Spokesperson Adrienne Watson said that Tehran had released from prison five US citizens detained over espionage allegations and placed them under house arrest. The US is also expected to release five Iranian nationals.

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US Does Not Assess Conflict in Ukraine as 'Stalemate' - White House

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - The United States does not see the ongoing conflict in Ukraine to be a stalemate, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Tuesday.

"No, we do not assess that the conflict is a stalemate," Sullivan told reporters.

Ukraine launched its much-touted counteroffensive in early June after repeatedly delaying the campaign due to lack of sufficient military supplies from its Western donors.

The country's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has admitted that progress in the counteroffensive has been "slower than desired."

Western media has reported that after suffering significant losses in soldiers and military equipment, the Ukrainian commanders have focused on making targeted strikes.

In mid-July, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that Ukraine's counteroffensive is in its early weeks and will play out over the following weeks.

The Russian Defense Ministry says Ukrainian troops have been trying - but failing - to advance in the South Donetsk, Bakhmut and the Zaporizhzhia sectors.

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US Has No Comment Over Talks on Saudi Interest in Civil Nuclear Program - White House

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - The United States is not revealing any details of diplomatic discussions regarding Riyadh's interest in a civil nuclear program, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan told reporters on Tuesday when asked on whether Washington is ready to allow Saudi Arabia to enrich uranium whether as part of the talks to normalize ties with Israel or in general.

"I am not going to get into details of the discussions that we've been having with the Saudis and Israel with respect to Saudi interest in a civilian nuclear program," Sullivan said. "There is still a ways to travel with respect to all of the elements of those discussions and they get quite technical, as you know. So we don't expect any imminent announcements on that issue, or on the broader question of normalization, but it's something we continue to work on in close consultations with both the Saudis and the Israelis."

Sullivan added that when it comes to any kind of civilian nuclear component, Washington is also interested in the IAEA's view as well.

Saudi Energy Minister Abdulaziz bin Salman Al Saud said in January that the country was intending to use its uranium reserves to produce low enriched uranium and increase international cooperation in the nuclear sector.

In 2018, Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said that the kingdom would begin to develop its own nuclear weapons if its regional adversary, Iran, came into possession of nuclear arms.

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US Not Looking at BRICS as Evolving Geopolitical Rival – White House

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) – The United States is not looking at the BRICS group of nations as an evolving geopolitical rival and will continue to work on positive relationships with Brazil, India and South Africa, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Tuesday.

“We are not looking at the BRICS as evolving into some kind of geopolitical rival to the United States or anyone else,” Sullivan said during a press briefing. “We will continue to work on the strong positive relationships we have with Brazil, India and South Africa.”

The BRICS group of major emerging economies — Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa — will gather for a summit in Johannesburg from August 22-24. The summit's agenda includes economic relations, trade infrastructure, and the potential switch to a common currency to reduce member states' reliance on the US dollar.

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Biden Admin. Believes Congress Will Show Bipartisan Support for Ukraine Policy - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration expects lawmakers in Congress to show bipartisan support for its Ukraine policy despite some not being keen on providing more funding to Kiev, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan on Tuesday.

"We believe that the support will be there, and will be sustained, even if there are some dissident voices on the other side of the aisle. We believe that at the core, there was still a strong bipartisan foundation of support for our Ukraine policy and for supporting and defending," Sullivan said during a press conference.

Earlier this month, President Joe Biden asked Congress for an additional 24 billion dollars in aid for Ukraine, including 13 billion in security assistance and more than 7 billion in economic and humanitarian assistance.

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Harris to Visit Jakarta in September to Attend ASEAN, East Asia Summits - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - US Vice President Kamala Harris will visit Jakarta, Indonesia, from September 4 -7 to attend the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the East Asia summits, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on

Tuesday.

"From September 4 to the 7th, Vice President Harris will travel to Jakarta, Indonesia, to attend the ASEAN summit and the East Asia summit," Sullivan said during a press briefing.

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Biden to Travel to New Delhi From September 7-10 For G20 Leaders Summit - White House

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will travel to New Delhi, India, to attend the G20 leader's summit, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Tuesday.

"President Biden will travel to New Delhi, India, from September 7 to the 10th to attend the G20 Leaders Summit," Sullivan said during a press briefing.

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Canada to Convene Ministerial on Nature Ahead of COP16 - Ministry of Environment

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - Canada will host on Wednesday a Ministerial meeting on Nature to discuss the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework ahead of the Conference of the Parties (COP16), the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change said in a statement.

Representatives of 185 countries are currently attending the Seventh Assembly of the Global Environment Facility taking place from August 22-26 in Vancouver.

"Tomorrow, the Honorable Steven Guilbeault, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, will be convening the Ministerial on Nature, a high-level political platform where governments can take stock of the successes, challenges, and opportunities to implement the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework," the statement said on Tuesday.

The ministers will share their views on achieving ambitious biodiversity outcomes leading up to the next COP16 to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, the statement said.

Biodiversity is declining at a fast pace on a worldwide scale and the foundations of the world's economy, food security and health are being threatened and require international collaboration, the statement added.

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework was brokered with the assistance of Ottawa at the COP15 held in Montreal in December 2022. Canada then made several financial pledges totaling nearly C\$1.62 billion (US\$1.2 billion) in biodiversity conservation and restoration initiatives around the world.

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US Congressman Says Funding Government With Continuing Resolution 'Unacceptable'

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - US Congressman Matt Rosendale said on Tuesday that he will oppose any attempt to fund the government through a continuing resolution, characterizing the temporary funding strategy as unacceptable.

"It is unacceptable and frankly offensive to the American people to allow Congress to continue on this path toward financial ruin, which is why I will be voting NO on any kind of CR," Rosendale said in a statement.

Earlier this month, US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said that he and House Speaker Kevin McCarthy reached an agreement on a continuing resolution to fund the government through December and avoid a possible shutdown.

However, the House Freedom Caucus said on Monday that they would oppose the continuing resolution and any supplemental appropriations bills containing a "blank check" for Ukraine.

The US federal fiscal year runs through September 30, by which point Congress must agree to a new budget or risk a government shutdown.

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Biden Names Ed Siskel as White House Counsel – White House

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) – Ed Siskel will serve as White House Counsel replacing Stuart Delery starting in September, according to a White House release on Tuesday.

"Ed Siskel's many years of experience in public service and a career defending the rule of law make him the perfect choice to serve as my next White House Counsel," US President Biden said in the release.

Siskel previously served in the White House Counsel's Office for nearly four years during the Obama-Biden administration, ultimately rising to Deputy Counsel. Afterward, he worked briefly in private practice and for two years as the city of Chicago's lead lawyer, and corporation counsel, under Mayor Rahm Emanuel. He was most recently the chief legal officer for a Chicago-based investment firm.

Prior to his tenure at the White House, he worked as an associate deputy attorney general at the Justice Department, senior counsel to the deputy attorney general, a federal prosecutor in the US Attorney's Office in the Northern District of Illinois, and a clerk for Justice John Paul Stevens on the Supreme Court. He graduated from the University of Chicago Law School, where he was editor-in-chief of the law review.

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Soviet-Born American Writing Screenplay About Family Separated by Nazis, Search for Roots

WASHINGTON, August 22 (Sputnik) - Soviet-born US citizen Marija Fine, who was separated from her birth family by the Nazis in early childhood and wrote an autobiographical book, is now working on a screenplay about her lifelong search for her identity and roots.

"I am so grateful that I could find out the story. That is why I wrote the book, and I am still working on a screenplay. I want my family members to be remembered," Fine told Sputnik.

Marija, originally named Marija Bronislava Platace, was born in 1943 in Soviet Latvia. During the Great Patriotic War, her family helped Soviet partisans to fight the Nazis. Her mother and grandmother cooked for partisans, and the men in her family helped soldiers transferring from Moscow to Latvia.

"My home and my grandfather August's home were used as a safe haven for the Soviet partisans. They showed my father, grandfather and uncle how to derail the trains the Nazis used," she said.

Everything changed when somebody "turned to sin" and betrayed them. She only assumes that there was a traitor among her relatives, but has no proof that this was the case. The Nazis tortured and killed her grandfather and great-uncle and sent others to concentration and labor camps. The girl was separated from her mother, and the Nazis decided to send her further to Germany.

"I was taken down from Riga orphanage with all the other Latvian orphans, up to 200 of us, to Germany to be kept safe for, my guess, eventual adoption into German families under the Third Reich," she said.

Fine spent four years in Germany until she came to the US and was adopted by an American family in 1949.

"I was most fortunate to be adopted into such a loving family. John and Selma Futchs were stellar parents," she said.

Her adoptive parents did not conceal the truth from their daughter and wanted her to know her Latvian origin. They even kept her first name, Marija, while other orphans got new American names. However, they did not encourage her to search for her Latvian family, saying it was impossible due to bad relations between the US and the Soviet Union.

Fine decided to find her birth family many years after her American parents died. She sent a request to the Latvian embassy, knowing only her last name and the place where she was born, Andrupene. In two days, she received a response with the names and birth dates of her parents. A family researcher helped her obtain additional information that allowed Marija to meet her aunt and other relatives in Latvia in 2014.

Aunt Leonora was the person who shared with Marija the story of the entire family. Her mother, Solomeja Platace, ended up in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in Germany and was released in April 1945. She knew nothing about Marija's father, Bronislavs Platacis, other than he was able to avoid the camp. The woman could not forgive him for leaving her with the Nazis and got a divorce, although he was trying to reunite the family.

Marija's father tried to find her and even advertised in East German newspapers. The staff at the orphanage in Riga decided he was troublesome and gave the wrong information.

"They said: 'Your daughter is living on this street in Riga,'" Fine recollected. "He went to that place, and he saw a young girl there that looked like she could be the age I was at that time. He

told her: 'I am your father.' But this girl said she had parents who apparently came forward."

Most of Marija's Latvian relatives, including her parents, passed away well before she visited her birthplace in 2014. However, she saw the home where she and her parents had lived as well as the church where they got married and she was christened.

"It is so important to know who you are, what your origins are, and to know what your parents experienced," Fine said.