

10/11/22 Tuesday

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As France Prepares to Leave CAR, Expert Recalls How Abuse Scandals 'Tarnished' Relations
By - Fantine Gardinier

Across Africa, former colonies long terrorized by the French Army are rejecting their continued presence, ending fruitless training and counterterrorism missions that have all too often led to the abuse, rape, and killing of civilians.

The 62-year-long presence of French troops in the Central African Republic (CAR) is expected to come to an end by the end of the year, Agence France-Presse ([AFP reported](#)) earlier this week. "Concordant sources" told the agency that the final 130 French troops deployed there on a training mission would be leaving.

The remaining French forces were part of a European Union training mission and based at Camp M'Poko, located at the main airport in the capital of Bangui.

French troops were most recently deployed to the CAR, a former French colony, in 2013, when the United Nations answered calls for help by then-President François Bozizé to fend off the Séléka, a rebel group based in Muslim communities in the country's north. Paris sent 2,000 troops under Operation Sangaris to work alongside a larger UN peacekeeping force; however, by the time they arrived, Bozizé had already been ousted by the Séléka and replaced by leader Michel Djotodia.

Sangaris [ended in 2016](#), but Bangui kept several hundred French soldiers in the country to train their forces, which were - and are - still fighting a civil war. Paris announced the [end of that training deal](#) last year, saying "a number of commitments" Bangui made to Paris had not been kept, including fighting what they claimed were Russian "disinformation networks" aiming to sow anti-French sentiment in the CAR. The African nation had started consulting Russian advisers as well, beginning in 2018.

Cameroonian political analyst Julio Assomo told the Nairobi-based TV network [Africa24 on Tuesday](#) that in fact, the French troops generated the ill will against them themselves.

"There are tensions which have increased in recent years which have not contributed to the strengthening of ties between France and the Central African Republic, in particular the sex scandals involving minors which French soldiers were subjected to about seven years ago," Assomo said.

"All of these elements have contributed to tarnishing the quality of relations between France and the CAR while exacerbating an anti-French feeling that has developed in the country in recent years," he added.

The accusations of sexual abuse of girls in the CAR by UN and French troops were brought in 2015, when at least 98 cases were reported, according to [Radio France International](#) (RFI). Following an investigation, Paris [disciplined five soldiers](#) for abusing two girls, but [decided against](#) any further charges.

However, even the job European soldiers were supposed to be doing in CAR was apparently sub-par. During a hearing by the EU Foreign Affairs Committee in February 2021, Spanish [MEP Nart Javier said](#) that the five-year training mission that followed Operation Sangaris had failed to produce appreciable results.

“The EU has trained thousands of FACA [CAR Armed Forces] soldiers who are not capable of fighting because the mission’s training mandate is not appropriate,” Javier said. “We make the policy here in Brussels, but it is Bangui that sees the deaths. If we are going to do military training in Africa, then we should do it realistically and effectively.”

Assomo said that the training mission was Paris’ final attempt to “leave its mark in the Central African Republic, not to say ‘keep in touch.’”

Since the French announced they were leaving, Bangui has [taken on more Russian advisers](#). As of February 2022, a total of 1,135 Russian instructors were operating in the country, training FACA personnel. Moscow says that Russian representatives are not involved in hostilities and were deployed in the CAR with the notification of the UN Security Council. France and the US have accused Moscow of secretly sending the Wagner Group private military contractor to CAR as well, but [Moscow has denied any connection](#) to Wagner and the [CAR has denied](#) that any such deal with Wagner exists.

Earlier this week, [Sputnik reported](#) that the CAR was investigating a case in which claimed security personnel from the US embassy in Bangui were caught filming a FACA air base in Boda, 200 kilometers from the capital.

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‘Should’ve Seen the Warning Signs’: Expert Blames Fed For Allowing Recession to Become Likely

By - Fantine Gardinier

On Monday, JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon warned that while the US economy seemed to be doing well for the moment, a recession likely lies on the horizon.

Talking to [CNBC on Monday](#), Dimon, head of the largest bank in the United States, warned that an alarming mix of headwinds could spell disaster for the US economy, including runaway inflation and the Federal Reserve’s rapid increase in interest rates in response, the Fed dumping most of its \$9 trillion in bonds in a “quantitative tightening” maneuver, and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine and Western responses to it.

“These are very, very serious things which I think are likely to push the US and the world - I mean, Europe is already in recession - and they’re likely to put the US in some kind of recession six to nine months from now,” Dimon said.

Timothy Hagle, a political science professor at the University of Iowa, told Sputnik on Tuesday that whether or not the economic situation is the Biden administration’s fault, US voters are likely to blame him and punish the Democrats in the midterm elections next month.

“The political outcome for Democrats could be a loss of control of both chambers in the US Congress,” Hagle said. “Most voters, and especially those in the political middle, care more

about 'kitchen table' issues such as jobs, the economy, and health care. When the economy is bad, as it is right now in terms of inflation, etc., voters blame the current administration.”

“Democrats and the Biden administration have tried to focus on issues where they feel they will have more success (e.g., abortion), but their attempts seem to have had little effect beyond their base. Republicans should be well-positioned to take control of Congress, but some of their candidates have had their own problems. We'll have to see whether concerns about the economy and other issues are enough to push Republicans over the top in the toss-up races.”

Hagle said the Fed's measures taken thus far “have been inadequate” to stop inflation and stabilize the economy. However, he noted that there are many factors outside their control and that the effects of their policies are often not immediate.

“Even so, the economics experts probably should have seen the warning signs of inflation and taken preventive measures sooner than they did,” he said.

“The measures will probably result in reduced inflation at some point. The problem, however, is how long it will take and how much pain American consumers must endure until then. One must also consider the factors outside the Federal Reserve's control. One, in particular, is continued excessive government spending. Even if Republicans take control of the US Congress after the midterm elections, the Biden administration may still be willing to use executive power to continue to spend money (including such things as debt forgiveness) on its preferred programs.”

One major spending item in recent months has been US support for the Ukrainian government. Last week, US President Joe Biden signed a spending bill that [included \\$12.3 billion in aid](#) to Ukraine - just one of more than half a dozen massive aid bills passed since Russia launched its special operation in Ukraine in February.

“Even if one recognizes that additional spending can cause problems, the argument may be that if the spending does not occur then another problem will become even worse,” Hagle said.

“That, in part, was the justification for the increased spending during the pandemic. Money spent in attempts to increase safety and stop the spread of the virus was seen as more important than concerns about the effect of additional deficit spending.”

All that said, Hagle, predicted that the outcome of efforts to mitigate the coming recession could range from “something that is not much worse than it already is and that we are able to recover from quickly” to something that could “get worse and last several years.”

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Bill Murray Kissed, Straddled 'Much Younger' Woman on 'Being Mortal' Film Set, Report Reveals
By - Fantine Gardinier

When news of “inappropriate behavior” halting production on the film set of “Being Mortal” broke in April, little information about what had transpired was provided, even to other members of the crew.

According to a Monday [report by Puck](#), actor Bill Murray kissed and straddled a “much younger” actress [on the set in April 2022](#). The woman, whose name was not disclosed, told the outlet that

with Murray's weight against her, she couldn't move, even when he kissed her on the mouth while they were both wearing medical masks.

The woman said she filed a complaint against Murray, as did another staff member who saw the incident occur.

Murray was reportedly surprised that she reacted the way that she did, saying he thought he was being funny, not sexual, as she read it. He alluded to that perception later, when he told CNBC that he "thought [it] was funny."

"I did something I thought was funny, and it wasn't taken that way," [Murray said on April 30](#). "The movie studio wanted to do the right thing, so they wanted to ... investigate it, and so they stopped the production.

"We're both professionals," he added. "We like each other's work. We like each other, I think, and if you can't really get along and trust each other, there's no point in going further working together or making a movie as well ... So we're talking about it."

The incident shut down the production of "Being Mortal," an adaptation of Atul Gawande's nonfiction book "Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End" and comedian Aziz Ansari's directorial debut. The film cost Disney's Searchlight \$20 million to produce, and Ansari has reportedly struggled to find another studio to take the film.

Murray has also had other complaints brought against him over the years, including by actress Geena Davis, who said he berated her on the set of the 1990 film "Quick Change" in front of hundreds of people. She also said Murray placed a massage device on her in her hotel room after she declined his offer to do so.

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Global Government Debt to Reach 91% of GDP in 2022, 7.5% Above Pre-Pandemic Levels - IMF

WASHINGTON, October 12 (Sputnik) - Global government debt will reach 91 percent of GDP, which is 7.5 percent higher than before the pandemic, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said in a new Fiscal Monitor report.

"Global government debt is projected to be 91 percent of GDP in 2022, which is about 7.5 percentage points above the pre-pandemic levels, despite the recent reduction in the ratio for many countries," the IMF said.

Since 2020, governments have changed their approach to the economy and pivoted their monetary and fiscal policy from expansion to tightening, the fund added.

"Debt and deficits fell in 2021 and 2022 but remain above pre-pandemic levels and projections. These developments reflect mainly the unwinding of pandemic-related measures and surprise inflation," the report said.

The IMF called on nations' authorities to maintain consistency between monetary and fiscal policy. This is a paramount measure in the context of high inflation, high debt, rising interest rates, and elevated uncertainty, the fund added.

The IMF also expressed concerns over the rise of extreme poverty and food insecurity that began even before the pandemic, and urged policymakers to provide emergency support for those in need.

"The food crisis should be addressed, at the global level, by a broad set of initiatives including the lifting of restrictions on exports of food and fertilizers," the report read.

Some aid will be available through the recently announced Food Shock Window under the IMF emergency financing toolkit, but additional support is mandatory in order to avoid hunger in many countries, the report added.

The IMF warned that binding financing constraints make trade-offs very painful for countries. Coordinated global action, the fun added, is thus urgent.

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Biden Says Will Decide on Re-Election After Midterms, Believes He Can 'Beat Trump Again'

WASHINGTON, October 12 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said he will decide on whether to run for re-election after the midterms, however, believes that he can beat former President Donald Trump.

"I am not going to make this about my decision, I'm going to make it about this off-year election," Biden told CNN on Tuesday. "After that's done in November, then I'm going to be in the process of deciding.... I believe I can beat Donald Trump again."

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Biden Says Ukraine Conflict Might Lead to Miscalculations, 'Could End in Armageddon'

WASHINGTON, October 12 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said in an interview that the Ukraine conflict may lead to miscalculations that could potentially end in the biblical event known as Armageddon.

"Mistakes get made, and the miscalculation could occur, no one can be sure what would happen, and could end in Armageddon," Biden said during an interview that aired on CNN Tuesday night.

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Biden Says Does Not Think US Will Go Into Recession, If There Is One It Will Be Slight

WASHINGTON, October 12 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said he does not think the United States will soon go through a recession but if one does occur it will be slight. "I don't think there will be a recession," Biden said during a CNN interview that aired Tuesday night. "If it is there'll be a very slight recession."

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Biden Says There Will Be Consequences for Saudi Arabia After Recent OPEC+ Decision

WASHINGTON, October 12 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said during an interview that there will be consequences for Saudi Arabia after the Saudi-led OPEC+ made the recent decision to cut oil production. "I'm not going to get into what I'd consider and what I'm having in mind, but there will be consequences," Biden said during a CNN interview that aired on Tuesday night.

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Biden Says Has No Intention to Meet With Putin

WASHINGTON, October 12 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said he does not have any intention to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin. "I have no intention of meeting with him but for example, if he came to me at G20 and said I want to talk about the release of [Brittney] Griner, I would meet with him. I mean it would depend," Biden said on Tuesday. "It would depend on specifically what he wanted to talk about. But look, he's acted brutally, he's acted brutally. I think he's committed war crimes. And so I don't, I don't see any rationale to meet with him now."

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Biden Says Does Not Think Putin Will Use Tactical Nuclear Weapons

WASHINGTON, October 12 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said he does not think that Russian President Vladimir Putin will use tactical nuclear weapon. "I don't think he will," Biden told CNN. "But I think it's very [ir]responsible [for] him to talk about the idea that a world leader of one of the largest nuclear powers in the world says he may use a tactical nuclear weapon."

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Russian Embassy in Canada Shares One of Many Graphic Emails Threatening Staff - Statement

WASHINGTON, October 12 (Sputnik) - The Russian Embassy in Canada shared a very graphic email it received this week of an individual threatening to bomb the diplomatic facility in Ottawa, kill Russian Ambassador Oleg Stepanov and harm his family and other staffers over Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, the Embassy said in a statement to Sputnik.

"We would like to share with you one of the messages that was sent to the Embassy mailbox," the Embassy said on Tuesday. "We receive these kind of threats continuously since February. Despite our concerns, the Canadian authorities have not taken any meaningful measures to ensure safety of us and our families."

The email was sent to the embassy Monday morning by an individual named "Kagan Roy."

"We will bomb your embassy again. Oleg Stepanov will be executed, but not before his wife is raped until dead while Oleg and his two children are forced to watch. This will be followed by the execution of the children, and then the ambassador himself," the email said.

The individual continued to demand that Russian officials leave Canada or else an assault team will be sent to the embassy to kill Russian men and rape Russian women until they are dead. Stepanov told reporters on Monday that Russia has demanded that Canadian authorities enhance security of Russian diplomatic buildings in Canada after the incident with the Molotov cocktail last month, but the ambassador highlighted that Canadian authorities appear to show no desire to take measures to secure Russia's diplomatic missions.

With regards to the incident with the Molotov cocktail in September, Stepanov said that the Canadian police are investigating the incident but no interim results have been provided.

The diplomat said the Canadian side says that their patrols in the areas of the Russian diplomatic missions are enough to ensure security.

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RPT - US Charges Ex-Kuwaiti Diplomat With Forced Labor - Justice Dept.

(Repeats to fix typo in lede)

WASHINGTON, October 12 (Sputnik) - US authorities charged a former Kuwaiti diplomat to the UN and his wife with abusing domestic workers from India and the Philippines, in addition to visa and contracting fraud, the Justice Department said in a press release.

"Barrak Abdulmohsen Alhunaif, a former diplomatic attache assigned to the United Nations Permanent Mission of the State of Kuwait, and his wife Khaledah Saad Aldhubaibi, were charged in Manhattan federal court with forced labor... in connection with their hiring and subsequent abuse of three domestic workers from India and the Philippines," the department said on Tuesday.

The former diplomat and his wife allegedly paid domestic workers as little as \$700 per month while forcing them to work in excess of 40 hours a week with no regular days off.

The Justice Department also accused the couple of verbally and physically abusing workers. In addition, the release alleges that Alhunaif and Aldhubaiba refused two of the workers timely medical care for illnesses caused by or caught while they were working.

In addition to forced labor, the couple was charged with visa fraud and fraud in foreign labor contracting, among other crimes.

The forced labor charge carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison while the others carry sentences ranging from 5 to 10 years each. Aldhubaibi if proven guilty on all charges could face up to 35 years in prison and Alhunaif up to 80 years.

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US Encourages UAE to Continue Building International Response in Support of Ukraine
WASHINGTON, October 12 (Sputnik) - The United States encourages the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to continue to build an international response in support of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price told reporters.

Price's statement came in response to a question about what the US government thought about UAE President Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan's visit to St. Petersburg, where he spoke with President Vladimir Putin.

"We do encourage the UAE, as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, to continue to help build a strong international response to support Ukraine's sovereignty and support its territorial integrity," Price said on Tuesday.

The spokesperson also said the United States appreciates the position the UAE has taken as one of the 141 United Nations member states to condemn Russia's special military operation in Ukraine at the UN General Assembly vote held in March.

The United States hopes the UAE will join those rejecting the recently held referenda in four Russian-controlled regions in Ukraine and their joining Russia.

The UN General Assembly is set to convene this week to vote on condemning the four entities' referenda and their joining Russia.

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Canadian Govt., Rio Tinto Will Invest Up to \$534Mln in Critical Mining Operations - CEO

WASHINGTON, October 12 (Sputnik) - The Canadian government and the mining cooperation Rio Tinto Fer et Titane (RTFT) will jointly invest up to \$534 million in decarbonizing operations at the Sorel-Tracy facility in southwestern Quebec, Chief Executive Officer Jakob Stausholm said. "Today we announce, that together with the government of Canada, we will invest up to 737 million Canadian dollars over the next eight years, to decarbonize our RTFT operations in Sorel-Tracy and to position the business as a center of excellent for critical mineral processing," Stausholm said during a press conference on Tuesday.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Innovation, Science and Industry Minister Francois-Philippe Champagne accompanied Stausholm during the press conference.

The Prime Minister Office issued a statement that the government will fund the RTFT decarbonization efforts with up to \$161 million the country's Strategic Innovation Fund. Rio Tinto is expected to reduce emissions by half by 2030, the statement said.

In addition to the mining company's objectives to decarbonize its operations at their Sorel-Tracy facility, the investment will ensure an important growth in its production of critical minerals such as lithium, titanium and scandium, the statement added.

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Justice Dept. Asks US Supreme Court to Reject Trump Appeal in Classified Documents Case

WASHINGTON, October 12 (Sputnik) - The Justice Department said it has filed a brief asking the US Supreme Court to reject an appeal by the former President Donald Trump over the allegedly classified documents seized from his residence in Florida.

Trump filed an emergency appeal asking the Supreme Court to permit a "special master" to review some 100 allegedly classified documents seized by the FBI from his Mar-a-Lago residence after an appeals court ruled against him.

"Because applicant has no plausible claims of ownership of or privilege in the documents bearing classification markings ... he will suffer no harm at all from a temporary stay of the special master's review of those materials while the government's appeal proceeds," Solicitor General Elizabeth Prelogar said on Tuesday.

The Justice Department argued Trump's claims had no merit, claiming the documents include extraordinarily sensitive government records.

The Justice Department is trying to determine whether or not it can prove Trump violated the Espionage Act, whether or not he illegally withheld national security secrets and if he lied about it and tried to obstruct the Justice Department investigation.

Trump has said the Biden Justice Department has been politicized and the justice system weaponized against him - and other opponents of the Democratic party - in the attempt to prevent the former president from running for the highest office again.

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UPDATE - Musk Says Only Spoke to Putin One Time 18 Months Ago About Space, New Talks 'Pointless'

(Updates with more details in paras 7-9)

WASHINGTON, October 12 (Sputnik) - Billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk claims that he only spoke with Russian President Vladimir Putin one time approximately 18 months ago about space, following reports he talked with Putin prior to publishing a recent Twitter poll proposing a peace deal between Russia and Ukraine.

"No, it is not [true]. I have spoken to Putin only once and that was about 18 months ago. The subject matter was space," Musk said on Tuesday via social media when asked about the reports.

Earlier on Tuesday, US media reported that Musk spoke with Putin prior to publishing a Twitter poll proposing a peace deal between Russia and Ukraine. The proposed peace plan included guarantees of water supply to Crimea, as well as organizing UN-monitored referenda in regions seeking to join the Russian Federation. Musk was criticized and derided by senior Ukrainian officials for proposing the peace deal.

Musk also dismissed the prospect of future talks with Putin about a peace plan, citing a lack of converging interests between Moscow and Kiev.

"Pointless, as there is currently no overlap between Russian and Ukrainian demands - it's not even close," Musk said later on Tuesday, when asked if he would be open to another conversation with Putin.

Musk is not an official representative of the US government, White House Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby also said on Tuesday during a press briefing, in response to a question about the reports.

Eurasia Group chief Ian Bremmer, whom media reports cited as the source of the claim that Musk and Putin allegedly spoke, reiterated the claim via social media later on Tuesday.

"Elon Musk told me he had spoken with Putin and the Kremlin directly about Ukraine. He also told me what the Kremlin's red lines were," Bremmer said.

Musk in response to the statement seemed to again deny reports of a recent conversation with Putin, stating "nobody should trust Bremmer."

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US Jobless Rate of 5.5% a Fair Trade-Off For 2% Inflation - IMF Chief Economist

WASHINGTON, October 12 (Sputnik) - A 5.5% unemployment rate would be "a fairly benign outcome" for returning US inflation to the Federal Reserve's target of 2% per year versus the current rate of above 8%, International Monetary Fund (IMF) Chief Economist Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas said.

The unemployment rate, which stood at 3.5% at the end of September, is expected to grow by two percentage points between 2023 and 2024, Gourinchas said in forecasts made during the World Bank/IMF annual meetings in Washington this week.

The Fed defines a jobless rate at 4% and below as "maximum employment."

Gourinchas also said inflation will not return to the Fed's target of 2% by 2023, although the US central bank will be closer to the target in 2024.

Inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) grew by 8.3% in the year to August, moderating from a four-decade high annual growth of 9.1% in the 12 months to June.

"The fight against inflation by central banks will last until 2024," he added.

The Fed has said that a robust labor market and wage growth were among major factors contributing to inflation hovering near four-decade highs.

The labor market has been the juggernaut of the US economy, spearheading its recovery from the two-year long coronavirus pandemic.

Joblessness among Americans reached an all-time high of 14.8% in April 2020, with the loss of some 20 million jobs after the COVID-19 breakout. Since then, the Labor Department's non-farm payrolls report has reported hundreds of thousands of job additions every month. US average hourly earnings have risen without stop since June 2021.

Since March, the Fed has raised interest rates by 300 basis points in its bid to fight inflation, and is expected to add another 125 basis points to rates before the end of the year.

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FBI Offered Steele \$1Mln to Corroborate Trump-Russia Dossier - Intelligence Analyst

ALEXANDRIA, Virginia, October 12 (Sputnik) - The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) offered \$1 million to former UK intelligence officer Christopher Steele to provide evidence to back his allegations in the so-called "dossier" on Trump-Russia collusion, senior FBI intelligence analyst Brian Auten testified in court.

Auten delivered his testimony in a district court in Virginia on Tuesday as part of a trial involving Russian national Igor Danchenko, charged with five counts of lying to FBI during an investigation into the so-called "Trump-Russia collusion" in 2016, that began earlier in the day. In October 2016, Auten along with other FBI agents traveled to the United Kingdom to interview Steele about his "dossier" - a set of reports that accused Donald Trump's presidential campaign team of a "major conspiracy" with the Russian leadership.

The money offer was made during the trip but Steele never got the money since he could not corroborate his reports. Moreover, according to Auten, he could not even provide any names of his sources, except for their general characterization.

Auten noted that FBI began to receive parts of the "dossier" on September 12, 2016 that was produced by Steele's company, Orbis Business Intelligence.

Danchenko was identified by FBI as the primary source of information for Steele's reports in December 2016, Auten also said.

In November, Danchenko pleaded not guilty to all five counts of making false statements to the FBI about the alleged collusion between former US President Donald Trump and the Kremlin during the 2016 US presidential election.

The prosecution insists that Danchenko lied to the FBI about the sources of information given to British spy Christopher Steele about alleged contacts between the Trump campaign and Russian officials, including information that the Kremlin may have facilitated Trump's election. The indictment states that Danchenko did not receive such information from anyone and fabricated facts.

Danchenko provided data to former British spy Steele, who prepared, based on this data, materials of the dossier, which the US authorities were guided by in the investigation of alleged ties between the Trump headquarters and Russia. A subsequent Special Counsel investigation has proven no collusion between Trump and Russia.

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US Urges Partners to Swiftly Disburse Existing Commitments to Ukraine, Do More - Yellen

WASHINGTON, October 12 (Sputnik) - The United States urges its partners around the world to disburse their commitments to Ukraine and do more in the future, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said.

"We are calling on our partners and allies to join us by swiftly disbursing their existing commitments to Ukraine and by stepping up in doing more - both to help Ukraine continue its

essential government services and to help Ukraine begin to build and recover," Yellen said during a meeting with Ukrainian Finance Minister Sergii Marchenko on Tuesday.

The Treasury Secretary reiterated that providing support to Ukraine is an international and collective effort.

Yellen said that in the coming weeks the United States will begin to disburse a sum of \$4.5 billion that Congress allocated two weeks ago in direct budget support for Ukraine.

"We are committed to getting this funding to you as soon as possible because we know how important it is in supporting your brave resistance to Russia's illegal invasion," Yellen said.

The United States has so far provide Ukraine with more than \$13 billion in economic assistance, she added.

Yellen also promised to cooperate with the European Union to enforce a price cap on Russian oil that is envisioned to cut Moscow's key source of revenue.

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US Weighing Humanitarian Parole Program for Venezuelan Migrants - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 12 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is considering a new humanitarian parole program intended to reduce the number of Venezuelan migrants illegally entering the United States, the New York Times reported, citing two administration officials familiar with the matter.

The proposed program would operate similarly to a humanitarian parole program offered to Ukrainians, which allows migrants to stay in the US temporarily on a two-year parole period if they have a US sponsor willing to provide financial support, the report said on Tuesday.

However, the details of the program remain unclear, the report said.

The policy proposal comes amid a significant inflow of migrants from Venezuela to the United States, with over 150,000 Venezuelans apprehended at the US southwestern border between October 2021 and August 2022, the report said.

The United Nations estimates that over 6.8 million Venezuelans have fled the country, the report added.

An absence of diplomatic relations between the US and Venezuela hinders authorities' ability to repatriate Venezuelans who turn themselves into border officials, causing the US to grant most migrants temporary permission to stay while they await immigration court proceedings, according to the report.

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Biden Calls Putin 'Rational' Leader Who Miscalculated on Ukraine

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden has called Russian President Vladimir Putin a 'rational' leader who miscalculated on Ukraine.

"I think he is a rational actor who has miscalculated significantly," Biden told CNN in a clip from an interviewed being aired Tuesday night.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on Tuesday that the evidence that the military personnel of the United States and other Western countries have their boots on the ground in Ukraine is mounting.

The minister emphasized that Moscow does not have a 100% proof of this information, but the evidence was multiplying and the West was starting to realize that they are going a little bit further than they intended.

On February 24, Russia began a military operation in Ukraine responding to calls for help from the breakaway republics of Donetsk and Luhansk. Western countries responded by imposing comprehensive sanctions against Moscow while also ramping up their military support for Kiev. In late September, referendums on joining Russia were held in the republics of Donetsk and Luhansk and parts of Ukraine controlled by the Russian forces. All these territories were integrated within Russia based on the results of the referendums.

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US Arms Sales Hit \$50Bln in FY2022 Following Slump in Previous Year - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 12 (Sputnik) - The United States has sold approximately \$50 billion in arms during Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 after selling nearly \$35 billion during the previous year, Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) chief James Hursch reportedly said during the Association for the US Army conference.

"I would say that we have enjoyed a rebound in arm sales," Hursch said on Tuesday after announcing the total figures for FY2022, according to a Breaking Defense report.

The \$50 billion figure includes foreign military sales, foreign military financing and other government arms trade authorities, the report said. The sale of expensive F-35 fighter jets contributed significantly to the sum, Hursch also said in the report.

A continuing increase in arms sales is expected over the next three years or so, Hursch added. The increase in sales between FY2021 and FY2022 was due to a number of factors, including increased demand in Europe stemming from the conflict in Ukraine; increased demand in the Indo-Pacific amid strategic competition with China; and the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has allowed US officials to regularly negotiate more deals in person, Hursch said.

However, the sales amount cleared by DSCA and the State Department do not always indicate the end values of deals finalized between a country and a defense contractor, Hursch also said. Moreover, the State Department sometimes approves arms sales not formally requested by a country to expedite potential future sales, Hursch added.

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Blinken, Serbian President Vucic Discuss US Support for Dialogue With Kosovo - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 12 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic about the United States' support for the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue and a continued engagement on regional stability, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said.

"Secretary Blinken underscored US support for the EU-facilitated Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue and urged continued constructive engagement to secure peace and stability across the region," Price said in a statement on Tuesday.

Blinken also thanked Vucic for Serbia's support of Ukraine and discussed efforts to ensure Serbian energy security, the statement added.

Moreover, Blinken congratulated the Serbian government on opening a new embassy in Washington, according to the statement.

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US Heading to One More COVID-19 Winter With Alarming Rate on Predicted Deaths- White House

WASHINGTON, October 12 (Sputnik) - White House COVID-19 Response Coordinator Ashish Jha said the United States is heading for third winter of COVID-19 with an alarming rate on predicted deaths weeks after US President Joe Biden declared the pandemic to be over.

"I don't think the president's comments has anything to do with what's happening right now," he said on Tuesday, adding that the US vaccine campaign has been limited because of lack of funding.

He added that currently there are three or four sub variants and the health officials are tracking most closely.

"We are doing a lot of work. about 300 to 400 Americans dying every days, tens of thousands of people in US get infected every day.

He added that if Americans get vaccinated, they can save lives and prevent about one million hospitalizations.

"Commonwealth Fund just put out a new report, a new analysis. They estimate that we can save as many as 90,000 lives and nearly a million hospitals this leads to treatments," he said.

In September, Biden said during an interview with CBS News's 60 Minutes that the COVID-19 pandemic is over. The White House sources later said that the president's statement on the end of the pandemic was not planned as part of the interview.

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Oil Tumbles 2nd Straight Day as China COVID-19 Scare Halts OPEC-Driven Rally

NEW YORK, October 12 (Sputnik) - Crude prices fell a second straight day on Tuesday in the first extended downside after last week's rally on the back of the hefty output cut announced by OPEC+ as China's coronavirus controls spawned new fear among oil traders.

Chinese COVID-19 cases have risen to the highest since August, with the world's largest oil importer experiencing the uptick after increased domestic travel during the National Day "Golden Week" earlier this month.

Chinese authorities reported 2,089 new local infections for Oct. 10 alone - the most since August 20, reports said. Shanghai, a city of 25 million, also said it will conduct mass testing at least twice a week until November 10, up from once a week previously, to avoid a reprise of the economically and psychically-scarring lockdowns experienced in April to May.

New York-traded West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude settled down \$1.78, or 2%, at \$89.35, extending Monday's 1.6% slide.

The US crude benchmark rose 17% last week after a 2 million-barrel-per-day cut in production announced by the 13-nation Saudi-led Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its 10 allies steered by Russia. Prior to that, WTI fell 12.5% in September and 24% in the third quarter.

London-traded Brent oil settled Tuesday's session down \$1.90, or 2%, at \$94.29 per barrel, after a 1.8% slide in the previous session, Brent rose 11% last week, making up all of September's loss and recovering partially from its 22% loss in the third-quarter.

This week's slump in oil also came on the back of new shudders introduced into the market by Federal Reserve policy-makers.

Cleveland Fed President Loretta Mester warned on Tuesday that a potential shock could tip the US economy into recession.

Her caution came on the heels of the stance by Fed Vice Chair Lael Brainard on Monday that US monetary policy will have to be restrictive in the near term as policy tightening will take time to produce results against inflation.

"I see a limited second-half GDP rebound, with GDP growth remaining flat this year," Brainard said, appearing on a live-streamed discussion about the economy.

World Bank President David Malpass and International Monetary Fund Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva added to market caution when they warned on Monday of a growing risk of global recession and said inflation remained a continuing problem.

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US Places Visa Restrictions on Taliban, Others Behind Repression of Afghan Women - Blinken

WASHINGTON, October 12 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed visa restrictions against officials of the Taliban (under UN sanctions for terrorism) and other individuals responsible for repressing Afghan women and girls, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.

"Today I am announcing a visa restriction policy under Section 212(a)(3)(C) of the Immigration and Nationality Act to restrict the issuance of visas for current or former Taliban members, members of non-state security groups, and other individuals believed to be responsible for, or complicit in, repressing women and girls in Afghanistan through restrictive policies and violence," Blinken said in a statement on Tuesday.

The United States calls on other world governments to take similar action as well, Blinken said. Blinken said the Taliban have restricted access to secondary or higher education in Afghanistan for girls and women, preventing their full participation in the workforce and their ability to choose their careers, and restricting women's movement, expression, or privacy,

The Secretary of State also said the Taliban have also engaged in violence and harassment including unjust arrest and detention of women, girls, or their family members for noncompliance with discriminatory policies.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, October 12 (Sputnik) -

RUSSIAN STRIKES IN UKRAINE

* The Swiss Foreign Ministry summoned Russian Ambassador in Bern Sergey Garmonin following Russia's missile attacks on Ukraine, Secretary of State Livia Leu said on Tuesday.

* The Russian armed forces continued to target Ukrainian military command and energy facilities, the Defense Ministry said.

UKRAINE DEVELOPMENTS

* The United States will continue working with Ukraine on providing the country additional air defense capabilities amid Russia's special military operation, White House National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said.

* The United States does not see statements made by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov that Russia is open to hold talks on Ukraine as constructive or genuine, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said.

* The US-led Ukraine defense contact group will discuss the topic of air defenses for Ukraine at their upcoming ministerial on Wednesday, US Ambassador to NATO Julianne Smith said.

* The leaders of the Group of Seven (G7) countries on Tuesday held an emergency meeting and reassured Ukraine that they will continue providing the country with military, financial and other support "for as long as it takes" amid Russia's special military operation there.

* The G7 countries said that they will continue to coordinate efforts to meet Ukraine's military and defense equipment needs.

* The G7 countries' leaders said they are exploring ways to ensure the Ukraine reconstruction efforts are supported with funds from Russia.

ELON MUSK

* Billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk said on Tuesday that he has only spoken with Russian President Vladimir Putin once approximately 18 months ago amid reports he spoke with Putin prior to recently publishing a Twitter poll proposing a peace deal between Russia and Ukraine.
* Musk does not serve as an official representative of the US government, White House Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said on Tuesday following reports of a call between Musk and Vladimir Putin.

GRAIN EXPORTS AGREEMENT

* The grain exports deal led to a decrease in prices on global markets, but additional work is needed in this direction, yielding results, and Russia is ready to expand the food exports in 2023 and for this it is necessary to return to the principle of free trade, Russian Finance Minister Anton Siluanov said on Tuesday.
* United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) Secretary-General Rebeca Grynspan and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths are expected to visit Moscow over the weekend to discuss the extension of grain exports agreement, spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said.
* Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu discussed by phone with Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar the situation in Ukraine, including the agreement on grain exports from Ukrainian ports as well as from Syria, the Russian Defense Ministry said.
* Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Russian President Vladimir Putin will discuss the grain deal, the situation in Ukraine and the energy cooperation during the upcoming meeting in Astana, a Turkish diplomatic source told Sputnik.

IMF WORLD ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

* The global growth is likely to slow to 2.7% in 2023, and there is a 25% probability that the growth could fall below 2%, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said in a new report on Tuesday.
* Global inflation will jump to 8.8% in 2022 but will decline to 4.1% by 2024, the IMF said.
* The projected economic decline in Russia is expected to be 2.3% in 2023, the IMF said.
* The projected contraction of economy in Ukraine is expected to be 35% as a result of the hostilities and the related crisis, the IMF said.
* The global inflation will reach its peak in late 2022 and will remain elevated for a longer time than previously expected, the IMF said.

ATTACKS ON NORD STREAM PIPELINES

* The leaders of the Group of Seven (G7) said on Tuesday that they are "deeply troubled" by the deliberate damage caused to Russia's Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines and welcome the ongoing investigations into the matter.

* Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that the situation with Sweden denying Russia access to the ongoing investigation into the explosions on Nord Stream gas pipelines reveals Western double standards.

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Saudis Bluntly Rejected US Request to Delay OPEC+ Oil Cut Decision by 30 Days - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - Saudi Arabian officials bluntly refused to comply with White House requests that the Riyadh-controlled oil producing alliance OPEC+ withhold for a month the production cuts it announced last week, the Wall Street Journal reported Tuesday. According to those familiar with the request, US officials had warned Saudi leaders that a cut would be viewed as a clear choice by Riyadh to side with Russia in the Ukraine war and that the move would weaken already-waning support in Washington for the kingdom, the report said. US officials asked their counterparts in Saudi Arabia and other big Gulf producers to delay the decision for another month, the report said.

Saudi officials instead thought the Biden administration wanted to buy crucial time before the US midterm elections on November 8, where an oil price spike could have a damning impact on Democrats in power, and said a "resounding no," the report added.

Beyond the refusal, the kingdom actually leaned on its OPEC allies, which include Russia, to approve the cut, which was announced on October 5 and aimed at reducing production by 2 million barrels per day.

Control of Congress could switch from the Democrats to the Republicans if oil prices, which have already raised US inflation to 40-year highs, continue to anger Americans.

Gasoline at US pumps hit a record high of \$5 per gallon in mid-June before the Biden administration drew down about 150 million barrels from the country's oil reserve to bring the price down to as low as \$3.70 on the average mid-September.

However, the price has started climbing again over the past two weeks and could escalate with the OPEC+ production cuts.

The Journal report appeared as White House National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby told CNN on Tuesday that the United States needs to reevaluate its relationship with Saudi Arabia.

"I think the president's been very clear that this is a relationship that we need to continue to re-evaluate, that we need to be willing to revisit, and certainly in light of the OPEC decision, I think that's where he is. And he's willing to work with Congress to think through what that relationship ought to look like going forward," Kirby said when asked for his reaction to Democrats' calls to freeze weapons sales to Saudi Arabia.

The 2 million barrels per day cut came on the heels of a more modest 100,000 barrels per day reduction agreed to by OPEC+ in early September. But global oil prices continued to fall after that cut, with benchmark Brent crude slumping to around \$82 per barrel from a high of almost \$140 in March. That prompted OPEC+ to embark on a more meaningful cut.

The Journal said the White House was already upset by the September production cut, which virtually wiped out the 100,000 barrels per day increase that OPEC+ announced after Biden's maiden visit to Saudi Arabia in July.

Saudi officials had originally planned a 500,000 barrels per day increase as a sign of goodwill towards the visit. But Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who has a testy relationship with Biden, personally saw to it that the increase be reduced to 100,000 barrels per day.

The US State Department's energy-security envoy, Amos Hochstein, then sent the Saudi energy minister, Abdulaziz bin Salman, an email that suggested he had broken his word promising a larger increase, those familiar with the matter told the Journal. The email angered Abdulaziz and strengthened his resolve to forge an oil policy independent of the United States, the report added.

The top ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Bob Menendez, and other leading Democrats have called for halting weapons sales to Saudi Arabia after Riyadh's decision to back OPEC+ cuts to oil production.

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US Does Not See Lavrov's Offer to Hold Talks on Ukraine as Constructive - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - The United States does not see statements made by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov that Russia is open to hold talks on Ukraine as constructive or genuine, US State Department spokesman Ned Price said in a press briefing on Tuesday.

"The timing is notable because these statements came within hours of a barrage of rocket missiles that targeted the capital city in Ukraine, they targeted other [of] Ukraine's towns and cities," Price said. "We see this as posturing, we do not see this as a constructive legitimate offer to engage in the dialogue and diplomacy that is absolutely necessary to see an end to this brutal war of aggression against the people, state, the government of Ukraine."

Lavrov slammed on Tuesday US statements that Russia left unanswered Washington's proposals on negotiations on Ukraine as lies, noting that Moscow received no serious proposals.

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World Bank Supports Comprehensive Debt Reduction - Malpass

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - World Bank President David Malpass said on Tuesday that the bank is supporting the idea of comprehensive debt reduction.

"We need comprehensive debt reduction, we are working every day on that," Malpass said during the conversation related to the annual International Monetary Fund and World Bank

meetings, adding that he already recently discussed the issue with representatives of the G20 and the G24.

Malpass stressed that the composition of debt has changed significantly over the years towards China and private sector creditors. He also expressed concerns that the international community simply does not have the mechanism which would allow it to solve the issue with debt.

The World Bank, he added, has called for a more comprehensive way to evaluate the debt reduction so there is fairness in the burden sharing among creditors.

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Taiwan Will Sustain Close Engagement With US on Semiconductor Industry - Economic Minister

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - Taiwan will sustain its partnership with the United States and other countries on advancing semiconductor manufacturing amid global supply chain concerns and heightened tensions in the Indo-Pacific region, Taiwanese Minister for Economic Affairs Wang Mei-Hua said on Tuesday.

“Taiwan will continue to work closely with our global partners, especially the United States, to engage in the development of advanced semiconductor manufacturing,” Wang said during an interview with the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Taiwan’s semiconductor manufacturing industry is both essential to the global high-tech economy and reliant on other countries for success, Wang also said. If Taiwan were to become involved in a conflict, market impacts would be felt across the world, including in the US and China, Wang said.

The statement comes following increased competition between Washington and Beijing in the semiconductor industry and Indo-Pacific region alike. US President Joe Biden in August signed legislation authorizing \$52 billion in subsidies for domestic semiconductor manufacturing in an effort to counter Chinese advancements in the area.

The global semiconductor supply chain was stressed by the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent public health measures in China and elsewhere, prompting countries to review and revise their approach to sourcing the products, which are essential to modern computing technologies.

Additionally, US-China relations were strained in recent months due to visits by US lawmakers, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, to Taiwan despite objections from Beijing. The disagreement resulted in increased Chinese military activity around the island, as well as condemnation of the trips.

US-Taiwan relations under the Biden administration are robust and continuing to grow, Wang said. The US and Taiwan are engaged in a lot of dialogue, including on supply chain cooperation, according to Wang.

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NASA's DART Spacecraft Alters Orbit of Asteroid in Planetary Defense Test Mission

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - NASA said on Tuesday that its planetary defense test mission from several weeks ago successfully used the Double Asteroid Redirection Test (DART) spacecraft to collide with an asteroid to alter its orbit.

"Analysis of data obtained over the past two weeks by NASA's Double Asteroid Redirection Test (DART) investigation team shows the spacecraft's kinetic impact with its target asteroid, Dimorphos, successfully altered the asteroid's orbit," NASA said in a press release.

The mission marks the first time humans have purposely changed the motion of a celestial object and the first full-scale demonstration of asteroid deflection technology, the release said.

NASA explained that it took Dimorphos 11 hours and 55 minutes to orbit its larger asteroid, Didymos, prior to the mission. Following the DART spacecraft's impact on Dimorphos, it takes the asteroid about 11 hours and 23 minutes to orbit the larger asteroid, NASA said.

NASA is still gathering and studying data from the mission, the release said.

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Musk Says Only Spoke to Putin One Time 18 Months Ago About Space, New Talks 'Pointless' (Updates with more details in paras 4-6; modifies headline)

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - Billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk said on Tuesday that he only spoke with Russian President Vladimir Putin one time about space approximately 18 months ago, following reports he talked with Putin prior to publishing a recent Twitter poll proposing a peace deal between Russia and Ukraine.

"No, it is not [true]. I have spoken to Putin only once and that was about 18 months ago. The subject matter was space," Musk said when asked about the reports via social media.

Earlier on Tuesday, US media reported that Musk spoke with Putin prior to publishing a Twitter poll proposing a peace deal between Russia and Ukraine. The proposed peace plan included guarantees of water supply to Crimea, as well as organizing UN-monitored referenda in regions seeking to join the Russian Federation. Musk was criticized and derided by senior Ukrainian officials for proposing a peace deal between Russia and Ukraine.

Musk also dismissed the prospect of future talks with Putin about a peace plan, citing a lack of converging interests between Moscow and Kiev.

"Pointless, as there is currently no overlap between Russian and Ukrainian demands - it's not even close," Musk said later on Tuesday, when asked if he would be open to another conversation with Putin.

White House Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby also said on Tuesday that Musk is not an official representative of the US government.

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Democratic Lawmakers Introduce Bill to Halt US Arms Sales to Saudis for One Year

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - Democratic lawmakers Richard Blumenthal and Ro Khanna introduced a bill on Tuesday that would halt all US arms sales to Saudi Arabia for one year.

"To provide for a temporary 1-year halt to all proposed direct commercial sales and foreign military sales to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia of weaponry and munitions," the bill states.

The suspension would include a halt to US sales of ammunition, weapons support and equipment, repair parts, and US government and contractor services to provide logistical support to the Saudi government, according to the legislation.

The Biden administration reportedly lobbied Saudi Arabia to delay the decision in a bid to prevent gas prices from skyrocketing ahead of the US midterm elections, which are less than a month away.

Earlier on Tuesday, White House spokesperson John Kirby said President Joe Biden will reevaluate US relations with Saudi Arabia after the Saudi-led OPEC+ group of countries recently decided to cut oil production.

Kirby added that Biden is willing to discuss this issue with members of Congress.

On Wednesday, OPEC+ announced that it agreed to cut oil production by two million barrels per day from November and will take production levels agreed for August as a reference point. The move was made in response to uncertainty in global oil market outlooks, in part caused by Western sanctions on Russian energy deliveries and the G7 plans to introduce a price cap on Russian crude.

The decision from OPEC+ received backlash from the United States, which demanded an increase in production to combat rising domestic gasoline prices.

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UN General Assembly Elects 14 New Members to Human Rights Council

UNITED NATIONS, October 11 (Sputnik) - The UN General Assembly elected fourteen new member states to serve on the Human Rights Council.

The new members include Algeria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Chile, Costa Rica, Georgia, Germany, Kyrgyzstan, Maldives, Morocco, Romania, South Africa, Sudan, and Vietnam.

The members will serve three-year terms starting on January 1, 2023.

The Human Rights Council is a 47-member body headquartered in Geneva.

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Biden Congratulates Israel, Lebanon Leaders on Maritime Border Demarcation Agreement

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden has called the leaders of Israel and Lebanon to congratulate them on reaching an agreement on maritime border demarcation, senior Biden administration officials told reporters on Tuesday.

"Earlier today, just a shot while ago, President Biden spoke with Prime Minister of Israel Yair Lapid and the President of Lebanon Michel Aoun and extended United States congratulations on reaching this milestone, and US commitment, and President Biden administration's commitment to continue supporting both countries as move forward into implementation," the official said.

Earlier on Tuesday, Lapid announced that Israel has reached a historic agreement on maritime border demarcation with Lebanon. Lapid's office said the draft agreement meets all the security and economic principles laid out by Israel and would be submitted for approval to the Security Cabinet and the government on Wednesday.

The deal was reached after intensive negotiations assisted by US mediator Amos Hochstein over the weekend and the Sukkot holiday.

Lebanon is also content with the agreement given that all of its demands have been taken into account, according to the office of Lebanese President Michel Aoun.

The negotiations on the demarcation of land and maritime borders have been ongoing since 1996 on the basis of a memorandum of understanding under United Nations auspices and US mediation. In June 2022, Israel urged the Lebanese authorities to speed up the talks. Israel called the Karish gas field its strategic asset and assured Lebanon of the absence of plans to produce gas in the disputed territory.

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UK Businessman Indicted for Violating US Sanctions on Deripaska - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - A federal US court indicted UK businessman Graham Bonham-Carter for allegedly violating American sanctions imposed on Russian businessman Oleg Deripaska, the Justice Department said on Tuesday.

"A UK national was arrested today for conspiracy to violate US sanctions imposed on Russian Oligarch Oleg Vladimirovich Deripaska and wire fraud in connection with funding US properties purchased by Deripaska and efforts to expatriate Deripaska's artwork in the United States through misrepresentations," the Justice Department said in a press release. "The US government will seek his extradition to the United States. Deripaska was previously charged with US sanctions violations in an indictment unsealed on Sept. 29."

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Elon Musk Says Only Spoke to Putin Only Once 18 Months Ago, Discussed Space

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - Billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk said on Tuesday that he has only spoken with Russian President Vladimir Putin once approximately 18 months ago amid reports he spoke with Putin prior to publishing a Twitter poll proposing a peace deal between Russia and Ukraine.

"No, it is not [true]. I have spoken to Putin only once and that was about 18 months ago. The subject matter was space," Musk said when asked about the reports via social media.

Earlier on Tuesday, US media reported that Musk spoke with Putin prior to publishing a Twitter poll proposing a peace deal between Russia and Ukraine. The proposed peace plan included guarantees of water supply to Crimea, as well as organizing UN-monitored referenda in regions seeking to join the Russian Federation. Musk was criticized and derided by senior Ukrainian officials for proposing the peace deal between Russia and Ukraine.

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Biden Believes Now Good Time to Reevaluate US Relations With Saudi Arabia - White House

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden believes now is the time to reevaluate US relations with Saudi Arabia after the Saudi-led OPEC+ group of countries recently decided to cut oil production, White House National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"The President believes that we should review the bilateral relationship with Saudi Arabia and to take a look to see if that relationship is where it needs to be and and that it is serving our national security interests, and he is willing to discuss this relationship with members of Congress," Kirby said during a conference call.

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US to Continue Working With Ukraine on Additional Air Defense Capabilities - White House

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - The United States will continue working with Ukraine on providing the country additional air defense capabilities amid Russia's special military operation, White House National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"We will continue to work with them [Ukraine] on additional needs going forward and that would include continuing to talk to them about additional air defense capabilities, I don't have any other announcements to make," Kirby said during a conference call.

Kirby said the United States will deliver the first National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems (NASAMS) to Ukraine in the very near future. Kirby added that the United States is certainly interested in expediting the delivery of additional NASAMS to Ukraine as soon as possible.

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White House on Reports of Musk-Putin Call: Billionaire Does Not Represent US Government

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - Billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk does not serve as an official representative of the US government, White House Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said on Tuesday following reports of a call between Musk and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"I'll let Mr. Musk speak for his conversations. Obviously, he's not representing the United States government in those conversations," Kirby said during a press briefing.

Kirby's statement comes following reports from the Eurasia Group that Musk spoke with Putin before publishing a contentious, viral poll on Twitter proposing a peace deal between Russia and Ukraine, which would include provisions such as guarantees of water supply to Crimea and UN-monitored referenda in several regions to join the Russian Federation.

The proposed peace deal was met with criticism and derision by Ukrainian officials, including by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

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UN Officials Expected to Visit Moscow Sunday to Discuss Grain Deal Extension - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, October 11 (Sputnik) - United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) Secretary-General Rebeca Grynspan and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths are expected to visit Moscow over the weekend to discuss the extension of grain exports agreement, spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Tuesday.

"Rebeca Grynspan and Martin Griffiths are still expected to go to Moscow on Sunday. I mean, our position on the ongoing war is clear," Dujarric said during a press briefing.

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Russian National Danchenko Arrives at US Court for Trial in Lying to FBI Case

(Updates with more details in paras 5, 6; corrects number of jurors in para 4)

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - Russian citizen Igor Danchenko's trial for lying to the FBI during an investigation into the so-called "Trump-Russia collusion" in 2016 began on Tuesday. Danchenko arrived at the District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia in Alexandria on time at 8:57 a.m. (12:57 GMT), along with his team of lawyers.

The prosecution was represented by a team of attorneys, including Special Counsel John Durham, who has been leading the investigation into the origins of the Russia collusion probe since 2020.

Judge Anthony Trenga announced a break during which the selection of 16 jurors would take place. The jurors later will have to deliver a verdict after considering all the evidence in the case. At 11:55 a.m. (15:55 GMT) the parties agreed on the selection of 16 jurors, including four alternates, to ensure that there are at least 12 jurors should any of them drop away.

The trial is set to begin at 1:00 p.m. (17:00 GMT) with the opening statements of the parties.

In November, Danchenko pleaded not guilty to all five counts of making false statements to the FBI about the alleged collusion between former US President Donald Trump and the Kremlin during the 2016 US presidential election.

The prosecution insists that Danchenko lied to the FBI about the sources of information given to British spy Christopher Steele about alleged contacts between the Trump campaign and Russian officials, including information that the Kremlin may have facilitated Trump's election.

The indictment states that Danchenko did not receive such information from anyone and fabricated facts.

Danchenko provided data to former British spy Steele, who prepared, based on this data, materials of the dossier, which the US authorities were guided by in the investigation of alleged ties between the Trump headquarters and Russia. A subsequent Special Counsel investigation has proven no collusion between Trump and Russia.

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US Treasury Dept. Says Reached 2 Multi-Million-Dollar Settlements With Crypto Exchange

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - The US Treasury Department said in a statement on Tuesday that it has reached two settlement agreements in the amount of \$24 million and \$29 million with the cryptocurrency exchange Bittrex over sanctions and money laundering violations.

Investigations conducted by the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) and Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) found apparent violations of multiple sanctions programs and willful violations of the Bank Secrecy Act's anti-money laundering (AML) and suspicious activity report (SAR) reporting requirements, the department said in a statement.

The settlements mark the first parallel enforcement action by OFAC and FinCEN, the statement said.

"For years, Bittrex's AML program and SAR reporting failures unnecessarily exposed the US financial system to threat actors," FinCEN Acting Director Himamauli Das is quoted as saying in the statement. "Bittrex's failures created exposure to high-risk counterparties including sanctioned jurisdictions, darknet markets and ransomware attackers."

The first \$24.2 million settlement agreement covers civil liability for 116,4231 apparent violations of sanctions programs, the statement said. Deficiencies in Bittrex's sanctions compliance procedures resulted in over \$263 million in cryptocurrency transactions between March 2014 and December 2017 by individuals in Crimea, Cuba, Iran, Sudan and Syria.

The second \$29.2 million settlement, toward which the first payment will be credited, covers violations of the AML program and SAR requirements, the statement also said. Bittrex failed to maintain effective transaction monitoring, resulting in "significant exposure to illicit finance," the statement said.

The move marks the largest virtual currency enforcement action by OFAC to date, the statement added.

The enforcement actions emphasize to the virtual currency industry the importance of implementing sanctions compliance controls and meeting federal obligations, according to the statement.

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JP Morgan Says Aware of Claims Made by Threat Actor Group, No Impact on Operations

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - JP Morgan is aware of the claims made by a cyber hacker group against the bank but at this time there have been no operational impacts arising from this situation, a JP Morgan spokesperson told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"We are aware of claims made by a threat actor group and at this time, have not experienced operational impact from this situation," the spokesperson said. "We continue to closely monitor activity."

Earlier on Tuesday, media reported that Russian hackers claimed they paralyzed the largest US bank's operations, including the clients' abilities to sell their assets, control cash flows, manage banking operations, coordinate payment transactions and even go to their online accounts.

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Global Financial Stability Risks Increasing Since April - IMF Report

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - The global financial stability risks have increased since April and have led the balance of risks to be skewed to the downside, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said in its updated 2022 Global Financial Stability Report on Tuesday.

"Global financial stability risks have increased since the April 2022 Global Financial Stability Report (GFSR), and the balance of risks is significantly skewed to the downside. The range of adverse GDP growth outcomes based on the probability distribution of future GDP growth is in the worst 20th percentile of the last four decades," the report said.

The IMF pointed out in the report that the financial vulnerabilities have elevated in the sovereign and non-bank financial institution sectors, while market liquidity has deteriorated across some key asset classes.

The fragile global environment, high inflation and deteriorating economic outlook for many countries are the major drivers that have led to the current situation, the report said.

The IMF also warned about the risk of disorderly tightening in the governments' bid to fight inflation, the report said.

"With the global economy facing a number of challenges and policymakers continuing to normalize policy to tame high inflation, there is a risk of a disorderly tightening of global financial conditions that may be amplified by vulnerabilities built over the years," the report added.

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UK Support for Ukraine Won't Change Under Labour Party Rule - Shadow Defence Minister

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - The United Kingdom's support for Ukraine would not change should the Labour Party gain control of the country's government in the next election, UK Shadow Defence Secretary John Healey said on Tuesday.

"On Britain's military help for Ukraine, and on reinforcing NATO allies on the Russian border, the British government has had, and will continue to have, Labour's fullest support as the official opposition. With a general election, there may well be a change to Labour, but there will be no change to Britain's resolve in confronting Russian aggression and standing with Ukraine," Healey said during an interview at the Wilson Center.

The Labour Party gained the highest level of citizen support over the ruling Conservative Party in 20 years following the release of a 60-billion-pound economic growth plan to address rising costs of living, according to a YouGov poll released late last month.

The Labour Party is leading the Conservative Party by 17 percentage points – the highest level of support since Tony Blair's election to prime minister in 2001 – the poll said.

A plurality of UK citizens, 44%, believe that Labour Party leader Keir Starmer would make a better prime minister than current officeholder Liz Truss, another YouGov poll from late September said. Truss was only supported by 15% of respondents, the poll also said.

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G7 Exploring Ways to Ensure Ukraine Reconstruction With Funds From Russia - Statement

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - The Group of Seven (G7) countries' leaders said in a joint statement on Tuesday that they are exploring ways to ensure the Ukraine reconstruction efforts are supported with funds from Russia.

"Ensuring Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction, including exploring avenues to do so with funds from Russia; pursuing accountability for Russia crimes committed during the war," the G7 said in the joint statement.

The G7 leaders held a virtual meeting earlier in the day in response to Russia's most intense missile strikes in months on Kiev and other Ukrainian cities on Monday. Russia launched the strikes in retaliation for what is believed to be a Ukrainian attack last Saturday on the bridge linking Russia with Crimea.

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G7 Leaders 'Deeply Troubled' by Deliberate Damage to Nord Stream Pipelines - Statement

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - The leaders of the Group of Seven (G7) said on Tuesday that they are "deeply troubled" by the deliberate damage caused to Russia's Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines and welcome the ongoing investigations into the matter.

"We are deeply troubled by the deliberate damage to the Nordstream pipelines in international waters in the Baltic Sea and strongly condemn any deliberate disruption of critical infrastructure," the G7 said in a joint statement. "We welcome ongoing investigations."

The leaders of the G7 held a virtual meeting earlier in the day in response to Russia's most intense missile strikes in months on Kiev and other Ukrainian cities. Russia launched the strikes in retaliation for what is believed to be a Ukrainian attack last Saturday on the bridge linking Russia with Crimea.

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G7 Will Continue to Coordinate Efforts to Meet Ukraine's Defense Needs - Joint Statement

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - The Group of Seven (G7) countries said during their emergency meeting on Tuesday that they will continue to coordinate efforts to meet Ukraine's military and defense equipment needs.

"We will continue to coordinate efforts to meet Ukraine's urgent requirements for military and defense equipment," the G7 said in a joint statement.

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G7 Leaders Will Provide Support to Ukraine for 'As Long As It Takes' - Joint Statement

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - The leaders of the Group of Seven (G7) countries on Tuesday held an emergency meeting and reassured Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelenskyy that they will continue providing his country with military, financial and other support "for as long as it takes" amid Russia's special military operation there.

"We reassured President Zelenskyy that we are undeterred and steadfast in our commitment to providing the support Ukraine needs to uphold its sovereignty and territorial integrity," the G7 said in a joint statement. "We will continue to provide financial, humanitarian, military, diplomatic and legal support and will stand firmly with Ukraine for as long as it takes."

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G7 Says Will Impose Further Economic Costs on Russia Over Actions in Ukraine - Statement

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - The Group of Seven (G7) countries on Tuesday vowed to continue to impose further economic costs on Russia following its recent actions in Ukraine. "We have imposed and will continue to impose further economic costs on Russia," the G7 said in a joint statement after an emergency meeting on Ukraine.

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US Senate Begins Debate on \$850Bln Fiscal Year 2023 Defense Spending Bill

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - The US Senate on Tuesday began debating the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 that provides approximately \$850 billion in funding for national defense and acts as a legislative vehicle for other security-related initiatives.

The bill authorizes \$846.86 billion in top-line NDAA spending, as well as \$10.6 billion in defense-related spending outside NDAA jurisdiction, according to a US Senate Armed Services Committee summary of the legislation.

The bill also includes a number of defense policy provisions, including extension of the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative with \$800 million more in funding for FY2023, \$1 billion for the National Defense Stockpile to acquire strategic and critical minerals currently in a shortfall, and establishment of a team to integrate the Defense Department's counter-China initiatives.

The legislation takes a number of steps to improve service members' quality of life, such as by funding a 4.6% pay raise for both military and civilian Defense Department employees. The bill also includes a provision requiring women to register with Selective Service.

In addition, the bill also invests in deterrence and modernization of the US nuclear triad, authorizing \$22 billion for the National Nuclear Security Administration and \$341.6 million for the Cooperative Threat Reduction program, which is focused on stemming proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons around the world.

Lawmakers have filed more than 900 amendments to the bill so far that include imposing secondary sanctions to enforce a proposed international price cap on Russian oil, authorization of \$6.5 billion in military aid for Taiwan over five years and the revocation of the 1991 Gulf War and 2002 Iraq War Authorizations for Use of Military Force.

Other amendments include restrictions on the sale of F-16 fighter jets to Turkey, authorization for the Defense Department to adjust contracts amid historic inflation and an effort to reverse a \$45 billion increase in defense funding approved by the Senate Armed Services Committee on top of the White House's recommendation.

In July, the US House of Representatives passed their version of the legislation in a 329-101 vote. The House bill, which also included amendments to restrict the sale of F-16 jets to Turkey and increase assistance to Ukraine, will need to be reconciled with the Senate version before a finalized NDAA can be sent to President Joe Biden's desk to be signed into law.

The Senate is not expected to begin voting on the bill until November.

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US-Led Ukraine Defense Group to Discuss Societal Resilience, Infrastructure - Official WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - The US-led Ukraine Defense Contact Group will discuss assessment of societal resilience, including infrastructure for Ukraine, at the upcoming NATO ministerial meeting on Wednesday, US Ambassador to NATO Julianne Smith said.

"The ministers will take time to discuss assessment of societal resilience, including infrastructure [for Ukraine]," Smith told journalists on Tuesday.

On Wednesday, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin will travel to Brussels, Belgium, to participate in the NATO Defense Ministerial at the alliance's headquarters.

The ministers have said they will discuss the situation in Ukraine and the protection of critical infrastructure in light of the sabotage at Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines.

Austin will be joined in Brussels by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley to lead the meeting of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group on Wednesday. Defense ministers and chiefs of staff from nearly 50 countries will attend the meeting.

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Europe to Face Challenging Winter in 2022, But Next One Will Be Even Worse - IMF

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) – Europe will face a very challenging winter this year, but the following one will be even worse, International Monetary Fund (IMF) Chief Economist Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas said on Tuesday.

“Winter 2022 will be challenging, but winter 2023 will likely be worse,” Gourinchas told reporters. The energy crisis, especially in Europe, is not a transitory shock, and the geopolitical realignment of energy supplies is both broad and permanent, he added.

Gourinchas also noted that price controls, targeted subsidies or export bans could lead to additional increase of prices and inflation.

“They rarely work,” he added.

On Wednesday, OPEC+ announced that the alliance agreed to cut oil production by two million barrels per day from November and will take production levels agreed for August as a reference point. The move was made in response to uncertainty in global oil market outlooks, in part caused by Western sanctions on Russian energy deliveries and the G7 plans to introduce a price cap on Russian crude. The decision received backlash from the US, which demanded an increase in production to combat rising domestic prices.

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US-Led Ukraine Defense Contact Group to Discuss Air Defenses For Ukraine - Official
WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) - The US-led Ukraine defense contact group will discuss the topic of air defenses for Ukraine at their upcoming ministerial on Wednesday, US Ambassador to NATO Julianne Smith said on Tuesday.

"There are further questions about what additional assistance could be provided, I suspect tomorrow will be the [topic] of air defense. I suggest there will be [discussions] on how to supply Ukraine with air defense [means]," Smith told journalists.

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Global Oil Price Increase Would Create Supply Shock - IMF

WASHINGTON, October 11 (Sputnik) – The global economy would face another supply shock if oil prices rise further as a result of the proposed price cap on Russian oil or decisions by energy producers, the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) Chief Economist Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas said on Tuesday.

“There is quite a bit of uncertainty about how energy markets are going to evolve in the coming months with both what is happening in terms of the sanctions on one side, and what is happening with energy producers on the other side. That is one of the layers that we had in our adverse scenario,” Gourinchas told reporters.

The IMF expects that such developments could "shave off" another 0.5 percent of output levels next year, he added.

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The US prosecution was represented by a team of attorneys, including Special Counsel John Durham, who has been leading the investigation into the origins of the Russia probe since 2020. Judge Anthony Trenga announced a break in the trial, during which the selection of 12 jurors would take place. The jurors later will have to deliver a verdict after considering all the evidence in the case.

In November, Danchenko pleaded not guilty to all five counts of making false statements to the FBI about the alleged collusion between former US President Donald Trump and the Kremlin during the 2016 US presidential election.

The prosecution insists that Danchenko lied to the FBI about the sources of information given to British spy Christopher Steele about alleged contacts between the Trump campaign and Russian officials, including information that the Kremlin may have facilitated Trump's election. The indictment states that Danchenko did not receive such information from anyone and fabricated facts.

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Hong Kong Leader Rejects US Calls to Act on Russian-Owned Superyacht – Chief Executive

HONG KONG, October 11 (Sputnik) - Hong Kong Chief Executive John Lee rejected on Tuesday US calls to act upon a Russian-owned superyacht anchored in the city's waters, saying there was "no legal basis" to enforce unilateral sanctions on Russia's billionaires.

"We cannot do and we will not do anything that has no legal basis," Lee said during a press conference. He said Hong Kong only had the legal basis to comply with UN sanctions.

Named Nord, the superyacht is believed to be owned by Russian tycoon Alexei Mordashov, who is facing US, EU, and UK sanctions amid the Russia-Ukraine conflict. It arrived in Hong Kong on October 5 from Vladivostok, Russia and has since been docked in the city's harbor.

The US State Dept warned Monday that Hong Kong risked damaging its business reputation if it offered a safe haven to parties seeking to evade sanctions.