

**6/13/23 Tuesday**

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Recording of Trump Discussing Classified Docs Was Part of Feud Over Iran With Top General

The FBI raided former US President Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate last August on suspicions he still possessed hundreds of missing documents from his time in the White House. In plain storage boxes, agents found hundreds of files marked classified, which Trump has claimed he declassified. Now, he faces 37 charges over the seized files.

A key piece of evidence in the Justice Department's case against Trump is a recording in which he discusses an alleged plan for strikes against Iran in an effort to score a political point against a top US general who criticized him. In the audio, Trump suggests he is holding a classified file. 'You're Gonna Have a F\*cking War'

The recording dates to July 2021, when The New Yorker, a prominent US magazine published [a scorching interview](#) with Gen. Mark A. Milley, who has been Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff since his 2018 appointment by Trump.

Since Trump's term expired in January 2021, Milley has been revealed as a [sharp critic of Trump](#) who disagreed with many of his policy decisions both foreign and domestic, and who decided to "fight from the inside" against a president he saw as "doing great and irreparable harm" to the nation.

In the interview, Milley described how he opposed Trump's efforts to launch a war against the Islamic Republic of Iran. Under his presidency, US-Iran relations crumbled from the detente reached by Trump's predecessor, Barack Obama, with [the 2015 nuclear deal](#). Trump accused Iran of secretly violating the deal, pursuing a nuclear weapon, and of sponsoring a vast network of militant and terrorist forces across the region, initiating a "maximum pressure" campaign that included returning economy-crushing sanctions and assassinating Gen. Qasem Soleimani, a national hero of the anti-Daesh\* war.

"If you do this, you're gonna have a f\*cking war," Milley was quoted as telling Trump in early 2021, after Trump proposed strikes against Iran's nuclear program, which the country insists is solely for civilian purposes.

Milley has repeatedly told journalists that he feared Trump would [attempt some kind of move](#) to remain in power after it became clear he had lost the November 2020 election, which Trump has maintained was stolen from him via massive voter fraud by the Democrats.

'This Was Him'

Following the article's publication, Trump brought up Milley's claims in a conversation with a group of people at his club in Bedminster, New Jersey, that included two people working on the autobiography of Trump's former chief of staff, Mark Meadows, Trump's former communications specialist, Margo Martin, and several other former aides.

"Well, with Milley – uh, let me see that, I'll show you an example. He said that I wanted to attack Iran. Isn't that amazing? I have a big pile of papers, this thing just came up. Look. This was him," Trump says, according to a transcript published by US media. "They presented me this –

this is off the record, but – they presented me this. This was him. This was the Defense Department and him. We looked at some. This was him. This wasn't done by me, this was him." "Secret. This is secret information. Look, look at this," Trump also says at one point, according to the transcript. "This was done by the military and given to me."

He was reportedly waving a document around while saying those words, although it's unclear if it was the Iran document in question. According to reports, prosecutors have also not yet determined which Iran strike document Trump was referring to. However, [Sputnik reported at the time](#) that a photo of a scattering of classified files found at Trump's estate by FBI agents included one dated from the day after Trump pulled the US out of the nuclear deal with Iran. "As president, I could have declassified, but now I can't," Trump also said during the conversation, according to the transcript.

#### Scoring Political Points

According to analysts who spoke with US media, Trump might have kept some of the files around after leaving office in order to use them for just such a retort. Even during his administration, Trump's cabinet and staff were revolving doors as figures passed into and out of his confidence, with many becoming strong critics of his administration afterward, including Milley but also his former national security adviser, John Bolton, and his former defense secretary, James Mattis.

"That would be a possible explanation for why he might hold onto documents he shouldn't hold onto," Peter Feaver, a professor of political science at Duke University who is reportedly close to Milley, told a US media publication on Tuesday. "And it sounds like in this case, it fits that pattern."

"Trump and Milley had a particularly fractious relationship, as stormy as any in modern times," Feaver said. "It probably stung former President Trump that a leader of an institution that the public held in high esteem ... was describing him in adverse terms."

However, an anonymous US official told the same publication that neither Milley or any other chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff "does not feud with a president or a former president of the United States."

#### Mar-a-Lago Raid Brings Federal Charges

The documents in question were seized by the FBI in a raid on Mar-a-Lago in early August 2022, which followed months of efforts to convince Trump to return a slew of missing documents voluntarily. While the National Archives secured a return of a large portion of the missing files, FBI agents still [found hundreds of documents](#) at the West Palm Beach estate, including hundreds with various degrees of classification markings.

Last week, the DOJ announced [a stunning 37 charges](#) against Trump, including for mishandling files, obstruction of justice, and most notably, violations of the 1917 Espionage Act. If convicted on all counts, the 76-year-old Trump could be confined to federal prison on a 400-year-long sentence.

Trump has denied all the charges, claiming he declassified all the files in question before leaving office and has called the prosecution effort a [politically-motivated "witch hunt."](#) He has demanded similar treatment for US President Joe Biden, who [has also been found in possession](#) of classified files dating to his time as US vice president under Obama, from 2009 to 2017.

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### Plutonium From US Nuclear Weapons Tests Polluting South China Sea, Study Finds

A new study has found that plutonium sediments in the South China Sea have their origins in fallout from US nuclear tests conducted in the South Pacific in the mid-20th century.

The study, published in the peer-reviewed Chinese language journal Environmental Chemistry, traced plutonium particles found in sediments on the seabed of the South China Sea to nuclear weapons tests in the US Pacific Proving Ground, a series of atolls and islands in the South Pacific nearly 3,000 miles to the east, where the US detonated dozens of nuclear weapons between 1946 and 1962.

Their conclusion was based on a precise identification of the ratio of two plutonium isotopes,  $^{240}\text{Pu}$  and  $^{239}\text{Pu}$ , which is a unique part of the process of manufacturing plutonium. The ratio in the South China Sea sediments is identical to that left by US nuclear weapons tests at the PPG, with a range of 0.306-0.36.

Plutonium from other sources, such as the worldwide radioactive fallout from [atmospheric nuclear weapons](#) tests, or the disaster at the [Chernobyl Nuclear Power](#) Plant in Soviet Ukraine in 1986, each bear their own unique ratios of  $^{240}\text{Pu}$  and  $^{239}\text{Pu}$ , enabling scientists to discern the origins of different types of plutonium.

According to the scientists, the radioactive sediment was carried westward by the North Pacific Gyre, an oval ocean current that rotates clockwise. The current comes west through the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, and Caroline Islands before hitting the Philippines and Taiwan, swinging north, and then turning east along the southern coast of Japan. On the California coast, it turns south until it is forced westward again by other currents along the Mexican coast. The sediments would have passed along this current, entering the South China Sea via the Luzon Strait that separates Luzon from Taiwan.

Despite the waterway's proximity to another nuclear-armed superpower, China, the radioactive material could not have come from Chinese nuclear weapons.

Between 1964 and 1996, China conducted 47 nuclear tests of its own - all of them at Lop Nur, a facility in the vast salt beds of southeastern Xinjiang, nearly 1,500 miles inland.

The research team in particular used sediments collected from Nansha, or the Spratly Islands, but also looked at prior research from other parts of the South China Sea, and found that US nuclear weapons created 7.15% and 15.89% of the plutonium in Nansha and 87% of the overall plutonium pollution in the northern parts of the South China Sea that are close to the Luzon Strait. However, the amount of pollution across the sea varies widely.

The US began using several remote Pacific islands to test nuclear weapons in the period immediately after World War II, which was forced to an end by Washington's use of nuclear bombs to destroy the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945.

Between 1946 and 1958, the US detonated 67 nuclear devices in the Marshall Islands, amounting to a total explosive yield equal to roughly 210 megatons of TNT, or an average of two Hiroshima-sized bombs every two days. The tests included underwater, surface, and upper

atmospheric detonations, testing the viability of the devices as anti-naval, anti-surface, and [even anti-satellite weapons](#).

The tests blanketed the area with huge amounts of radioactive material, rendering many of the islands uninhabitable and bringing cancer-causing particles down on many of the island residents who were not removed prior to the testing. In addition to plutonium, they also polluted the area with cesium, strontium and other radioactive materials.

Castle Bravo, the US' first thermonuclear bomb, detonated in 1954 on Bikini Atoll, was much larger than scientists anticipated and threw up vast amounts of radioactive dust into the atmosphere, which fell across a wide region of sea that included several inhabited islands and a Japanese fishing boat, Daigo Fukuryū Maru, afflicting the crew of 23 with acute radiation poisoning and killing one of them.

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Economists Expect Fed to Halt Rate Hikes After US Reports 4.0% Inflation, Lowest Since March 2021

The US Federal Reserve's efforts to halt inflation by raising interest rates seems to have paid off, cutting the rate of dollar depreciation in half since a year earlier. Many economic experts are now predicting the latest inflation report will only further encourage the central bank to back off from further rate hikes.

According to [the latest report](#) by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the United States is experiencing its lowest rate of inflation in more than two years.

The Consumer Price Index (CPI) for May 2023 was just 4.0% higher than in April 2023 prior to seasonal adjustments, the BLS said on Tuesday. That was the smallest increase in the rate of inflation since March 2021.

The change in commodity prices was not even across all sectors, with energy costs decreasing by 11.7% but the food index increasing by 6.7% over the previous year.

As compared to the previous month, prices increased in May by just 0.1%, which was not the smallest increase but was among the smallest month-to-month increase over the last year.

The 4.0% increase was slightly better than the 4.1% increase economists had predicted, and significantly lower than the 4.9% year-on-year increase recorded in April 2023, signaling that inflation is slowing at a considerable pace.

As a result, some economic observers are predicting the Fed will decline to raise interest rates at its June meeting, which also began on Tuesday.

"The encouraging trend in consumer prices will provide the Fed some leeway to keep rates unchanged this month and if the trend continues, the Fed will not likely hike for the rest of the year," said Jeffrey Roach, chief economist at LPL Financial, as quoted in US media.

Indeed, in late May, several senior Federal Reserve officials already had similar expectations. Philadelphia Fed President Patrick Harker said "we really should skip, not pause, but skip an increase" in June.

Philip Jefferson, a member of the Fed's Board of Governors, also said at the time that "a decision to hold our policy rate constant at a coming meeting should not be interpreted to mean that we have reached the peak rate for this cycle. Indeed, skipping a rate hike at a coming meeting would allow the Committee to see more data before making decisions about the extent of additional policy firming."

However, the Fed's stated goal is to reduce inflation to just 2%, meaning the battle is far from over.

Sarah House, a senior economist at Wells Fargo, cautioned that "directional progress should not be confused with mission accomplished."

"It's a fine report," she said, "but I still think it keeps the Fed on edge."

Last month, the Fed raised its benchmark interest rate to between 5% and 5.25%, its highest level in 16 years.

A year ago in June 2022, the inflationary spiral set in motion by the COVID-19 pandemic reached its nadir, with a 9.1% increase in prices over June 2021. However, the Fed had already begun ratcheting up interest rates after inflation hit a 40-year high in January 2022, after having tolerated high inflation as the cost of keeping markets stable amid the continued recovery from the economic crash caused by COVID-19 lockdowns in February-April of 2020. That crash destroyed more than one-third of the New York Stock Exchange's value and thrust 40 million Americans into unemployment.

The US national unemployment rate sits at [a historically low 3.7%](#), but increasing interest rates is known to trigger higher unemployment and carries the risk of triggering a recession, too, which many [top financiers still expect](#) later this year.

Research released on Tuesday by David Rosenberg, the former chief North American economist at Merrill Lynch who is now the president of Toronto-based Rosenberg Research, noted that since 1950, 11 out of 14 rate-hike cycles have ended in recessions.

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### Trump Pleads Not Guilty to 37 Charges in Classified Docs Indictment

A federal indictment publicly presented on Friday revealed prosecutors were charging the former US president with 37 counts of crimes - including obstruction and unlawful retention of defense information, over his mishandling of classified documents.

Former US President Donald Trump pleaded not guilty on Tuesday to nearly 40 charges outlined in his first-ever federal indictment that alleges the one-time president failed to follow protocol and mishandled classified documents after leaving office.

The plea was submitted before US magistrate judge Jonathan Goodman at Trump's first scheduled court appearance in Miami, Florida, where a few hundred demonstrators and Trump supporters alike gathered outside the federal courthouse.

"We most certainly enter a plea of not guilty," Trump's lawyer Todd Blanche was [reported](#) to have said in court.

The day's proceedings saw Trump arrive at the courthouse just before 2 p.m. local time, and processed by US Marshals within a span of 15 minutes. While the president was not placed in handcuffs for the formal arrest, he was fingerprinted by authorities.

Trump was booked alongside Walt Nauta, a Navy veteran that worked as the former president's valet during his time at the White House and as a Trump's personal aide at his Mar-a-Lago residence.

US reporter Adam Reiss described the inside of the court room as including more than 40 reporters and a mix of Secret Service officials among legal officials.

Nauta was charged in the indictment with six charges that include: conspiracy to obstruct justice; withholding a document or record; corruptly concealing a document in a federal investigation; scheme to conceal; and false statements and representations.

He did not submit an official plea as a separate arraignment for Nauta is scheduled for a later date.

US media reported that after federal prosecutor David Harbach agreed neither Trump nor Nauta were a flight risk, Goodman did not order either individual to surrender their passport. Trump was not asked to turn over his passport, nor were any travel limits imposed on him as a result. Trump has been ordered not to speak to Nauta about the case; however, he is not barred from coming into contact with the individual. In fact, the pair were spotted together at the nearby Versailles Restaurant for an impromptu stop after the court hearing.

Coverage of Trump's movements after departing the courthouse showed figures [appearing](#) to "pray" over Trump moments after he entered the eatery.

Prior to the historic case's court hearing, Trump took to social media to voice his criticism against special counsel Jack Smith, a prosecutor leading the case against Trump, and in typical Trump mannerisms resorted to name calling Smith a "thug" and a "lunatic."

Alina Habba, a lawyer representing Trump, told reporters outside the courtroom after Trump arrived on scene that "what we are witnessing today is the blatant and unapologetic weaponization of the criminal justice system."

"The people in charge of this country do not love America - they hate Donald Trump," she added.

Trump echoed similar sentiments while speaking to the press at the Versailles Restaurant, telling supporters:

"We have a rigged country. We have a country that's corrupt. We have a county that's got no borders. We have a country that's got nothing but problems. We're a nation in decline and then they do this stuff — and you see where the people are."

Since the indictment was first revealed by Trump on June 8, he has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing and stated the move is part of a political scheme intended to block his 2024 bid for the White House. As such, Trump and company have questioned why authorities have not gone after US President Joe Biden with the same tenacity as he was also found to have mishandled classified records.

Biden was earlier found to have retained multiple classified documents at his residences in Delaware and at the Penn Biden Center in Washington, DC, from his time as vice president under the Obama White House.

Similarly, many members of the Republican Party - including House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis - have blasted the use of a government investigation in the matter.

The June indictment marks the second such legal filing issued against Trump; however, it's widely speculated that additional filings may emerge as an investigation remains ongoing in Georgia into his alleged efforts to overturn the 2020 election.

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Pulitzer-Winning Novelist Cormac McCarthy Dead at 89

The American novelist, born in Providence, Rhode Island, penned 12 novels, two plays, five screenplays, and three short stories.

Novelist Cormac McCarthy, who authored "Blood Meridian," "The Road," and "No Country for Old Men," died on Tuesday of natural causes, his publisher Alfred A. Knopf revealed in a statement. He was 89.

Knopf's announcement detailed that McCarthy died at his home in Santa Fe, New Mexico. McCarthy's death was also confirmed by his son, John McCarthy.

Born Charles McCarthy Jr. in 1933 to an Irish Catholic family, the decorated author [reportedly](#) read little in his childhood and adolescence, and it wasn't until he served in the US Air Force that he began to read more broadly during his station in Alaska.

McCarthy's work is reminiscent of German Melville or William Faulkner, according to the late literary critic Howard Bloom. His works are often stories that offer violent, post-apocalyptic American frontier tales.

But McCarthy, a very private man often referred to as a "writer's writer," spent much of his career subsisting on grants, eventually winning the MacArthur "genius grant" in 1981.

"I never had any doubts about my abilities," McCarthy told an [American newspaper](#) in 1992. "I knew I could write. I just had to figure out how to eat while doing this."

"Someone would call up and offer him \$2,000 to come speak at a university about his books," echoed Annie DeLisle, his second wife in an [interview](#). "And he would tell them that everything he had to say was there on the page. So we would eat beans for another week."

McCarthy began to gain widespread recognition after the release of his 1992 book "All the Pretty Horses," which went on to become a New York Times bestseller and win the National Book Award, among other titles.

But it wasn't until 2007 that McCarthy would become a household name, once Oprah Winfrey picked up his post-apocalyptic novel "The Road" for her book club and introduced it to a wider span of readers. "The Road" also won the 2007 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for Fiction.

Many of McCarthy's novels went on to be adapted into movies; in fact, his novel "No Country for Old Men" was adapted into a film by the Coen Brothers and won four Academy Awards, including best picture in 2008.

Authors, poets, and other notable celebrities took to Twitter to lament McCarthy's passing.

“When a great artist dies, there is the moment when the world understands it will never again have a new creation from that mind, that heart, that vast soul. It is a loss beyond measure, but what that soul has left us is a gift beyond time,” poet Joseph Fasano wrote on Twitter.

Stephen King, a renowned American author of horror and supernatural fiction, also took to Twitter to express his mourning.

“Death was not hilarious today. RIP Cormac McCarthy. A great favorite,” wrote Patton Oswalt, an American comedian.

McCarthy was married three times, but not at the time of his death. He is survived by two of his kids, Cullen and John McCarthy.

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Clinton: Trump Backers Using 'Emailgate' as Distraction From Mar-a-Lago Indictment

Following the Friday indictment in which former US President Donald Trump was charged with 37 criminal charges, Republicans attempted to change the subject by bringing back a nearly decade-old controversy that saw Hillary Clinton use a private email server for official communications rather than her government accounts.

Former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has hit back at Republicans for using the topic of her private email scandal as a distraction from Trump being indicted for the second time this year.

“Hillary wasn’t indicted,” said Trump at a Georgia Republican Party state convention last weekend. “She should have been. But she wasn’t indicted.”

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and New Jersey Governor Chris Christie echoed those sentiments, suggesting that the Justice Department had a “double standard” for how they investigated Clinton’s email practices, in which she was not criminally charged.

“I do think it’s odd... how that is their only response,” [Clinton](#) said in an interview with Crooked Media’s “Pod Save America” which was published on Tuesday. Clinton ran against Trump in the 2016 US presidential election.

While James Comey, who was the FBI Director at the time of the Clinton email scandal, called her email practices “extremely careless,” he and other investigators found no evidence of intention to break laws surrounding classified information.

But prosecutors who are handling Trump’s case have [reportedly](#) found evidence of not only taking boxes of classified information back to Mar-a-Lago with him, but of also attempting to conceal those boxes from investigators.

“They refuse to read the indictment. They refuse to engage with the facts. There’s nothing new about that,” she continued. “And what they refuse to admit is: This is on a track about him, not about anybody else, no matter how much they try to confuse people and how much they try to raise extraneous issues.”

“If you watched any of the news programs this weekend,” she said, adding that “their efforts to defend this man are truly beyond anything that I ever thought possible in our country.”

“I mean, it is so profoundly disturbing how, this could have been the break. This could have been the opportunity to say, ‘Thank you so much for everything you’ve done for us. We really appreciate it, but this is kind of serious, and so we’re not going to continue to defend you,’” Clinton stated.

“But no, they’re all in, again. That’s what, the psychology of this is so hard for me to fully grasp.” The latest comes as Trump submitted his not guilty plea before federal court in Miami, Florida, marking the second such submission filed in just a few months.

The current charges filed against Trump include obstruction and unlawful retention of defense information over his failure to adhere to the Presidential Records Act and turn over any classified records upon leaving office in January 2021.

To date, Trump has repeatedly stated he is innocent, underscoring that the entire legal move against him is politically motivated.

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The Mar-a-Lago Reading Room - Cartoon  
By Ted Rall

On Tuesday, former President Donald Trump pleaded not guilty to 37 charges, including obstruction and unlawful retention of defense information stemming from his mishandling of classified records stored at his Mar-a-Lago residence.

The federal indictment against Trump alleges he failed to hand over classified documents to the National Archives, a protocol stipulated under the Presidential Records Act that requires all presidents to turn over official documents upon leaving office. Federal agents first seized hundreds of classified records in [August](#) of 2022.

Since news first broke on the indictment, Trump has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing and has accused the prosecuting team of taking part in a politically-motivated scheme.

“We have a rigged country. We have a country that’s corrupt. We have a county that’s got no borders. We have a country that’s got nothing but problems. We’re a nation in decline and then they do this stuff — and you see where the people are,” Trump told supporters at the Versailles Restaurant in Miami following his court appearance.

The latest indictment marks the second such legal filing to be issued against the former president, and may prove to not be his last as officials are also investigating whether he allegedly took part in efforts to overturn election results in Georgia for the 2020 election. Even if convicted over the Mar-a-Lago charges, officials have stated it’s unlikely to bar Trump from running for president as there is no law that would prevent his bid. A conviction by the US Senate during earlier impeachment proceedings would have proved the only means to block a presidential run.

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US House Panel Proposes Expansion of Anti-Russian Energy Policy for US Bases in Europe

WASHINGTON, June 14 (Sputnik) - The US House Armed Services panel's Subcommittee on Readiness released an initial copy of their Fiscal Year 2024 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) proposals before a markup on Wednesday, including a measure to expand a policy that combats the use of Russian energy at US military bases in Europe.

The subcommittee's markup for the FY24 NDAA includes a modification to a previous policy that combats the US military's reliance on Russian energy to run bases in Europe.

The measure would expand a policy included in the FY23 NDAA, which calls for main operating bases in Europe to establish and implement plans to reduce reliance on Russian energy, to include all operating bases.

The measure also requires the US Secretary of Defense to submit to Congress a plan for each base and an assessment of the feasibility of reaching the goal for the "elimination" of the use of Russian energy.

The proposal comes as the House Armed Services panel's subcommittees conduct a number of markups on sections of the FY24 NDAA, formal work on which was temporarily impacted by debt ceiling negotiations earlier this year.

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US Expects Robust Exchange on Ukraine During Blinken Trip to China - Senior Official

WASHINGTON, June 14 (Sputnik) – The Biden administration expects a "full and robust" exchange on the ongoing conflict in Ukraine between Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Chinese counterparts during his visit to Beijing, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel J. Kritenbrink said on Wednesday.

"I'm absolutely confident that there'll be a full and robust exchange on the situation in Ukraine and the United States as Secretary Blinken will continue to make clear US expectations regarding Chinese actions in that regard," Kritenbrink said during a press briefing.

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US Expects China to Raise Concerns With Blinken About US Technology Policy - Official

WASHINGTON, June 14 (Sputnik) – The United States expects China to raise concerns with Secretary of State Antony Blinken about US technology policy, including with regard to semiconductors, during his visit to the country later this week, Deputy Assistant to the President and Coordinator for Indo-Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell said on Wednesday.

"We do believe that China has concerns about elements of our technology policy, with regard to semiconductors, the number of high-end technologies uses, some of our activities with allies and partners, and we believe that those issues will be raised directly with Secretary Blinken and we will defend and explain our activities to date, and what to expect in the future," Campbell said during a press briefing.

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Blinken Hopes to Discuss Ways to Increase Exchanges Between US, Chinese Peoples - Official

WASHINGTON, June 14 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken hopes to engage with China on ways to increase exchanges between the American and Chinese peoples, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel J. Kritenbrink said on Wednesday.

"The Secretary is committed to exploring potential cooperation on transnational challenges when it is in our interest, in areas such as climate and global macroeconomic stability. We also hope to discuss ways to increase exchanges between the American and Chinese peoples," Kritenbrink said during a briefing.

Blinken is set to travel to Beijing and London from June 16-21.

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US Hopes Engagements With China to Reduce Risk of Miscalculation – Senior Official

WASHINGTON, June 14 (Sputnik) – The United States hopes that the upcoming series of engagements with China during Secretary of State Antony Blinken's visit to Beijing later this week will help reduce the risk of miscalculation and avoid a potential conflict, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel Kritenbrink said on Wednesday.

"This is a really critical series of engagements that we will have in Beijing at a crucial time in the relationship that we hope will, at a minimum, reduce the risk of miscalculation so that we do not veer into potential conflict. I think it's incredibly serious," Kritenbrink said during a press briefing.

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US Not Ready to Offer Long-Term Israel-Style Security Guarantees to Ukraine - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 14 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration wants to provide Ukraine with security assurances on par with those given to Israel, but will likely seek a shorter-term

commitment to Kiev, The New York Times reported on Wednesday, citing US officials.

Under the so-called "Israel model," the United States has a 10-year-long security pact to the Jewish state, but this will unlikely be the case with Ukraine, the report said.

This is not the type of security arrangement that Volodymyr Zelensky wants, the report noted.

The report comes as NATO is set to gather for a summit in Vilnius next month, with pressure on President Joe Biden reportedly mounting to support a faster and more certain path to membership for Kiev.

At the summit, the alliance is expected to upgrade its relations with Ukraine from a NATO-Ukraine Commission to a NATO-Ukraine Council, thus providing Kiev the same treatment Russia was given in 2002, the New York Times said.

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Blinken During China Trip Wants to Establish Open Communication Channels - Official

WASHINGTON, June 14 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken during his upcoming trip to China will seek to establish open communication channels in order to prevent miscalculations and avert conflict, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel J. Kritenbrink said on Wednesday.

"First, he wants to establish communication channels that are open and empowered to discuss important challenges, address misconceptions, and prevent miscalculation, so as to manage competition that does not veer into conflict", Kritenbrink said during a briefing.

Blinken is set to travel to Beijing and London from June 16-21.

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US Has Seen Signals That Beijing Recognizes Diplomacy Still important - Senior Official

WASHINGTON, June 14 (Sputnik) – The United States has seen signals suggesting that Beijing recognizes diplomacy with Washington is still important despite the existing tensions, Deputy Assistant to the President and Coordinator for Indo-Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell said on Wednesday.

"I think we'd heard from unofficial interlocutors just a few months ago that China was giving up on diplomacy with the United States. But, of course, we have seen other signals of light that suggest that they [the Chinese] recognize that diplomacy with Washington is still important," Campbell said during a press briefing.

According to Campbell, Beijing's economic concerns, new US technology policies, and the effectiveness of Washington's engagement with allies and partners could be possible explanations for this change in China's approach to diplomacy with the United States.

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US Expects China to Take Provocative Steps From Taiwan Strait to Cuba – Senior Official

WASHINGTON, June 14 (Sputnik) – The United States expects China to engage in provocative actions from the Taiwan Strait to Cuba as competition between the two countries continues, Deputy Assistant to the President and Coordinator for Indo-Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell said on Wednesday.

"As the competition continues, the PRC will take provocative steps from the Taiwan Strait to Cuba, and we will push back, but intense competition requires intense diplomacy. If we're going to manage tensions, that is the only way to clear up misconceptions, to signal, to communicate and to work together where our interests align," Campbell said during a briefing on Secretary Antony Blinken's upcoming trip to China.

Campbell added that the US expects China to be a major player on the world stage for "the rest of our lives".

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Blinken to Discuss US-China Ties, Issues of Concern During Visit to Beijing - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, June 14 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will visit China in the coming days for talks with senior officials on a range of bilateral issues of concern, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a statement on Wednesday.

"Blinken will travel to Beijing, the People's Republic of China (PRC), and London, the United Kingdom, June 16-21," Miller said. "While in Beijing, Secretary Blinken will meet with senior PRC officials where he will discuss the importance of maintaining open lines of communication to responsibly manage the US-PRC relationship. He will also raise bilateral issues of concern, global and regional matters, and potential cooperation on shared transnational challenges."

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Biden Admin. Quietly Resumes Talks With Iran on Prisoners, Nuclear Program - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 14 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration has quietly resumed talks with Iran with a view to securing a release of American prisoners and curbing Tehran's nuclear program, The Wall Street Journal reported on Wednesday, citing sources in the know.

After senior US and Iranian officials started discussions in New York in December, White House delegations have traveled to Oman at least three times to continue indirect contacts, the report said.

In exchange for a prisoner release and curbs on nuclear activity, Iran wants access to billions of dollars in its energy revenue blocked abroad by US sanctions, the report noted.

Former South Korean officials told the Journal that discussions are ongoing with both nations over the release of \$7 billion in Iranian funds held in South Korea.

The Biden administration, however, does not want talks with Iran to top the political agenda ahead of the presidential campaign, the report added, noting that concessions to Iran would likely trigger criticism.

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US House Passes Resolution Calling on Russia to Release WSJ Reporter Evan Gershkovich

WASHINGTON, June 14 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives passed a resolution calling on the government of Russia to immediately release American citizen Evan Gershkovich from detention in the country.

House lawmakers passed the resolution calling for Gershkovich's release in a unanimous vote of 422-0 on Tuesday.

Gershkovich, a journalist with the Wall Street Journal, was detained by the Russian authorities on espionage charges earlier this year.

The resolution calling for Gershkovich's release also urges the Biden administration to raise the case in all interactions with the Russian government and press for his immediate release.

In addition, the resolution expresses continued support for other US citizens and lawful permanent residents detained in Russia and elsewhere abroad, including Paul Whelan, Marc Fogel and Vladimir Kara-Murza.

The resolution also calls for the immediate release of Whelan, whom the Russian authorities arrested on charges of espionage in 2018 and convicted him in court, for which he received a 16-year prison sentence.

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Two Involved in 'False Elector' Case Appear Before Washington Grand Jury - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 14 (Sputnik) - Nevada Republican Party Chair Michael McDonald and Vice Chairman Jim DeGraffenreid appeared before a grand jury in Washington in connection with the investigation into "false electors" after the 2020 US presidential election, NBC News reported.

The grand jury has been investigating former President Donald Trump and his associates'

efforts to interfere with the peaceful transfer of power in the United States by acting as fake electors, the report said on Tuesday.

McDonald and DeGraffenreid are alleged to have signed documents certifying that Trump won in Nevada despite him having lost, the report said.

US District Court Judge David Carter said those who put the fake electors ruse in motion likely committed felony crimes, the report said.

The US House January 6 Committee had unearthed evidence that Trump was aware of the electors plan. Republican National Committee (RNC) Chairwoman Ronna McDaniel said in a deposition to the panel that Trump called her to talk about the importance of the RNC helping the campaign gather contingent electors, according to media reports.

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US Senator Says Will Stall Justice Dept. Nominees Amid Alleged Weaponization of Government

WASHINGTON, June 13 (Sputnik) - US Senator J.D. Vance said in a statement posted to social media that he will stall Justice Department nominees until Attorney General Merrick Garland vows to stop using federal law enforcement to target political opponents as Republicans allege.

"I've announced today that I will be holding all Department of Justice nominees that Merrick Garland will use, if confirmed, not to enforce the law impartially, which is his duty, but clearly to harass his political opponents," Vance said on Tuesday.

The nominations must be blocked until Garland promises to "do his job" and stop going after political opponents, Vance said.

The statement comes following the indictment of former US President and leading 2024 Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump for allegedly mishandling classified documents.

Trump's indictment is "just one" example of Garland using the Justice Department for political purposes, Vance said, also pointing to the targeting of anti-abortion Catholics and release of violent criminals linked to the 2020 riots.

Although only a simple majority is needed for the Senate to confirm nominees, members can stall a floor vote by blocking its scheduling, which requires unanimous consent. In the event a member blocks a fast-tracked confirmation vote, the chamber is required to hold procedural votes to achieve confirmation.

Vance's office reportedly said the senator will not block nominees for US Marshals positions, which fall under the Justice Department.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, June 14 (Sputnik)

#### RUSSIA-NATO RELATIONS

\* The world would become more dangerous if Ukraine does not succeed against Russia on the battlefield, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said on Tuesday.

\* Russia reserves the right to ensure its safety amid NATO and the US plans to "defeat us" on the strategic level, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

\* Russian tactical nuclear weapons will be stored across Belarus and not just in one particular place, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said.

#### CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

\* The collective West needs to stop supplying Ukraine with weapons if they want to resolve the ongoing conflict, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Tuesday.

\* Kiev so far is failing in all directions of their counteroffensive and the Ukrainian military has suffered heavy casualties, Putin said.

\* Ukraine's losses amount to 25-30% of the equipment volume that was delivered from abroad, Putin said.

\* Russia's future plans after the end of Ukraine's counteroffensive depend on what will be the situation at that point, Putin said.

\* Necessary technical works related to the waterproofing of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant's (ZNPP) cooling pool have been carried out to save water in the facility, Renat Karchaa, an adviser to the head of Rosenergoatom, a subsidiary of Russian state nuclear energy corporation Rosatom, said.

\* Sweden has assisted Kiev in conducting information warfare since the beginning of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, Swedish Psychological Defense Agency (SPDA) Operations Department chief Mikael Tofvesson said.

\* US Defense Department deputy spokesperson Sabrina Singh said she cannot corroborate reports claiming Russia recently destroyed 16 US-supplied combat vehicles in Ukraine.

#### TRUMP COURT CASE

\* Former President Donald Trump on Tuesday pleaded not guilty in US federal court to 37 criminal charges in connection to his alleged mishandling of classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago residence in Florida, US media reported.

\* Trump has been released from federal custody under no conditions, the report said.

\* US federal judge Jonathan Goodman said he does not consider Trump to be a flight risk, does not need to surrender his passport and will be able travel internationally, the report said.

\* The United States resembles dictatorships where politically motivated prosecutions of opponents are commonplace, spokesperson for Donald Trump Alina Habba said.

#### EU DIGITAL PASSPORTS

\* EU Council negotiators and the European Parliament have reached a provisional agreement on rules to digitalize the Schengen visa procedure, the EU Council said in a statement on Tuesday.

\* The transition to digital passports will make the visa application procedures more efficient and

improve the security of the Schengen area, the statement said.

#### ENERGY MARKETS

\* The OPEC said on Tuesday that secondary sources believe that Russia reduced its oil production by 416,000 barrels per day in May, when compared to the February level.

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Biden Meets with Uruguay President Luis Lacalle Pou - White House

WASHINGTON, June 13 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden met with Uruguay's President, Luis Lacalle Pou at the White House on Tuesday, a White House official said in a release.

"This afternoon, President Biden met with President Luis Lacalle Pou of Uruguay at the White House," said the White House in a release.

Lacalle Pou made an unannounced stop at the White House during a trip to New York, where he's slated to attend an event Tuesday night hosted by the Americas Society in his Honor.

As the leader of one of the wealthiest nations in South America that exports vast amounts of its software to China and the United States, Lacalle Pou has remained neutral among tensions between Beijing and Washington.

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Pulitzer Prize-Winning US Author Cormac McCarthy Dies at 89-Years Old - Publisher

WASHINGTON, June 13 (Sputnik) - American author Cormac McCarthy passed away at the age of 89 on Tuesday, publisher Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group said in a statement.

"Pulitzer Prize-winning author Cormac McCarthy died today of natural causes at his home in Santa Fe, New Mexico. He was eighty-nine years old," Knopf said via Twitter.

McCarthy won a Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2007 for his post-apocalyptic novel "The Road," which was later adapted into a film. McCarthy is also known for his novel "No Country for Old Men," which was also made into a film, and "Blood Meridian."

McCarthy's novels were notable for their use of explicit violence, bleak themes and sparse use of punctuation.

"Keep a little fire burning; however small, however hidden," Knopf's announcement on McCarthy's passing said, quoting from "The Road."

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UPDATE - US to Buy up to 12Mln Barrels This Year to Rebuild Oil Reserve - Bloomberg

(Adds details, comment and context, paragraphs 3-11)

WASHINGTON, June 13 (Sputnik) - The United States plans to buy about 12 million barrels this year to replenish its heavily-drawn oil reserve, with relatively low crude prices helping, Bloomberg reported on Tuesday, citing two people with knowledge of the matter.

The Department of Energy, or DoE, had confirmed the purchase of three million barrels for the so-called Strategic Petroleum Reserve, or SPR, and announced solicitation for another three million barrels in a news release issued Friday.

The Bloomberg report acknowledged that, suggesting the government will now be sourcing six million barrels more for the rest of the year.

The DoE will “seek opportunities for additional repurchases as market conditions and the constraints of SPR operations allow,” the Bloomberg report quoted a spokesperson of the department as saying. It added that the White House did not immediately comment on the matter.

In Friday’s news release, the DoE said the three million barrels it bought were purchased at an average of about \$73 per barrel, lower than the \$95 average that crude from the SPR was sold at in 2022, describing it as a “good deal for taxpayers”.

In Tuesday’s trading, West Texas Intermediate, the benchmark for U.S. crude, settled at just under \$70 a barrel for the front-month contract on the New York Mercantile Exchange.

The Biden administration has leaned heavily on the SPR since late 2021 to offset tight crude supplies that had raised fuel costs for Americans. As of last week, the SPR’s crude balance was at its lowest since November 1983 after the release of about 200 million barrels or more from the reserve over the past 18 months.

What the DoE was buying back for the SPR in the name of reserve rebuilding is “a tiny amount compared to ... the barrels that have been sold”, said Adam Button, a markets commentator on the ForexLive platform.

The administration’s use of the SPR has been a highly-charged matter for oil bulls and opponents of President Joe Biden. Both sides accuse him of indiscriminately releasing hundreds of millions of barrels from the stockpile to subdue crude prices and shore up his political standing with American voters — when the reserve is meant for emergency use, in times of critically short oil supply.

Biden, in his defense, said he was acting to reduce record high pump prices of fuel, which stood at above \$5 per gallon last June and now hovers at around \$3.50. The administration also blames last year’s high crude prices for US inflation getting to four-decade highs of above 9% in June.

The DoE reiterated on Friday it has canceled 140 million barrels in congressionally mandated sales from the SPR scheduled for fiscal years 2024 through 2027.

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## White House Says Transgender Activist Going Topless at LGBT+ Pride Event 'Inappropriate'

WASHINGTON, June 13 (Sputnik) - White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said on Tuesday that transgender activist Rose Montoya, who identifies as a woman, appearing for a topless photo at an official lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender plus (LGBT+) Pride Month event was unacceptable and inappropriate.

"The behavior was simply unacceptable, we've been very clear about that. It was unfair to the hundreds of attendees who were there to celebrate their families," Jean-Pierre said during a press briefing. "It's not appropriate. It's disrespectful. It really does not reflect the event that we hosted."

On Saturday, the White House hosted a Pride Month event on the South Lawn. Video footage from the event shows several attendees, including Montoya, posing topless.

The guests who appeared in the video will not be invited to future events, Jean-Pierre said.

Montoya responded to criticism of the group's actions during a video posted to Twitter.

"My transmasculine friends were showing off their top surgery scars and living in joy, and I wanted to join them," Montoya said. "I had zero intention of trying to be vulgar or be profane in any way."

Montoya also added that it is legal in Washington to appear topless, but the group covered their nipples when posing in order to be on safe ground.

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## US to Buy up to 12Mln Barrels This Year to Rebuild Oil Reserve - Bloomberg

WASHINGTON, June 13 (Sputnik) - The United States plans to buy about 12 million barrels this year to replenish its heavily-drawn oil reserve, with relatively low crude prices helping, Bloomberg reported on Tuesday, citing two people with knowledge of the matter.

The Department of Energy, or DoE, had confirmed the purchase of three million barrels and announced solicitation for another three million in a news release issued Friday. The Bloomberg report acknowledged that, suggesting that the government will be sourcing another six million barrels on top of those.

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## White House Says Will Do 'Everything' Possible to Uphold Hatch Act

WASHINGTON, June 13 (Sputnik) - White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said on Tuesday that the White House will do everything possible to adhere to the law designed to stop the federal government from affecting elections or acting in a partisan manner.

"We do everything we can to uphold the Hatch Act," said Jean-Pierre during a White House

press conference.

Jean-Pierre was called out for violating the Hatch Act on Tuesday by the US Office of the Special Counsel (OSC), an independent agency charged with enforcing the law, when she used the term "mega MAGA" in the briefing room at the White House.

Jean-Pierre said that she had received a warning letter, and is not expected to face disciplinary action by the OSC.

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US OKs Possible \$1.8Bln Sale of F-18 Hornet Related Services to Kuwait - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, June 13 (Sputnik) - The United States has approved a possible sale of \$1.8 billion worth of engineering and maintenance services to Kuwait as part of a continuation of such services with respect to the country's F-18 Hornet fleet, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said on Tuesday.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of Kuwait to buy continuation of contractor engineering technical services and contractor maintenance services for an estimated cost of \$1.8 billion," DSCA said in a press release.

Among others, Kuwait requested to buy F/A-18 avionics software upgrades, engine component improvements, ground support equipment, engine and aircraft spares and repair parts, Engineering Change Proposals (ECP), and maintenance and engineering support, the release said.

The sale is expected to provide follow-on sustainment support to Kuwait's F/A-18C/D/E/F aircraft, the release noted.

Kuwait currently has 27 legacy F-18 Hornets and six F-18D trainers, according to Breaking Defense.

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Trump Released With No Conditions, Judge Says Not Considered to Be Flight Risk - Reports

MIAMI, June 13 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump has been released from federal custody under no conditions in connection to his classified documents case, Fox News reported on Tuesday.

According to Fox News, Judge Jonathan Goodman said he does not consider Trump to be a flight risk.

Trump, who pleaded not guilty to 37 charges for allegedly mishandling classified documents, reportedly does not need to surrender his passport and will be able travel internationally.

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US Approves Possible \$160M In Sale of Sustainment Items for E-2C Hawkeye to France—Pentagon

WASHINGTON, June 13 (Sputnik) - The United States has approved a possible sale of \$160 million worth of E-2C Hawkeye early warning and control aircraft sustainment items and related services to France, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said on Tuesday.

“The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of France of E-2C Hawkeye sustainment items and services for an estimated cost of \$160 million,” DSCA said in a press release.

According to the release, France requested to buy additional non-MDE E-2C Hawkeye sustainment items and services that will be added to a previously implemented case valued at \$99.6 million and include Engine Component Improvement Program, software updates, technical publications, US Government, and contractor technical, product support assistance.

The principal US contractor will be Northrop Grumman, the release added.

According to Northrop Grumman, the French Navy has been exploiting the E-2C Hawkeye since 1998 and is the only country other than the United States to operate its E-2 Hawkeyes from an aircraft carrier.

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Prosecutor Tells US Judge Doesn't View Trump or Aide Nauta to Be Flight Risk - Reports

MIAMI, June 13 (Sputnik) - Federal prosecutor David Harbach told the judge overseeing former President Donald Trump's classified documents case that they do not view him or his aide Walt Nauta, who is also being prosecuted in this case, to be flight risks, CNN reported on Tuesday.

Trump pleaded not guilty in federal court in Miami to 37 criminal charges in connection to his alleged mishandling of classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago residence in Florida.

According to Trump's indictment, the classified documents he stored in boxes at his Mar-a-Lago residency in Florida included information about defense and weapons capabilities of both the United States and foreign countries; US nuclear programs; potential vulnerabilities of the United States and its allies to military attack; and plans for possible retaliation in response to a foreign attack.

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### Mississippi Police Officer Who Shot 11-Year-Old Boy Suspended Without Pay - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 13 (Sputnik) - A Mississippi city's governing body voted to suspend a police officer who mistakenly shot and seriously injured an eleven-year-old boy, CNN reported. The Indianola, Mississippi, Board of Aldermen voted 4-1 Monday night to suspend without pay Sergeant Greg Capers, who shot Aderrien Murry while responding to a domestic disturbance call in May.

The Murry family has been insistent that the police department fire and charge Capers. His mother, Nakala Murry said her son was fitted with a chest tube and placed on a ventilator at the University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson after his lung collapsed and he suffered broken ribs and a lacerated liver.

Aderrien was released from the hospital days after the incident and is continuing to recover, his family said.

The Mississippi Bureau of Investigation has the police bodycam footage and is investigating the incident, the report added.

The Murry family has filed a \$5 million lawsuit in federal court, citing reckless endangerment, excessive force, negligence, civil assault and battery, among other counts.

Indianola Mayor Ken Featherstone told the news outlet he looks forward to making everyone whole but the city "doesn't have \$5 million in the bank."

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### Trump Spokesperson Compares US to Dictatorship as He Surrenders to Miami Authorities

WASHINGTON, June 13 (Sputnik) - The United States resembles dictatorships where politically motivated prosecutions of opponents are commonplace, spokesperson for Donald Trump Alina Habba said on Tuesday after the former US president arrived at a federal courthouse in Miami for his first appearance in the classified documents case.

"We are at a turning point in our nation's history. The targeting prosecution of a leading political opponent is the type of thing you see in dictatorships, like Cuba, and Venezuela. It is commonplace there for rival candidates to be prosecuted, persecuted, and put into jail," Habba told reporters who gathered at the court.

Donald Trump and his assistant Waltine Nauta arrived at the courthouse in Miami for their booking procedure and initial court appearance. Both defendants are now considered legally under arrest until the court decides whether to release them on bail.

On Friday, the US government released the indictment against Trump and Nauta. Prosecutors charged Trump with 31 counts of willful retention of national defense information, one count of conspiracy to obstruct justice, one count of withholding a document or record, one count of corruptly concealing a document or record, one count of concealing a document in a federal investigation, scheming to conceal, and making false statements and representations.

The indictment co-charges Nauta with conspiracy to obstruct justice, withholding a document or record, corruptly concealing a document or record, concealing a document in a federal

investigation, and scheming to conceal. In addition, the indictment charges Nauta with a separate count of making false statements and representations.

The indictment comes as Trump leads the pack of Republican presidential candidates for the 2024 election.

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Trump Pleads 'Not Guilty' to 37 Charges in Classified Documents Case - Reports

MIAMI, June 13 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump on Tuesday pleaded not guilty in federal court to 37 criminal charges in connection to his alleged mishandling of classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago residence in Florida, Reuters reported.

On Friday, an indictment charging Trump with 37 counts of crimes including willful retention of national security information was made public. The indictment comes as Trump leads the pack of Republican presidential candidates for the 2024 election.

According to Trump's indictment, the classified documents he stored in boxes at his Mar-a-Lago residency in Florida included information about defense and weapons capabilities of both the United States and foreign countries; US nuclear programs; potential vulnerabilities of the United States and its allies to military attack; and plans for possible retaliation in response to a foreign attack.

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White House Says Will Not Comment on Potential for Trump Pardon if Ex-President Convicted

WASHINGTON, June 13 (Sputnik) - White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said on Tuesday that she will not comment on the potential for President Joe Biden to pardon former President Donald Trump in the event he is convicted on charges linked to his alleged mishandling of classified documents.

"I'm just not going to speak to that. No comment," Jean-Pierre said during a press briefing, when asked about the potential for a pardon.

Last week, Trump was indicted on 37 counts of charges including willful retention of national defense information and making false statements and representations. Trump, who denies the allegations, made his first court appearance in Miami, Florida, on Tuesday.

Biden could potentially pardon Trump as part of a negotiated plea deal by the former president, which could also include an agreement not to run for president again, US Assistant State Attorney in Broward County, David Cannady, told Sputnik.

The White House has broadly declined to comment on the indictment, citing the ongoing nature of the case.

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Pentagon Says Cannot Verify Reports Russia Destroyed 16 US-Provided Vehicles in Ukraine

WASHINGTON, June 13 (Sputnik) - Defense Department deputy spokesperson Sabrina Singh said on Tuesday that she cannot corroborate reports claiming Russia recently destroyed 16 US-supplied combat vehicles in Ukraine.

"On the report that 16 vehicles were destroyed, I've seen the reports, but I can't corroborate some of the video and imagery coming out of that. So we're going to continue to monitor that," Singh said.

Media reported that Ukraine recently lost 16 Bradley fighting vehicles on the battlefield. Earlier this year, the United States provided Ukraine with 109 Bradley combat vehicles as Kiev prepared for its counteroffensive, which is underway.

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Mark Milley are on their way to Brussels, where they will convene a meeting with allies in the Ukraine Defense Contact Group to determine what additional security assistance Ukraine needs amid Russia's special military operation.

Earlier on Tuesday, the United States announced a new \$325 million security aid package for Ukraine that includes Stinger anti-aircraft and Javelin systems, 15 Bradley combat vehicles, ten Stryker armored personnel carriers, AT-4 anti-armor systems, TOW missiles, and additional munitions for National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems (NASAMS), among other military equipment.

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State Dept. Says Reports About Purported Interim Deal With Iran 'Wrong'

WASHINGTON, June 13 (Sputnik) - US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller on Tuesday called reports about Washington indirectly negotiating some sort of a deal with Iran "either wrong or completely misleading."

"There are a number of reports we have seen by various outlets about different deals or purported deals or diplomatic negotiations [with Iran]. The vast majority of those reports have been either wrong or completely misleading, and that includes reports of an interim deal," Miller said during a press briefing.

Earlier in June, several US media outlets reported that the United States and Iran held indirect talks in Oman in May to discuss Tehran's nuclear program and lifting of sanctions amid a freeze in negotiations on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, also known as the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

Axios reported on Monday that Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Nasser Kanaani confirmed that Tehran and Washington held indirect talks in Oman last month, while the Biden

administration has not publicly confirmed the talks took place.

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US House Passes Bill Establishing Special Envoy for Abraham Accords Position

WASHINGTON, June 13 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives passed a bill on Tuesday to establish a new Special Envoy for the Abraham Accords at the State Department, who will maintain the rank and status of ambassador.

House lawmakers passed the bill in a bipartisan vote of 413-13.

The Abraham Accords are agreements to normalize and improve relations between Israel and four Arab League member states - Bahrain, Morocco, Sudan and the United Arab Emirates.

The Special Envoy shall serve as the primary advisor to the US government for expanding and strengthening the Abraham Accords, according to an official bill summary.

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US House Passes Rules for Gas Stove Bills, Breaks Republican Protest Against Leadership

WASHINGTON, June 13 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives voted on Tuesday to advance rules for consideration of bills regarding the regulation of gas stoves and other issues, ending a deadlock caused by a protest by some Republican lawmakers over the party's leadership in the chamber.

House lawmakers passed the rules measure in a vote of 218-209.

Last week, a dozen Republican lawmakers joined Democrats to stop consideration of the bills in a protest of House Speaker Kevin McCarthy's handling of the debt ceiling deal, as well as other legislative issues.

Members of both parties and chambers, including members of the House Freedom Caucus, expressed opposition to the McCarthy-Biden debt deal, which ultimately made its way through Congress earlier this month.

Republicans also tied their protest votes to an alleged attempt by House Republican leaders to threaten to withhold consideration of a gun regulation reform bill by Congressman Andrew Clyde if he voted against the debt ceiling deal.

The rules measure passed by the House on Tuesday provides for the consideration of Clyde's legislation.

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## US Senate Confirms Elizabeth Allen as Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy

WASHINGTON, June 13 (Sputnik) - The US Senate on Tuesday confirmed communications strategist Elizabeth Allen as US Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy, paving the way for her to lead the State Department's educational, cultural and public affairs bureaus.

The Senate passed Allen's confirmation in a vote of 66-33, with over a dozen Republicans joining Democrats in support.

The Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, a role in which Allen currently serves in an acting capacity, leads the State Department's Educational and Cultural Affairs bureau and its Global Public Affairs bureau.

Allen also currently serves as Senior Official for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs.

The White House characterized Allen as a longtime communications and public affairs strategist who has served in positions in the Obama administration and the Biden campaign.

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## Trump Supporters Lined Up at Miami Courthouse Say Indictment Designed to Derail 2024 Bid

MIAMI, June 13 (Sputnik) - Supporters of former US President Donald Trump told Sputnik they came to the federal courthouse in Miami to protest an indictment they believe is designed to end the presidential campaign of the candidate who poses the biggest threat to President Joe Biden.

Trump's hearing on Tuesday comes after he was indicted last week on 37 charges related to the mishandling of classified documents, including those the FBI uncovered in a raid of his Mar-a-Largo residence in August.

Several protesters for and against Trump have been standing outside the courthouse for hours, battling heat and bees. There is an increased police presence including a law enforcement helicopter. The opposing groups are not separated from each other, but so far remain peaceful.

Many people are wearing MAGA red hats and costumes with an American flag and holding banners ranging from "Leave the 45th President alone," to "Lock him up."

One Trump supporter named "Patriot" told Sputnik he came to the court building last night from another Florida town because it's important for him to be here as "a free American."

"I'm here because there's a witch hunt against my president," Patriot said, referring to Trump. "It's a farce. We are not looking at the bigger picture - we have an old man [in the White House] with dementia who falls up and down stairs."

Patriot also offered up his own legal opinion on the matter.

"The president is allowed to keep classified information," he explained. "So what he did wasn't illegal."

Miami resident John, 81, told Sputnik the new charges are just part of the broader effort to disenfranchise Americans.

"The purpose and function of this, along with many other actions, is to prevent me from electing the president that I think is best for my country, my children, and my grandchildren," John said.

His opponents also hope the indictment politically damages Trump enough so he does not win

the popular vote, John added.

"That's the goal, and they might be successful. If they are, the country is doomed because they have to bring the country down in order to have a revolution," John said.

Ken from Coral Springs, Florida said he came to the courthouse before 9:00 a.m. EST (1300 GMT) for the hearing, which does not begin until 3:00 p.m, in order to defend "the greatest president, not only in the United States, but in the world."

Regarding the Florida case, Ken said, it was opened because Trump's opponents are "panicking."

Ken said many of his supporters will stand by Trump no matter what.

"The people are awake," Ken said.

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NATO Chief Says World Would Become 'More Dangerous' if Ukraine Loses to Russia

(Provides full quote in para 2, adds details in para 3)

WASHINGTON, June 13 (Sputnik) - The world would become more dangerous if Ukraine does not succeed against Russia on the battlefield, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said on Tuesday.

"President [Vladimir] Putin must not win this war because that will not only be a tragedy for Ukrainians, but it will also make the world more dangerous," Stoltenberg said ahead of a meeting with US President Joe Biden, according to the White House.

Ukraine's defeat would embolden other countries such as China to act aggressively, Stoltenberg also said. NATO will become "more vulnerable" in a world where competitors believe they can use military force to achieve objectives, Stoltenberg said.

The more land Ukraine is able to take over now, the "stronger hand" they will have at the negotiating table in the future, Stoltenberg added.

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State Dept. Declines to Comment on Reports US Warned Ukraine Not to Sabotage Nord Stream

WASHINGTON, June 13 (Sputnik) - State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller on Tuesday declined to comment on reports claiming the United States warned Ukraine not to sabotage Russia's Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines last year.

The Wall Street Journal reported, citing officials, that the CIA warned Ukraine against sabotaging the pipelines after obtaining information about a Ukrainian plan to destroy part of the pipeline system.

"We're not going to comment on private diplomatic conversations that we have with Ukrainian officials with respect to the underlying question," Miller said when asked to confirm the reports

about the United States allegedly warning Ukraine.

Miller explained that this matter is under investigation by a number of European governments and the United States will wait for the outcome of those investigations.

According to the Wall Street Journal, Dutch military intelligence officials notified the CIA in June 2022 that a Ukrainian sabotage team was seeking a yacht on the Baltic coastline to be used by a team of divers to plant explosives along the pipelines.

The tip prompted the CIA to deliver a message to Ukraine warning them against the sabotage, the report said.

The Nord Stream 1 and 2 gas pipelines were built to deliver gas under the Baltic Sea from Russia to Germany. The pipelines were incapacitated by explosive devices in September 2022. US investigative journalist Seymour Hersh detailed the involvement of the US government in the attacks, based on information from a source familiar with the intricacies of planning and carrying out the attacks.

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Trump Arrives at Federal Courthouse in Miami for First Appearance in Classified Docs Case

MIAMI, June 13 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump has arrived at the Federal Courthouse in Miami to make an initial appearance in the classified documents case, a Sputnik correspondent reported.

Hundreds of supporters have been rallying outside the court since the early hours of Tuesday. On Friday, the indictment against Trump was released, outlining a total of 38 charges against Trump and a personal aide, including willful retention of national defense information and making false statements.

The indictment comes following an investigation into Trump's storage of sensitive materials at his Mar-a-Lago residence after leaving the White House, which culminated in a raid on the property in August.

The probe and indictment have been met with criticism from Trump, who denies the allegations, as well as from Republican lawmakers and fellow 2024 Republican presidential candidates.

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NATO Chief Says World Would Become 'More Dangerous' if Ukraine Loses to Russia

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Ukraine's defeat would embolden other countries such as China and make the world "more dangerous," Stoltenberg said ahead of a meeting with US President Joe Biden, according to the

White House.

The more land Ukraine is able to take over now, the "stronger hand" they will have at the negotiating table in the future, Stoltenberg added.

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UN Has No Data on Ukraine Using Grain Corridor to Launch Naval Drones at Russia

UNITED NATIONS, June 13 (Sputnik) - The United Nations has no information about Ukraine using a maritime humanitarian corridor in the Black Sea intended to facilitate grain shipments to launch naval drones against Russia, spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Tuesday.

"I think issues having to do with the corridor are dealt with in Istanbul through the Joint Coordination Center and it is obviously important that all agreements are respected but I don't have any data on that," Dujarric told a briefing.

Speaking with war correspondents earlier in the day, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that Ukraine regularly uses the humanitarian corridor to launch naval drones to attack the Russian fleet.

Russia, Putin said, is considering exiting the grain deal, which is set to expire on July 17. The president will host African leaders soon and plans to discuss the grain deal with them. Russia is ready to supply grain to the poorest nations "free of charge," Putin said.

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US Based Agribusiness Bunge Ltd. Announces Merger with Viterra in a \$6.2Bln Deal

WASHINGTON, June 13 (Sputnik) – US based Bunge Ltd has announced its merger with Viterra Ltd in a \$6.2Bln deal to create an "innovative" global agribusiness, the company said on Tuesday.

"Bunge Limited (NYSE: BG) ("Bunge") today announced it has entered into a definitive agreement with Viterra Limited, a private company limited by shares incorporated under the laws of Jersey ("Viterra"), together with certain affiliates of Glencore PLC (LSE: GLEN) ("Glencore"), Canada Pension Plan Investment Board ("CPP Investments") and British Columbia Investment Management Corporation ("BCI"), to merge with Viterra in a stock and cash transaction. The merger of Bunge and Viterra will create an innovative global agribusiness company well positioned to meet the demands of increasingly complex markets and better serve farmers and end-customers," Bunge's statement said.

Under the deal terms, Viterra shareholders will receive some 65.6 million shares of Bunge stocks, valued at approximately \$6.2 billion, the statement said, of which \$2 billion are part of a cash transaction. In addition, Bunge has agreed to assume the responsibility for \$9.8 billion worth of Viterra's debt.

In addition, Bunge said it was planning on repurchasing \$2 billion worth of its own stocks, in the shortest possible delays, the statement added, and expects to complete the operations in a period of 18 months.

Bunge's Chief Executive Officer Greg Heckman said that the merger is a step forward implementing the company's goals of connecting farmer to consumers, delivering them food, feed and fuel all across the world.

Funded in 1818 in the Netherlands, Bunge is a major player in the agribusiness sector. It employed nearly 23,000 people as of December 2022, and generated \$67.23 billion worth of revenues during the same year.

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First COVID-19 Cases Emerged Among Wuhan Lab Scientists Studying Coronaviruses - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 13 (Sputnik) - The very first cases of COVID-19, caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, emerged among Chinese scientists at the Wuhan Institute of Virology while conducting gain-of-function research on SARS-like coronaviruses, journalists Michael Shellenberger, Matt Taibbi and Alex Gutentag jointly reported on Tuesday.

Three of the earliest people infected with SARS-CoV-2 were Ben Hu, Yu Ping and Yan Zhu, who all worked at the Wuhan laboratory, the report said, citing multiple US government officials. Hu led the laboratory's gain-of-function research on coronaviruses, which increases their infectiousness, the report said.

Hu and Yu studied the lineage of SARS-like viruses related to SARS-CoV-2, the report also said.

One source claimed to be "100%" certain that the three researchers developed symptoms consistent with COVID-19 in the autumn of 2019, the report pointed out.

It is not clear how the US government gained access to intelligence regarding the sick Wuhan lab workers, as well as why it was not shared with the public, the report said.

US President Joe Biden signed legislation earlier this year calling for the release of information on sick researchers at the Wuhan lab, including whether the researchers had been involved with coronavirus research, the report added.

The US Directorate of National Intelligence is expected to release previously classified materials next week, which could potentially include the names of the three scientists first infected by SARS-CoV-2, according to the report.

US intelligence assessments have so far provided mixed analyses, including some assessments placing the origin of the COVID-19 pandemic at the Wuhan lab and others pointing to a nearby market.

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UN Official to Discuss Conflict Prevention, Security Issues in Trip to Moscow-Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, June 13 (Sputnik) - UN Under-Secretary-General Rosemary Di Carlo's trip to Moscow is aimed at discussing conflict prevention together with security matters, UN Spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Tuesday.

"The trip is one which has been in the works for quite some time. Sometimes she regularly travels to discuss with member states conflict prevention and security issues. The trip is an opportunity to discuss all issues of concern," Dujarric told a briefing.

Once the meeting is concluded, more details will follow, he added.

Di Carlo is going to Moscow at a time when the UN is putting all its efforts into the UN-brokered grain deal extension. In mid-May, the grain deal was extended until July 17 without any changes.

The Russian Foreign Ministry warned that Moscow would block the extension of the deal if its concerns about the implementation of clauses on Russian agricultural exports were not addressed. The grain deal was brokered by the United Nations and Turkey in July 2022 to facilitate the export of agricultural products from Ukrainian ports in the Black Sea during hostilities. The package agreement also included a memorandum of understanding between Russia and the United Nations to unblock Russian grain and fertilizer exports via the Black Sea.

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US Sanctions Motivate States to Use Alternative Currencies, But No Easy Way Out - Yellen

WASHINGTON, June 13 (Sputnik) - Various countries are trying to bypass the use of the US dollar to evade sanctions imposed by the United States, but there is no easy way out to do so, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said on Tuesday.

"The fact that the dollar is used as a reserve currency and plays such a huge role in international transactions does enable our sanctions to be much more effective and it's not surprising that countries that are fearing they can be affected by our sanctions are looking for alternatives to the dollar," Yellen said. "It's something that we simply have to expect. But the dollar plays the role it does in the world financial system."

Yellen also said that no other country is able to replicate the dollar despite their efforts against it, including China.

"We have deep, liquid, [and open] financial markets, strong rule of law and an absence of capital controls that no country is able to replicate. It will not be easy for any country to devise a way to get around the dollar," Yellen said.

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CIA Warned Ukraine Not to Sabotage Nord Stream Pipelines Shortly Before Attacks - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 13 (Sputnik) - CIA had warned Ukraine against sabotaging the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines after obtaining information about a Ukrainian plan to destroy part of the pipeline system, Wall Street Journal reported on Tuesday, citing officials familiar with the matter.

In June 2022, Dutch military intelligence officials notified the CIA that a Ukrainian sabotage team was seeking a yacht on the Baltic coastline to be used by a team of divers to plant explosives along the pipelines, the report said.

The tip prompted the CIA to deliver a message to Ukraine warning against the sabotage, the report said.

The message was delivered despite doubts the CIA had about Ukraine's ability to carry out such an attack, which involved planting explosives deep underwater, the report added.

The Nord Stream 1 and 2 gas pipelines were built to deliver gas under the Baltic Sea from Russia to Germany. The pipelines were incapacitated by explosive devices in September 2022.

US investigative journalist Seymour Hersh has detailed the US government's involvement in planning and carrying out the attack on the pipelines based on information from a government source. Ukraine has denied any involvement in the attack.

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Yellen Says US Mapping Location of Russian Assets to Keep Them Frozen

WASHINGTON, June 13 (Sputnik) - The United States is working with its allies to pinpoint the exact locations of the immobilized assets of Russia's central bank to ensure that they stay frozen, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said in a congressional testimony on Tuesday.

"We're working first more accurately to map exactly where these assets are and we're examining a number of options, including some [where] we may be able to take [with] under existing authorities" to keep them immobilized, Yellen told the US House Financial Services Committee.

Yellen said from the outset of Russia's military operation in Ukraine, the United States has taken decisive steps to immobilize Russian central bank reserves in the amount of \$300 billion.

The United States was committed to the Group of Seven (G7) countries in ensuring that the immobilized assets remained frozen "until Russia pays for the damage it has caused" arising from its war on Ukraine, Yellen said.

"And we're working with allies and partners, also in the G7 and the so-called repo task force on this issue," Yellen added.

The European Union said last month that some \$215 billion of frozen Russian assets were in the bloc, with approximately \$8 billion being held in Switzerland alone, according to the Swiss

Federal Department of Economic Affairs.

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New \$325mln Military Package for Ukraine Includes Stingers, 15 Bradley Vehicles - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, June 13 (Sputnik) - The new \$325 million package of security assistance for Ukraine includes an undisclosed number of Stinger anti-aircraft and Javelin systems, and 15 Bradley armored infantry vehicles, the US Department of Defense said in a press release on Tuesday.

The new package also includes 10 Stryker armored personnel carriers, AT-4 anti-armor systems, TOW missiles, and additional munitions for National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems (NASAMS), the release said.

The package is the second one over the course of the last week. On Friday, the Biden administration announced a \$2.1 billion military aid package featuring munitions for air defense systems and drones.

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Yellen Says US Debt Ceiling Drama 'Cannot Be Normalized' as Way of Doing Business

WASHINGTON, June 13 (Sputnik) - The United States came close to receiving a negative rating as the Biden administration wrangled with rival Republicans to raise the nation's debt ceiling and this cannot become a way of doing things in Washington, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said on Tuesday.

"I am relieved that, with the President's leadership, Congress took action to address the debt limit in time," Yellen said. "[T]he United States once again came dangerously close to the line. This cannot be normalized as the way we do business in Washington."

On May 27, US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy and President Joe Biden reached a deal to increase the nation's \$34.1 trillion debt ceiling in time for the US government to pay for its obligations and avoid default. However, Fitch Ratings imposed a negative watch on the United States' triple-A sovereign rating after the debt deal was passed by Congress and signed by Biden.

Yellen noted that this was the second time in more than a decade that "Congress went right up to the wire in failing to raise the debt ceiling [quickly enough]," earning a negative credit watch from another rating agency, Standard & Poor's, in 2011.

"We are a nation that keeps our word and pays our bills," she said. "We should never give anyone any reason to think otherwise. Waiting until the last minute to do so hurts our global leadership and credibility on the world stage."

Yellen pointed out that the United States was a creditor fully deserving of its triple-A debt rating

and losing it would risk the well-being of US households, resulting in long-lasting increases in their borrowing costs and other catastrophic consequences for the economy.

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US Unveils \$325mln Security Aid Package for Ukraine – Blinken

WASHINGTON, June 13 (Sputnik) – The United States is to send an additional package of security aid to Ukraine worth \$325 million, including air defense systems, HIMARS ammunition, and armored vehicles following the beginning of the Ukrainian counteroffensive, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Tuesday.

“I am authorizing our 40th drawdown for Ukraine, which will provide \$325 million worth of U.S. arms and equipment. This security assistance package includes critical air defense capabilities, additional munitions for High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, artillery rounds, anti-tank weapons, armored vehicles, and other equipment essential to strengthening Ukraine’s forces on the battlefield,” Blinken said in a statement.

CNN reported on Monday that Ukraine has lost at least 16 US-supplied Bradley infantry armored vehicles in the first days of Kiev’s counteroffensive in southern Ukraine which represents nearly 15% of the 109 vehicles supplied by Washington.

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NATO Leaders to Step Up Support for Ukraine at Upcoming Summit in Vilnius - Stoltenberg

WASHINGTON, June 13 (Sputnik) - NATO leaders are planning to sustain and step up the security assistance for Ukraine during the upcoming summit in Vilnius, Lithuania, while further strengthening deterrence and defense capabilities, Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said on Tuesday.

"We are now preparing for the upcoming NATO Summit in Vilnius. We will there agree to sustain and step up further support for Ukraine, further strengthen our deterrence and defense, which includes a stronger commitment to increase defense spending," Stoltenberg said.

The NATO secretary-general made the remarks after a bilateral meeting with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Washington earlier on Tuesday.

The NATO summit in Vilnius will take place on July 11-12 and Stoltenberg will chair the meeting. The summit agenda is expected to include Ukraine's prospects for NATO membership, the strengthening of the alliance's eastern flank and the issue of defense spending.

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Ramaswamy Says Will Sue US DOJ if FOIA Request for Trump Indictment Communications Ignored

WASHINGTON, June 13 (Sputnik) - Republican Party 2024 presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy said on Tuesday that he will sue the Justice Department if the government fails to comply with a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request for any official communications between the White House, Justice Department and others regarding the indictment of former US President Donald Trump.

"Yesterday, I submitted a FOIA request, a demand to the Biden Department Justice Department," Ramaswamy said during a press conference in Miami. "They are required within 20 business days to give us an answer about any direct or indirect communications... If they do not comply with the law in the next 20 business days, then we will sue them in federal courts at our campaign's expense to get to the bottom of those answers."

Last week, an indictment against Trump charging him with 37 counts of crimes including willful retention of national defense information was made public. The indictment comes as Trump leads the pack of Republican contenders in the 2024 presidential race.

Ramaswamy, a biotech entrepreneur, launched his campaign in February. Ramaswamy's campaign has focused on issues including addressing challenges posed by China and developing a new national identity rooted in merit.

Ramaswamy has garnered approximately 3% support among Republican primary voters, compared to 59% support for Trump, according to a Morning Consult poll conducted earlier this month.

Ramaswamy held the press conference on his FOIA request in Miami, where Trump is scheduled to appear for his first court appearance since the indictment was released.

Hundreds of people, including media representatives and supporters of the former president, have gathered outside the courthouse in Miami where Trump is set to appear Tuesday afternoon.

Trump, who denies the allegations, has criticized the investigation alongside a number of other Republican lawmakers and presidential candidates. Trump and other Republicans have also criticized the Justice Department for not pursuing an investigation into current US President Joe Biden's own alleged mishandling of classified documents with the same rigor.

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Police Cordon Off Area Near Miami Courthouse Over Suspicious Object - Correspondent

MIAMI, June 13 (Sputnik) - US law enforcement authorities have cordoned off an area near the federal courthouse in Miami where former President Donald Trump is due to make an initial appearance in the classified documents case, a Sputnik correspondent reported from the scene on Tuesday.

Law enforcement officers could be seen clearing an area near the courthouse where they had found the suspicious object, just hours ahead of Trump's initial appearance at the US District Court for the Southern District of Florida.

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US Examining More Sanctions Against China For Human Rights Violations - Yellen

WASHINGTON, June 13 (Sputnik) - The United States is seeking to impose greater sanctions on China, in response to its human rights record, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said Tuesday.

"The United States has acted aggressively to impose sanctions on China for ... apparent human rights violations," Yellen said in testimony before the US Congress. "And continue to examine further sanctions that we can levy."

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US Needs Greater Stake in IMF, International Financial Institutions - Yellen

WASHINGTON, June 13 (Sputnik) - The United States needs to have a higher stake in the leadership of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and in other international financial institutions to ensure adequate investments in the global economy, particularly in poorer countries, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said in a congressional testimony on Tuesday.

"The United States is not a passive shareholder. We actively shape the priorities of these institutions - as a leading shareholder in nearly all of them," Yellen told the US House Financial Services Committee. "Looking ahead, the Biden Administration seeks to bolster US leadership in these institutions."

Yellen said the United States seeks to renew its participation in the IMF's "New Arrangements to Borrow," which has served as a critical backstop to IMF resources.

"We also seek authorization to lend to two key IMF trust funds: the Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust, and the Resilience and Sustainability Trust. These actions will help the IMF address economic crises, with a particular emphasis on supporting vulnerable developing countries amid heightened risks," she said.

The treasury secretary pointed out that the Biden administration aims to boost US involvement in the International Development Bank and the African Development Fund as well.

"These investments will bolster our engagement in these regions at a time of geopolitical competition," Yellen said.

In addition, the United States seeks to help international financial institutions achieve greater governance, accountability and debt sustainability, Yellen said.

US involvement with such institutions serves as an important counterweight to nontransparent,

unsustainable lending from others like China, she said.

"As an example, the multilateral development banks are a leading source of financing to close the infrastructure gap in developing countries," Yellen said.

The United States has already introduced reforms to stretch the World Bank's balance sheet to unlock as much as \$50 billion in additional lending capacity over the next decade, she added.

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US Security Officials Cite Number of FISA Section 702 Successes in Defense of Authority

WASHINGTON, June 13 (Sputnik) - Several US intelligence and national security officials provided testimony to the Senate Judiciary Committee on Tuesday in defense of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) Section 702 data collection authority, citing a number of cases where the authority purportedly mitigated a number of threats to the United States.

Officials including National Security Agency Deputy Director George Barnes, CIA Deputy Director David Cohen and FBI Deputy Director Paul Abbate provided joint testimony to the committee in support of the authority's continued authorization by Congress.

"Section 702 authorizes the Intelligence Community to collect critical foreign intelligence information about foreign targets located outside the United States with the compelled assistance of US communications service providers. In the fifteen years since its enactment, Section 702 has proven indispensable to US national security," the joint statement said.

Section 702 was used in US government efforts to stop components for weapons of mass destruction from reaching foreign actors, the statement said. The authority was also used to identify espionage recruitment efforts by foreign intelligence services, the statement said.

Section 702 played an "important role" in the US government's response to the 2021 Colonial Pipeline cyberattack, the statement said. The US intelligence community used the authority to acquire information that verified the identity of the hacker and enabled efforts to recover the majority of the ransom money, the statement said.

Moreover, the authority "helps advance US foreign policy priorities" around the world, the statement said. Section 702 data has been used to track alleged war crimes in Ukraine, expose efforts by foreign countries to coerce other nations to oppose international responses to human rights violations, and demarche a Middle Eastern country over its efforts to track dissidents abroad, the statement said.

However, the authority has also been the subject of criticism, particularly in regards to queries involving persons in the US. The FBI abused a Section 702 database more than 278,000 times, prompting the court overseeing FISA to warn the agency to improve its practices or risk legal intervention, US media reported last month.

Queries using US person identifiers are "critical" to protecting US national security, particularly for the FBI, which is responsible for protecting against domestic threats, the statement said.

The statement cites a case in which US person queries of Section 702-acquired information was used to identify a foreign government's assassination plots and discover that Iranian hackers conducted extensive research on the former head of a federal department. The timely

identification of the foreign government's plans contributed to the FBI's disruption of the plots, the statement said.

"In a world in which digital authoritarianism and technological repression are on the rise, Section 702 is a model for democratic countries to conduct intelligence activities consistent with the rule of law," the statement said.

In February, the White House called on Congress to reauthorize Section 702 of FISA. The next month, the US House Intelligence Committee launched a bipartisan working group dedicated to reauthorizing the authority.

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Hundreds of Media, Trump Supporters and Opponents Gather Outside of Miami Courthouse

MIAMI, June 13 (Sputnik) - Hundreds of media representatives and dozens of supporters as well as opponents of former US President Donald Trump are gathering outside of the Miami courthouse just hours before a scheduled court hearing in the criminal case against Trump is set to start, a Sputnik correspondent reported from the scene.

The first hearing in the criminal probe into an alleged mishandling of classified documents by Trump, whom a grand jury chose to indict on 37 charges, will start at 3:00 p.m. ET.

The area outside the courthouse has been crowded since the early hours of Tuesday and police has placed a yellow tape around the court complex to prevent the crowd from entering the premises.

Many Trump supporters are present near the courthouse, holding flags and banners with signs in support of the former president along those who seek Trump to be prosecuted.

The atmosphere is peaceful but there is enhanced law enforcement presence, complete with a police helicopter flying over the courthouse and police officers walking throughout the crowd of reporters and demonstrators.

The indictment against Trump was released to the public on Friday and it outlined 38 charges against Trump and an aide that include willful retention of national defense information and making false statements.

The indictment came after an FBI investigation into allegations that Trump was storing sensitive materials at his Mar-a-Lago residence in Florida after finishing his term in office. The probe culminated in a heavy-handed FBI raid on Trump's residence in August.

Trump denies all allegations against him and has criticized the probe and the related indictment as being a continuation of the political witch hunt against him, this time to deprive him of running in the 2024 US presidential election.

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## US Consumer Prices Up 4% in Year to May, Smallest Rise in Over 2 Years

(Adds comments, details and context in paras 4-12)

WASHINGTON, June 13 (Sputnik) - US consumer prices grew by 4% in the year to May, expanding at their slowest pace in more than two years, according to Labor Department data on Tuesday that backed the notion that the Federal Reserve was ready to halt rate hikes this month after 10 increases.

The Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI) expanded by 4.9% in the year to April. Economists polled by US media had expected a 4.1% growth in the 12 months to May. Although what the Labor Department reported was not much of a difference to the forecast, it still added to the odds of a Fed rate pause, especially given that it was the smallest expansion of its kind since the worst of post-pandemic inflationary trends.

Reacting to runaway inflation, the central bank has raised interest rates 10 times since the end of the coronavirus pandemic in March 2022, adding a total of 5% to the previous 0.25%. The CPI hit 40-year highs in June 2022, expanding at an annual rate of 9.1%. Since then, it has slowed.

"The all items index increased 4.0 percent for the 12 months ending May; this was the smallest 12-month increase since the period ending March 2021," the Labor Department said in Tuesday's news release, underscoring the importance of that one piece of data alone to the likely Fed decision on rates.

Even so, core inflation, measured by excluding volatile food and energy prices, rose 0.4% for May and was still up 5.3% from a year ago. That was an indication that while price pressures had eased in general, consumers were probably paying more than they should for everything, from what they stock in their refrigerator to what they put in the tank of their car.

"The core numbers are stubbornly high," economist Adam Button said in a post on the Forex Live forum, acknowledging, however, that a fall in workers' earnings helped bring overall inflation lower, fulfilling at least partly the conditions the Fed required for a rate pause.

President Joe Biden, in a statement released by the White House, said the May CPI report showed "continued progress tackling inflation at the same time that unemployment remains at historic lows".

The labor market has been the juggernaut of US economic recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, with hundreds of thousands of jobs being added without fail since June 2020 to make up for the initial loss of 20 million jobs to the pandemic.

While policy-makers over the world typically celebrate on seeing good jobs numbers, the Fed is in a different predicament. The central bank wishes to see an easing of conditions that are a little "too good" now for the economy's own good — in this case, unemployment at more than 50-year lows and average monthly wages that have grown without stop since March 2021.

Such job security and earnings have cushioned many Americans from the worst price pressures since the 1980s and encouraged them to continue spending, further feeding inflation.

The Fed has a mandate of ensuring "maximum employment" through a jobless rate of 4% or below, and keeping inflation "manageable." The last was a task easily achieved before the COVID-19 breakout, when prices expanded less than 2% a year. The pandemic and the trillions of dollars of relief spending by the government, however, triggered runaway inflation since

mid-2021.