

6/19/23 Monday

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British MPs Back Partygate Report That Found Johnson Deliberately Misled UK Parliament

The British Parliament has voted to approve a report finding that Boris Johnson intentionally misled MPs about parties that occurred at Downing Street during COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020, when Johnson was prime minister.

In a Monday evening vote, 354 MPs voted to approve the report and just 7 voted against it - the remaining 286 abstained from the decision. MPs were given a free vote, meaning the party whips, who are typically responsible for enforcing party discipline, did not instruct them on how to vote.

While most of Johnson's Conservative Party abstained in protest, some voted against the report and some voted for it. The Conservatives command an absolute majority in Parliament with 352 out of 650 seats.

If Johnson had not [resigned two weeks ago](#) when the report was announced, he would be facing a 90-day suspension. However, he will still be stripped of the special access to Parliament typically given to ex-MPs, as per the report's recommendations.

The probe, opened by Parliament's Privileges Committee, found that Johnson purposefully misled the legislature over a series of parties thrown in 2020 and 2021 that the then-prime minister attended, in defiance of COVID-19 lockdown laws implemented by his government.

[Johnson admitted](#) in March to having misled Parliament, but said he did so "in good faith." He has called the probe "a dangerous and unsettling precedent."

"Their purpose from the beginning has been to find me guilty, regardless of the facts. This is the very definition of a kangaroo court," Johnson said when announcing his resignation on June 9. Johnson has represented the western London constituency of Uxbridge and South Ruislip since 2015, winning the election while he was still Mayor of London. In July 2019, he secured his position as leader of the Conservative Party and as prime minister, which he held until September 2022, when his government collapsed under the weight of a scandal over his appointment of Chris Pincher as deputy chief whip.

He also served as the capital's mayor from 2008 until 2016, and before that represented Henley in the House of Commons from 2001 until 2008.

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What is Juneteenth, America's Newest Federal Holiday?

On Monday, millions of Americans are enjoying a day off from work to commemorate the country's newest federal holiday, Juneteenth. While it only legally acquired that status two years ago, its celebration goes back more than a century and a half, to the days immediately following the American Civil War.

The holiday's name is a contraction of [June Nineteenth](#), referring to the date in 1865 when the furthest reaches of the Confederacy were brought under Union control and their enslaved Black persons freed.

The date has been commemorated by Black Americans ever since, with it morphing in more recent decades into a day for the [celebration of Black culture](#).

"Juneteenth celebrations are a chance for this country, for the United States to rethink not only its origins, but the relationship of everybody who lives in this country to each other," said Greg Carr, associate professor of Africana Studies at Howard University, a historic Black university founded in Washington, DC, just [two years after](#) the events of the holiday.

"In many ways, Juneteenth symbolically becomes a litmus test for the possibilities of this country," he said.

Leslie Wilson, professor of history at Montclair State University in New Jersey, also told US media that "We are not celebrating the history of Juneteenth. We are celebrating the symbolism of Juneteenth. The symbolism of Juneteenth is the transition from slavery to freedom."

Slavery and War

The origins of Juneteenth can ultimately be traced back to 1619, when the first enslaved Africans were brought to the English colonies that would one day form the United States. Especially in the South, where the climate was amenable to massive plantation farming of cash crops in high demand in Europe, such as tobacco, cotton, sugar, and indigo, American farmers increasingly resorted to using slaves imported from the African coast, swelling the enslaved population to nearly 40% in the southern states.

As the North moved toward industrialization based on factories that employed low-paid workers, many of whom were recent immigrants from Europe, anti-slavery attitudes grew, and the issue of slavery became a stand-in for the country's myriad socio-economic fault lines. By 1861, those issues had become so irreconcilable that when Abraham Lincoln, who pledged to halt the westward expansion of slavery, was elected president, 11 states where slavery was legal seceded from the country and declared a Confederate States of America that would safeguard their right to own Black people as human chattel.

After the war began in April of that year, Union soldiers began seizing Confederate property, including their slaves, as contraband of war in an effort to undermine the Confederacy's ability to sustain itself. As word spread, tens of thousands of Black slaves fled from their plantations toward Union lines, and by January 1, 1863, Lincoln issued an Emancipation Proclamation declaring that all slaves in states rebelling against the federal government were freed.

The Confederate government obviously ignored this order, but wherever Union armies reconquered territory, the Proclamation freed slaves. The Union Army began enlisting thousands of Black volunteers as soldiers, some of whom formed the army's most elite troopers. The 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, for example, was the army's most highly decorated unit - and sustained among the highest number of casualties.

However, the Emancipation Proclamation didn't abolish slavery entirely: the institution persisted in four border states - Maryland, Delaware, Kentucky, and Missouri - that had remained loyal to Washington but whose loyalty was seen as precarious. Only in December 1865, when the war was over and the 13th Amendment was passed, was [slavery forever abolished](#) everywhere in the United States.

Spreading the Word

On April 9, 1865, Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee surrendered to Union forces in western Virginia, several weeks after the Union armies had defeated the bulk of Lee's army and recaptured the Confederate capital of Richmond. Elsewhere, other Union forces were forcing Confederate forces into retreat, and even as news of Lee's surrender spread, some rebels refused to lay down their arms.

In Texas, the Confederate Army of the Trans-Mississippi kept fighting until June 2, and even after, the Confederate institutions kept functioning until Union troops arrived and forced their end. The southern port of Galveston, on the US-Mexico border, was among the last places to receive word of the end of the war and of slavery's abolition. An estimated 1,000 slaveowners lived in the area.

US Maj. Gen. George Granger, assigned to occupy Galveston island and the surrounding area, issued General Order No. 3. on June 19:

"The people of Texas are informed that, in accordance with a proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free. This involves an absolute equality of personal rights and rights of property between former masters and slaves, and the connection heretofore existing between them becomes that between employer and hired labor. The freedmen are advised to remain quietly at their present homes and work for wages. They are informed that they will not be allowed to collect at military posts and that they will not be supported in idleness either there or elsewhere."

However, as noted, the final slaves to be freed were in Delaware and Kentucky, when the 13th Amendment was ratified into law on December 18, 1865 - nearly three years after the Emancipation Proclamation was issued.

Day of Jubilee

The following year, 1866, saw the first celebrations by Black freedmen of what was called "Jubilee Day." From the beginning, the day was highly political, with Black organizers using the day to help freedmen get instructions on how to exercise their political and social rights won with the abolition of involuntary servitude. The Freedmen's Bureau, a key Reconstruction institution dedicated to this task, used the day for fundraising and outreach.

After the war was over, Union forces occupied the defeated South for several years, overseeing Reconstruction: a process of integration, education, and re-education designed to erase the legacy of slavery and elevate the Black freedmen to equality with their white countrymen. The nation's first public schools were opened to educate the 3.5 million freed slaves, who it had been illegal to teach to read or write, and numerous other public institutions serving their needs came as well.

The main goal of Reconstruction was to break the political back of the white planter class whose rivalry with the northern capitalists, who backed the triumphant Union Army, had led to the outbreak of hostilities. White politicians and planters who had backed the rebel government had

their lands confiscated, and those who wished to return were required to take public oaths of loyalty to the federal government.

However, Confederate sympathizers and white supremacist paramilitary groups regularly attacked the Black freedmen and the institutions that served them, with the most notorious group being the Ku Klux Klan. The US government declared the KKK a terrorist organization in 1871 and used the army to crush them, but in the end, the white supremacists won, and a shrewdly hatched political deal in 1877 saw Union forces end their suppression and withdraw from the South.

By the 1890s, white supremacist governments had returned to power in every southern state, ushering in a new period of racial apartheid and Black political disenfranchisement colloquially called "Jim Crow" that persisted until the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.

As a result, celebration of Juneteenth was greatly suppressed, as was essentially all anti-Confederate sentiment in the South. As Black families began to migrate out of the South fleeing Jim Crow and seeking better employment, they carried the Day of Jubilee with them, spreading it into the country's north and west.

Modern Celebrations

The Civil Rights Movement saw an accompanying revival of suppressed Black political and social expression as Black Americans affirmed their right to equality with white Americans, and that included a revival of Juneteenth celebrations.

A major turning point came during the 1968 Poor People's Campaign, an anti-poverty movement kick-started by civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in the months before his April 1968 assassination. Rev. Ralph Abernathy of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) made June 19 the "Solidarity Day of the Poor People's Campaign" and a grand celebration was held in Washington, DC, attended by as many as 100,000 people. After, the revival spread across the country, with cities with large Black populations like Washington, DC, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, leading the charge. In 1974, Juneteenth celebrations returned to southern Texas, and the state's legislature made it a state holiday in 1979.

The first attempt to make Juneteenth a federal holiday came in 1996, and the following year saw activist Ben Haith create the Juneteenth flag now flown on federal buildings for the holiday.

By 2019, 47 states and the District of Columbia had recognized Juneteenth, although only Texas had adopted the holiday as a paid holiday for state employees. All that changed after George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, died on May 25, 2020 after Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin knelt on his neck for nine minutes during an arrest. In the days and weeks that followed, tens of millions of Americans poured into the streets to demand accountability for Floyd's murder and an end to police violence,.

In some states, the move to make Juneteenth a holiday came as the protests were still underway. However, on June 17, 2021, US President Joe Biden signed a bill making Juneteenth the 11th federal holiday - the first since Martin Luther King Jr. Day was designated a federal holiday in 1983.

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'Limited Progress' From Xi-Blinken Talks, But Core US-China Issues Likely Beyond Compromise

In Bali in November 2022, the US and Chinese leaders sought to defuse months of sky-high tensions with pledges to compete but to avoid a new “Cold War” type of competition. Still, the US has aggressively pursued policies designed to force computer chip makers out of Chinese markets and to demonize and isolate China in East Asia.

Over the weekend, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken made a [long-awaited trip to Beijing](#) to meet with senior Chinese diplomats, including President Xi Jinping, in an attempt to stabilize the US-China relationship. While the two sides renewed their pledges not to seek the other's overthrow or marginalization, few of the key issues at stake in their competition have been adequately addressed, an international affairs expert said.

Alan Cafruny, a professor of international affairs at Hamilton College in New York, told Sputnik on Monday that those issues “are almost certainly not susceptible to negotiations or compromise. However, improved communication may serve to de-escalate provocative and dangerous words and actions, perhaps most notably with respect to US rhetoric with respect to the ‘One China’ policy.”

“After having been postponed following [the shooting down](#) of an alleged Chinese surveillance balloon, Blinken's visit to China, culminating in his meeting with Xi Jinping, represents an attempt by both parties to stabilize the relationship,” he explained.

“There was some limited progress with respect to air travel, student exchanges (more than 300,000 Chinese students are studying in the USA), and the willingness to improve communications. However, China will refuse to re-start military-to-military communication as long as Washington continues to sanction its defense minister. More generally, there is no evidence of progress with respect to Taiwan or the US broader containment strategy in which Europe and Japan are being enlisted. At the same time, anti-China sentiments are increasing on a bilateral basis in the context of 2024 elections,” Cafruny said.

“Even as ‘nationalists’ dominate US policy, relations are highly complex. US-China trade is increasing and both countries are highly reliant on each other for economic stability.

Notwithstanding [‘de-coupling’ initiatives](#) and bellicose rhetoric, US capital continues to pour into China. Notably, Jamie Dimon (JP Morgan) and [Elon Musk \(Tesla\)](#) have recently visited the mainland and endorsed further economic integration. Last week, [Bill Gates \(Microsoft co-founder\)](#) met with Xi Jinping in Beijing. These factors certainly have played a role in the limited rapprochement.”

Cafruny explained that while the US once welcomed China's integration into the global capitalist economy, as the socialist state began to enjoy increasing economic success, Washington became more ambivalent, with a shift beginning years before the Trump administration made explicit [its strategic shift](#) toward “great power competition” with Moscow and Beijing in 2018. He told Sputnik there were “certainly no mysteries” about Washington being behind that deterioration in relations.

“China's integration into the US-led world economy starting in the 1990s was extremely beneficial to US (and European) capital. However, as China's economic development began to threaten US primacy, Washington sought to contain China's further rise, starting with Obama's ‘pivot to Asia’ and escalating under Trump and Biden with protectionist-albeit-self-defeating

trade policies and then sanctions on China's technology, most recently semiconductors. These policies have been accompanied by growing US and NATO operations in the Pacific. China refuses to subordinate itself to Washington.

"It is unlikely that, in the long term, the strategy of economic containment will succeed," Cafruny predicted.

"With its near-monopoly on advanced semiconductors, Taiwan, of course, has both geopolitical and geo-economic significance. The United States has carried out increasingly provocative actions with respect to Taiwan, providing increasing military support as Biden renounces the concept of 'strategic ambiguity' and challenges the ['One China' agreement](#) established in 1979. China has responded with increasingly aggressive military exercises around the island, most notably in response to US Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi's ill-conceived visit to Taipei," he explained.

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Kiev Regime Reportedly Can't Account for 'Hundreds of Millions' in Weapons

Missing arms shipments, broken-down vehicles, and intra-governmental lawsuits — a new mainstream media report paints a damning portrait of Kiev's efforts to requisition enough military hardware to keep its floundering counter-offensive going.

The Zelensky regime spent "hundreds of millions" on weapons which have yet to materialize, according to a damning new [article](#) by a major Western newspaper which reported serious problems throughout the Ukrainian military supply chain.

"Ukrainian government documents show that as of the end of last year," Kiev's leaders "paid arms suppliers more than \$800 million since... February 2022 for contracts that went completely or partly unfulfilled," the outlet noted.

"We did have cases where we paid money and we didn't receive," a deputy Ukrainian defense minister working on arms procurement reportedly confirmed.

When weapons do show up, their quality is reportedly a major source of frustration.

Video of a "recent delivery of 33 self-propelled howitzers donated by the Italian government.... showed smoke billowing from the engine of one, and engine coolant leaking from another," according to the outlet.

In a statement, Italy's Defense Ministry claimed the vehicles were known to have been decommissioned long ago but that the Kiev regime demanded them regardless. The weapons were always meant "to be overhauled and put into operation," the ministry insisted, given what it called "the urgent need for means to face the Russian aggression."

But the headaches didn't end there. Efforts to fix the faulty howitzers were complicated by another setback in January after Zelensky's officials claimed they paid a US company to carry out the necessary repairs, but 13 of them were still "not suitable for combat missions" when received.

In a February letter to the Pentagon's inspector general, Ukraine's defense procurement director effectively accused Ultra Defense Corporation of defrauding the Kiev regime of millions of

dollars, claiming the Florida-based weapons supplier took \$19.8 million of Ukrainian government funds with “no prior intention to fulfill its obligations.”

However, the company’s chief executive, Matthew Herring, strenuously denies the accusations. “Every single one of them worked when we delivered them,” he reportedly wrote. In a statement which accused the Ukrainians of failing to maintain the weapons upon their arrival, he noted that one howitzer suffered from a coolant leak which “magically appeared after delivery in Ukraine.” The episode isn’t the only instance where Kiev officials’ stories didn’t exactly match up with the entities they partnered with.

The documents, reportedly the product of a government audit this year, “showed that some of the most valuable sets of undelivered contracts are between the Defense Ministry and state-owned Ukrainian arms companies that function as independent brokers.”

“In recent months, the ministry has sued at least two of those state firms over unfulfilled contracts, and Ukraine recently announced overhauls aimed at making those companies more efficient,” the outlet reported.

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Multiple Twisters Ravage Mississippi as Forecasters Warn of More Extreme Weather

Over the last several weeks millions of Americans have remained under severe weather advisories as officials warned that large parts of the US would be subjected to heavy rains, hail, tornadoes and a scorching heat wave. Meteorologists earlier stated the weather patterns were the result of El Nino conditions.

At least one person is dead after multiple tornadoes swept through Mississippi overnight, and another 19 people were injured by the extreme weather, officials in Jasper County announced on Monday.

The city of Bay Springs and the rural town of Louin took on the majority of the reported tornado’s impact, leaving structural damage and injuries in its wake after the tornado touched down around 11:30 p.m. on Sunday, the National Weather Service (NWS) in Jackson said.

“We had some mobile homes totally destroyed. Roofs off houses,” said Randy Johnson, a Jasper County sheriff. “You know, just what you’d expect out of a strong tornado.”

Thousands of customers in the southern US were without power by 4:17 p.m. EDT, including 192,636 in Oklahoma, 77,989 in Texas, 65,569 in Louisiana, 36,288 in Mississippi, and 22,927 in Arkansas, according to [PowerOutage.us](https://www.poweroutage.us/).

Eric Carpenter, a meteorologist with the NWS in Jackson, said the timing of the tornadoes, as well as the persistent thunder, hail, and high temperatures were “a very unusual situation.”

“This is a whole different game here,” Carpenter said. “What we would typically see in March and April, we’re seeing in June.”

And the threat of severe weather continues to linger for millions of people in the US southeast, with excessive heat warnings and heat advisories now in effect in Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi, the NWS said. Those heat warnings will continue for several days, according to one

[report](#), with temperatures climbing to triple digits with heat index values in some areas close to 120 degrees Fahrenheit.

The weather service adds that the threat of tornadoes continues to linger for the region as of Monday.

"High temperatures in the 100s and lows in the upper 70s and 80s will support the continued Excessive Heat Warnings and Heat Advisories that have been in effect for much of central/southern Texas and Louisiana," the weather service [warned](#).

Showers and thunderstorms could also produce flooding and flash flooding in the mid-South area to the Gulf Coast, said the NWS.

"Temperatures will remain well below average across the West as an amplifying upper trough moves into the Great Plains. Very dry, warm and windy conditions will support a Critical Risk of Fires across Arizona and New Mexico through Tuesday," the service added.

It was reported that the Texas city of [Houston](#) would be opening cooling centers from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. through Monday, as Louisiana's Caddo Parish also opened cooling centers.

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Scientists Discover Universe's Hottest Object - And It's Not the Sun

By - Mary Manley

Brown dwarfs have masses that range between a giant planet like Jupiter, and small stars, more specifically the substellar objects, which are neither planets nor stars, and can have 13 times to 80 times the mass of the planet Jupiter.

New findings by an international team of researchers recently revealed the scorching discovery of a brown dwarf that far eclipses the level of heat emitted by the sun.

Sitting 1,400 light-years from Earth, the [brown dwarf](#) has since been named WD0032-317B. It was discovered by a team led by astrophysicist Na'ama Hallakoun from the Weizmann Institute of Science in Israel.

The brown dwarf has an orbit that is so close to its host star, that it maintains a temperature above 8,000 Kelvin (7,727 degrees Celsius, or 13,940 Fahrenheit), which officials note is "hot enough to break apart the molecules in its atmosphere into their composite atoms."

For comparison, the temperature of the sun is 5,778 Kelvin.

In the past the US space agency [NASA](#) has described brown dwarfs as "failed" small, low-mass stars that are the "missing link between gas giant planets."

The celestial bodies often prove difficult to zero in on as they emit low light and energy levels; in fact, they went largely undetected until the late 1980s.

What makes this particular brown dwarf even more interesting is that while brown dwarfs do burn hotter than planets, officials say they typically burn cooler than the coolest red dwarf stars, as they are unable to reach hot temperatures on their own.

In addition to the exciting discovery of such an abnormally hot object, the team of astronomers have stated the brown dwarf may be able to give scientists a better understanding of the planet

Jupiter, as well as other gas giants orbiting hot, massive stars that are difficult to study on their own due to the activity and rotation rates of the stars.

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Internal Docs Offer New Details on Jeffrey Epstein's Ties to JPMorgan Chase

Earlier this month the bank agreed to pay \$290 million in a similar lawsuit brought by alleged victims of disgraced American financier Jeffrey Epstein. The lawsuit has broken open the ties and dealings the bank had maintained with Epstein for years.

A new report has revealed details surrounding Jeffrey Epstein's ties to JPMorgan Chase, one of the largest banking institutions in the world, and specifically highlighted the financier's ties to former JPMorgan executive Jes Staley.

Epstein was arrested in 2019 on federal sex-trafficking charges, and died that same year in jail before he was tried in court over sex trafficking charges. The 20-plus internal report was [reportedly](#) prepared after news broke of Epstein's arrest in 2019.

It's speculated the report may have been made public in the legal fight JPMorgan is duking out with the US Virgin Islands.

The USVI brought forward a lawsuit against the bank last year, alleging JPMorgan ignored Epstein's egregious acts because he helped bring in wealthy clients for the bank.

According to reports based on the USVI lawsuit, Epstein and Staley had close ties and exchanged hundreds of emails before Staley left JPMorgan in 2013 and went on to become the CEO of Barclays. Some of those emails included "young women in seductive poses," the [report](#) claims.

"That was fun. Say hi to Snow White," Staley reportedly wrote in a July 2010 email to Epstein. Epstein responded: "[W]hat character would you like next?" to which Staley replied, "Beauty and the Beast."

Staley has claimed he was not aware of Epstein's crimes, and ended the friendship before becoming Barclays CEO. The report also noted Epstein offered to help one of Staley's daughters in applying to graduate schools, including Columbia University. The college has claimed there was no meeting between "the [school's] president and Staley," "nor did the president know Epstein, then or later."

"You have paid a price for what has been accused," Staley wrote Epstein in 2011 - two years after soliciting prostitution charges were first filed against Epstein in Florida, according to an email in the report. "But we know what u have done for us. And we count you as one of our deepest friends. And most honest of people."

The report also reveals ties between Epstein and other people in power, including Dubai's Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem and Peter Mandelson, a British politician. Citing the report, US media reported that Epstein then tried to connect both Mandelson and Sulayem to Staley, as well as JPMorgan, for business deals and international expansions.

While Sulayem has not responded to requests for comment, Mandelson, a member of the House of Lords, told US media that his connections to Epstein were not a secret and that he "very much regrets ever having been introduced to Epstein."

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RPT - Blinken Talks With Chinese Leaders Unlikely Reduced Risk of War Over Taiwan - Ex-Diplomat

WASHINGTON, June 20 (Sputnik) - Secretary of State Antony Blinken's meetings in Beijing, although they may have momentarily stabilized US-Chinese relations, failed to make progress in reducing military tensions or the risk of a war breaking out over Taiwan, former US diplomat Chas Freeman told Sputnik.

Blinken made a long-awaited trip to Beijing to meet with senior Chinese officials, including President Xi Jinping, in an attempt to improve relations that had spiraled to new lows over a number of issues including a possible confrontation over Taiwan. Although he described the talks as constructive, Blinken on Monday told reporters China did not agree to restore military-to-military channels for managing crisis communications.

"There were no breakthroughs in the relationship between the two governments and the danger of war was not reduced," Freeman, who was the principal American interpreter during President Nixon's historic visit to China in 1972, said. "But Blinken's aim was to stabilize, not enhance the Sino-American relationship. It has been stabilized for the moment at the atrociously bad level it has reached since the United States launched its economic war on China five years ago."

Although there will likely be future exchanges between high-level officials on issues like trade, Freeman added, there is no evidence that there will be an economic truce between the United States and China.

Freeman added, however, that minor progress was made on some fronts, like reassuring allies that the two sides were engaging in dialogue.

"Some measure of polite dialogue is necessary to allay the concerns of the nations of the global community - who rightly fear that miscommunication between the United States and China could have tragic consequences," Freeman, who also served as an assistant US defense secretary, said. "Blinken's meetings in Beijing met that very low standard."

On a positive note, Freeman added, the two sides agreed to facilitate travel and transport between the two countries to ensure the continuation of people-to-people contacts, notwithstanding tensions in the official relationship.

"And Blinken demonstrated that official contacts can continue despite hysterical opposition from demagogues in the US Congress," he said.

The US government has enraged Beijing by repeatedly sending military aid to Taiwan. Beijing opposes any official contacts of foreign states with Taipei and considers Chinese sovereignty over the island indisputable.

Blinken during the trip reiterated that Washington does not support the independence of

Taiwan, but voiced concerns to China about "provocative" actions.

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RCMP Denies Probing Trudeau Over SNC-Lavalin Case

WASHINGTON, June 20 (Sputnik) - The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) refuted media reports that it was probing allegations of political meddling in the SNC-Lavalin trial.

Earlier in the day, the Democracy Watch watchdog group said the RCMP had confirmed in a letter that it is investigating Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and some Cabinet Officials over their alleged obstruction of the SNC-Lavalin probe.

"In response to numerous media reports, the RCMP can confirm it is not investigating allegations of political interference in the trial of SNC Lavalin," the RCMP said in a statement on Monday.

In 2021 and 2022, Democracy Watch said it made requests under the Access to Information Act (AITA) to access records on the proceedings regarding investigations into Trudeau's and several ministers' involvement in pressing then-Attorney General Jody Wilson-Raybould to stop the prosecution of SNC-Lavalin.

The RCMP statement appears to contradict what the agency said in the letter to Democracy Watch, which the organization posted online.

"A review of the records revealed that this matter is currently under investigation," the RCMP letter, dated May 25, said. "The records are subject to an exemption pursuant to subparagraph 16(1)(a)(i) of the Act... Please note we have exercised our discretion and released some material to you. Once the investigation and any related court proceedings are concluded, you may re-submit your request."

The news of the ongoing investigation was brought to the attention of the House of Commons by Conservative lawmakers Dane Lloyd and Gerard Deltell, who asked whether Trudeau, his cabinet members, or their staff were being investigated by the RCMP.

"No," said the Liberal and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons Mark Holland, adding that this "old case" was being used by the Conservatives for partisan purposes.

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Biden Says US-China Relations on 'Right Trail' After Blinken Visit to Beijing

WASHINGTON, June 20 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden said the relationship between the United States and China is on the "right trail" after Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited Beijing and spoke with Chinese leaders, according to the White House press pool.

"He did a hell of a job," Biden said on Monday. "We're on the right trail here."

The US president said he has been receiving updates of Blinken's meeting with Chinese

leaders through White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan.

Over the weekend, Blinken made a long-awaited trip to Beijing to meet with senior Chinese officials, including President Xi Jinping, in an attempt to improve relations that had spiraled to new lows over a number of issues, including a possible confrontation over Taiwan.

Although Blinken described the talks as constructive, he noted that China did not agree to restore military-to-military channels for managing crisis communications.

The US government has enraged Beijing by repeatedly sending military aid to Taiwan. Beijing opposes any official contacts of foreign states with Taipei and considers Chinese sovereignty over the island to be indisputable.

Blinken reiterated during his trip that the United States does not support the independence of Taiwan, but voiced concerns to China about its alleged proactive actions.

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House Republicans Seek to Ban Public Access to Military Records of Service Members

WASHINGTON, June 20 (Sputnik) – The Fiscal Year 2024 Defense Appropriations bill, unveiled by Republicans from the House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, seeks to ban public access to military records of present or former service members.

“None of the funds appropriated or otherwise made available by this Act may be used to release information described in paragraph C4.2.2.5.2 of DoD [the Department of Defense] 5400.11-R regarding a current or former member of the Armed Forces to any non-Federal entity or person without the consent of such member or former member,” the bill said.

According to the Department of Defense’s privacy rules from 2007, personal data regarding individual military members, including full name, rank, salary, awards, assignments, and official photo, may be disclosed without restrictions.

The ban will not apply to cases when such information is requested under the “Freedom of Information Act” provided that the releasing authority notifies the member or the former member who is the subject of the request, the bill revealed last week.

The move comes after the Pentagon erroneously released the private data of several GOP politicians without their consent during their midterm election campaigns after it was requested by a person linked to the Democratic party, according to media reports.

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US Coast Guard To Deploy Additional Capabilities In Search For Titanic Tourist Submersible

WASHINGTON, June 19 (Sputnik) - Rear Adm. John Mauger, the commander of the First Coast Guard District told reporters on Monday that they will deploy additional capabilities to locate the tourist submersible that went missing earlier in the day in the North Atlantic on a mission to visit

the wreck of the Titanic.

"The location of this search is approximately 900 miles east of Cape Cod, in a water depth of roughly 13,000 feet. It is a remote area and it is a challenge to conduct a search in that remote area, but we are deploying all available assets to make sure that we can locate the craft and rescue the people on board," Mauger said. "Going into this evening, we will continue to fly aircraft and move additional vessels into the area."

Mauger noted that in this remote part of their search and rescue responsibility, they often rely on commercial vessels, and they have been in touch with additional commercial vessels operating in the area and initiated the movement of additional Canadian Coast Guard assets and US Coast Guard surface assets over the course of the next couple of days.

"The Coast Guard has two C-130 aircraft in addition to the command team that's working here. We have two C-130 aircraft deployed. The Canadians have C-130 aircraft and a P-8 aircraft. We also have access to and we'll launch this evening a C-130 aircraft from the New York national guard to make sure that we have sufficient air assets there," he noted.

Taking into account that this was a submersible vessel, the authorities are searching both on the surface of the ocean and in the water.

"We are doing that right now with the use of sonar abilities and sonar on the shipments out there to listen for any sounds that we can detect in the water column," he said. "Over the course of the next couple of days, we anticipate adding additional capability to conduct an additional search in the water as those commercial assets arrive on the scene."

Mauger also shared that they anticipate that the people on board are somewhere between 70 to the full 96 hours of available oxygen at this point.

Earlier on Monday, the Boston Coast Guard said that it was undertaking an operation to locate a tourist submarine with five people on board in the vicinity of the Titanic wreckage after the vessel went missing in the Atlantic Ocean.

The Titanic, the largest luxury ship at the beginning of the twentieth century, struck an iceberg during her maiden voyage from Southampton to New York on April 15, 1912, and sank in the Atlantic. The incident resulted in the death of more than 1,500 passengers and crew.

The Titanic wreck is located about 370 miles off the coast of Newfoundland in Canada at a depth of approximately 2.5 miles.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, June 20 (Sputnik) -

TITANIC SUBMERSIBLE MISSING

* OceanGate Expeditions, a US firm deploying submersibles for deep sea expeditions, said in a statement on Monday that it is trying to re-establish contact with one of its vessels that went missing during an expedition to the wreckage site of the Titanic.

* A US Coast Guard C-130 crew, assisted by a Canadian P8 Poseidon aircraft, is looking for

the missing tourist submarine with an unknown number of people on board, the First Coast Guard District announced in a statement.

- * British businessman and world-record-holding aviator Hamish Harding, is suspected to be aboard the tourist submersible.

MILITARY AID TO UKRAINE

- * Russia has requested a meeting of the UN Security Council on the weapons supplies by the collective West to Ukraine, First Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Monday.

- * Reports about delivering Israeli Merkava tanks to Ukraine are not true, the Israeli Defense Ministry told Sputnik, adding that several countries want to purchase these tanks.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

- * The Russian armed forces launched a missile attack on the locations of storage of foreign-made equipment of the Ukrainian army in the night from Sunday to Monday, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

- * They successfully repelled two attacks by Ukrainian troops in the area of the village of Mala Tokmachka in the Zaporizhzhia region over the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

- * The United States would welcome China playing a constructive role in the Ukrainian peace effort, US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken said.

- * The UN Security Council will hold a meeting on Ukraine on June 23 with an expected briefing from Senior UN official Rosemary Di Carlo, a United Nations source told Sputnik.

BLINKEN VISIT TO CHINA

- * China and the United States have reached progress and agreements on a number of issues during the visit of Blinken to Beijing, Chinese President Xi Jinping said.

- * The United States and China have not agreed to resume military-to-military communication yet, but this remains a "work in progress" amid rising tensions in the bilateral relationship, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Monday.

- * Blinken said he had invited Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang to visit the United States.

- * Providing China with technologies that Beijing can use in its nuclear program is not in the US interest, Blinken said.

- * It is essential to maintain communications between the US and Chinese military, Blinken said.

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Blinken Talks With Chinese Leaders Unlikely Reduced Risk of War Over Taiwan - Ex-Diplomat

WASHINGTON, June 20 (Sputnik) - Secretary of State Antony Blinken's meetings in Beijing, although they may have momentarily stabilized US-Chinese relations, failed to make progress in reducing military tensions or the risk of a war breaking out over Taiwan, former US diplomat

Chas Freeman told Sputnik.

Blinken made a long-awaited trip to Beijing to meet with senior Chinese officials, including President Xi Jinping, in an attempt to improve relations that had spiraled to new lows over a number of issues including a possible confrontation over Taiwan. Although he described the talks as constructive, Blinken on Monday told reporters China did not agree to restore military-to-military channels for managing crisis communications.

"There were no breakthroughs in the relationship between the two governments and the danger of war was not reduced," Freeman, who was the principal American interpreter during President Nixon's historic visit to China in 1972, said. "But Blinken's aim was to stabilize, not enhance the Sino-American relationship. It has been stabilized for the moment at the atrociously bad level it has reached since the United States launched its economic war on China five years ago."

Although there will likely be future exchanges between high-level officials on issues like trade, Freeman added, there is no evidence that there will be an economic truce between the United States and China.

Freeman added, however, that minor progress was made on some fronts, like reassuring allies that the two sides were engaging in dialogue.

"Some measure of polite dialogue is necessary to allay the concerns of the nations of the global community - who rightly fear that miscommunication between the United States and China could have tragic consequences," Freeman, who also served as an assistant US defense secretary, said. "Blinken's meetings in Beijing met that very low standard."

On a positive note, Freeman added, the two sides agreed to facilitate travel and transport between the two countries to ensure the continuation of people-to-people contacts, notwithstanding tensions in the official relationship.

"And Blinken demonstrated that official contacts can continue despite hysterical opposition from demagogues in the US Congress," he said.

The US government has enraged Beijing by repeatedly sending military aid to Taiwan. Beijing opposes any official contacts of foreign states with Taipei and considers Chinese sovereignty over the island indisputable.

Blinken during the trip reiterated that Washington does not support the independence of Taiwan, but voiced concerns to China about "provocative" actions.

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British Businessman, Aviator Suspected Among Five Missing on Titanic Submersible

WASHINGTON, June 19 (Sputnik) - Hamish Harding, a British businessman and world-record-holding aviator is suspected to be aboard the tourist submersible that went missing Monday in the North Atlantic on a mission to visit the wreck of the Titanic.

On Sunday, Harding said on social media that he had joined the OceanGate Expeditions RMS Titanic mission and was very excited about Monday's dive.

"We started steaming from St. Johns, Newfoundland, Canada yesterday and are planning to start dive operations around 4 am tomorrow morning. Until then we have a lot of preparations

and briefings to do,” wrote Harding on his Instagram page on Sunday.

Harding added that the expedition would be attended by a few other “legendary” explorers, including the deep sea diver and Titanic expert Paul Henry Nargeolet.

The US coast guard confirmed on Monday afternoon that there were 5 people aboard the 21-foot vessel, named Polar Prince, and that the crew lost contact with them just under two hours after submersing on Sunday morning.

The identities of all five crew members remain unknown.

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US Welcomes Resumption of Diplomatic Ties Between Qatar, UAE - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, June 19 (Sputnik) – The United States welcomes the resumption of diplomatic ties between Qatar and the United Arab Emirates and the reopening of embassies after more than 6 years of severed relations, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday.

“The United States welcomes and congratulates Qatar and the United Arab Emirates on their resumption of diplomatic representation and reopening embassies. This is another important step forward among our Gulf Cooperation Council partners to promote regional stability and mutual cooperation,” Miller said in a statement.

Earlier in the day, the Qatari Foreign Ministry announced that the diplomatic missions of Qatar and the United Arab Emirates will start working in Doha, Abu Dhabi, and Dubai from Monday after the full restoration of diplomatic relations.

The United Arab Emirates, along with Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Egypt, cut diplomatic ties with Qatar on June 5, 2017, in the wake of the crisis in relations between the Gulf countries after Riyadh accused Doha of supporting terrorist groups in the region.

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UPDATE - RCMP Investigating Trudeau, Cabinet Officials Over Obstruction of Justice – Letter

(Adds details in Para 4-5)

WASHINGTON, June 19 (Sputnik) – The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) has confirmed in a letter to Democracy Watch that it is investigating Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and some Cabinet Officials over their alleged obstruction of the SNC-Lavalin probe.

In 2021 and 2022, Democracy Watch made requests under the Access to Information Act (AITA) to access records on the proceedings regarding investigations into Trudeau's and several ministers' involvement in pressing then-Attorney General Jody Wilson-Raybould to stop the prosecution of SNC-Lavalin.

“A review of the records revealed that this matter is currently under investigation. The records

are subject to an exemption pursuant to subparagraph 16(1)(a)(i) of the Act ... Please note we have exercised our discretion and released some material to you. Once the investigation and any related court proceedings are concluded, you may re-submit your request," the letter dated May 25 said.

The news of the ongoing investigation was brought to the attention of the House of Commons by Conservative lawmakers Dane Lloyd and Gerard Deltell, who asked whether Trudeau, his cabinet members, or their staff were being investigated by the RCMP.

"No," said the Liberal and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons Mark Holland, adding that this "old case" was being used by the Conservatives for partisan purposes.

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US C-130, Canadian P8 Poseidon Searching for Missing Titanic Submersible - Coast Guard

WASHINGTON, June 19 (Sputnik) - A US Coast Guard C-130 crew, assisted by a Canadian P8 Poseidon aircraft, is looking for a missing tourist submarine with an unknown number of people on board seeking to view the Titanic wreck, the First Coast Guard District announced in a statement on Monday.

"A USCG C-130 crew is searching for an overdue Canadian research submarine approximately 900 miles off Cape Cod," the statement posted on Twitter said. "Rescue Coordination Center Halifax is assisting with a P8 Poseidon aircraft in the search. The P8 has underwater detection capabilities."

OceanGate Expeditions, a US firm deploying submersibles for deep sea expeditions, said in a statement on Monday that it is trying to re-establish contact with one of its vessels that went missing during an expedition to the wreckage site of the Titanic.

The company said it was "deeply thankful" for the extensive assistance we have received from several government agencies and deep sea companies in the efforts to reestablish contact with the submersible.

The company did not reveal how many people were on board the submersible and whether there were any tourists among them.

Earlier on Monday, the Boston Coast Guard has said that it was undertaking an operation to locate a tourist submarine with an unknown number of people on board in the vicinity of the Titanic wreckage after the vessel went missing in the Atlantic Ocean.

The Titanic, the largest luxury ship in the beginning of the twentieth century, struck an iceberg during her maiden voyage from Southampton to New York on April 15, 1912, and sunk in the Atlantic. The incident resulted in the death of more than 1,500 passengers and crew.

The Titanic wreck is located about 370 miles off the coast of Newfoundland in Canada at a depth of 2.5 miles.

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with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

UN 'Willing to Go' to All Areas of Ukraine Regardless of Who Controls Them - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, June 19 (Sputnik) - The United Nations stands ready to visit all areas of Ukraine, including Russia-controlled territories, the UN spokesperson Farhan Haq said on Monday.

"We are willing to go to all areas of Ukraine regardless of who is in control [of them]," Haq said during a press briefing.

Such visits, however, need to be done in compliance with obligations under international law, Haq added.

UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Ukraine Denise Brown criticized Moscow during the weekend for not allowing the United Nations to enter the Russia-controlled side of the now destroyed Kakhovka hydroelectric power plant (HPP) area.

Haq said that Brown's opinion represents the position of the United Nations.

Earlier on Monday, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said it is very difficult to ensure the safety of United Nations experts seeking to inspect the territory around the HPP after its destruction, since constant shelling and provocations are taking place in the area.

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RCMP Investigating Trudeau, Cabinet Official for Alleged Obstruction of Justice - Letter

WASHINGTON, June 19 (Sputnik) - The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) has confirmed in a letter to Democracy Watch that it is investigating Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and a cabinet official over their alleged obstruction of the SNC-Lavalin probe.

In 2021 and 2022, Democracy Watch made requests under the Access to Information Act (AITA) to access records on the proceedings regarding investigations into Trudeau's and several ministers' involvement in pressing then-Attorney General Jody Wilson-Raybould to stop the prosecution of SNC-Lavalin.

"A review of the records revealed that this matter is currently under investigation. ... Please note we have exercised our discretion and released some material to you. Once the investigation and any related court proceedings are concluded, you may re-submit your request," the letter dated May 25, said.

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White House Says Has No Timeline for Phone Call, Meeting Between Biden, Xi

WASHINGTON, June 19 (Sputnik) - White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said on Monday that there is no timeline for either a phone call or a meeting between President Joe Biden and his Chinese counterpart, President Xi Jinping.

"I don't have anything to read out at this time. The President [Biden] is looking to do that sometimes down the road. I just don't have anything specific or any timeline to zero in on for you all today," Jean-Pierre said during a press briefing.

In May, Biden said that he was going to meet with Xi "whether it's soon or not" and that arrangements for a conversation between him and Xi were in the works and expressed hope that the talks would come to fruition.

The last time the two leaders had a meeting was on November 14 in Bali, Indonesia. Biden and Xi agreed to keep open lines of communication and that US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will follow up on the meeting during his visit to China, which took place on June 18-19.

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UN Welcomes Dialogue Between US, China in Beijing - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, June 19 (Sputnik) - The United Nations commends the negotiations between US and China in Beijing and believes any interaction to improve relations is crucial, the UN Spokesperson Farhan Haq said on Monday.

"We certainly welcome the meeting between the US and Chinese Foreign Ministry officials. Any dialogue between the United States and China on this is crucial to improving coordination on a wide range of major issues," Haq told the briefing.

Over the weekend, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken made a long-awaited trip to Beijing to meet with senior Chinese diplomats, including President Xi Jinping, in an attempt to stabilize the US-China relationship.

Antony Blinken became the first US secretary of state to visit China in the last five years.

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UN Welcomes Efforts by African Leaders in Moving Forward With Grain Deal - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, June 19 (Sputnik) - The United Nations appreciates efforts by African nations to negotiate a continuation of the grain deal, UN Spokesperson Farhan Haq said on Monday.

"We welcome efforts by all groups including concerned African nations to work together in moving forwards with the grain deal," Haq told the briefing.

Talks between Russian President Vladimir Putin and an African delegation on the Ukraine peace initiative have finished at the Konstantinovsky Palace in St. Petersburg after 2.5 hours this weekend. The meeting was followed by bilateral talks between the South African President

and Vladimir Putin regarding Moscow's stance on the Ukraine crisis.

Russia, Ukraine, Turkey, and the UN reached an agreement on July 22, 2022, to provide a humanitarian maritime corridor for ships carrying food and fertilizer exports from Ukrainian Black Sea ports. On May 18, 2023, Russia extended the Black Sea Grain Initiative, for 60 days, until July 17.

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Russia Requests UNSC Meeting on Collective West's Weapons Supplies to Ukraine - Mission

UNITED NATIONS, June 19 (Sputnik) - Russia has requested a meeting of the UN Security Council on the weapons supplies by the collective West to Ukraine, First Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Dmitriy Polyanskiy said on Monday.

"Today, we requested a meeting over the supplies of Western weapons to Ukraine and the consequences to the diplomatic efforts," Polyanskiy said on his Telegram channel.

The Russian diplomat said there will be interesting witnesses on the issue during the meeting.

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UN Chief Calls to Step Up Counterterrorism Efforts

UNITED NATIONS, June 19 (Sputnik) - The UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Monday called on members to step up the counterterrorism fight.

"We must continue strengthening the central tool in our efforts: the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy," Guterres told UN members.

We have to, however, also adopt the most effective approach, which is through prevention.

The UN will be putting forward a New Agenda for Peace which will be centered around prevention.

Tackling the underlying issues which may lead to terrorism is the solution. According to the UN, factors contributing to terrorism include poverty, discrimination, disaffection, bad infrastructure, or violations of human rights.

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US Cities Never Experienced Problems in Partnership With Chinese Counterparts - Expert

WASHINGTON, June 19 (Sputnik) - US municipalities have never experienced political or security issues in the sister-city relationships with their Chinese counterparts, Sister Cities

International (SCI) Chairman Emeritus Bill Boerum told Sputnik.

"While there are upward of 100 sister city relationships with China, we have never experienced anything other than courtesies," Boerum said.

Some US officials, including Assistant Secretary of Homeland Security Iranga Kahangama, have claimed that China is using the sister-city agreements to strengthen its influence in the United States. In addition, Senator Marsha Blackburn introduced and promoted legislation to investigate the SCI.

Boerum said the SCI leadership has participated in multiple conferences in China and all discussions were focused on working together rather than on politics or foreign policy.

With respect to Senator Blackburn's calls for investigation, the SCI had strategized on determining on how to approach the situation.

"After considering a course of action, it was decided not to add fuel to the fire by issuing a denial of the influence," he said.

Boerum also said that the SCI leadership decided to brief Senator Blackburn privately.

While sister-cities partnerships between US and China are very important, such activity since the COVID-19 pandemic has been close to zero at the federal and municipal levels, Boerum added.

Chinese President Xi Jinping said on Monday that the international community is concerned about the state of relations between the United States and China and does not want to choose sides. US Secretary Antony Blinken said that both countries have agreed on the need to stabilize bilateral relations.

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Tourist Company Says Submersible on Expedition to Titanic Wreck Site Went Missing

WASHINGTON, June 19 (Sputnik) - OceanGate Expeditions, a US firm deploying submersibles for deep sea expeditions, said in a statement on Monday that it is trying to re-establish contact with one of its vessels that went missing during an expedition to the wreckage site of the Titanic.

"Our entire focus is on the crewmembers in the submersible and their families," OceanGate said in a statement to CBS News.

The company stressed that it was "deeply thankful for the extensive assistance we have received from several government agencies and deep sea companies in our efforts to reestablish contact with the submersible."

The firm did not reveal in its statement how many people were on board the vessel and whether there were any tourists there.

The Boston Coastguard has said that it is undertaking an operation to locate a tourist submarine with an unknown number of people on board for an expedition to view the Titanic wreck after the vessel went missing in the Atlantic Ocean, BBC reported earlier on Monday.

The Titanic, the largest luxury ship in the beginning of the twentieth century, struck an iceberg during her maiden voyage from Southampton to New York on April 15, 1912, and sunk in the Atlantic. The incident resulted in the death of more than 1,500 passengers and crew.

The Titanic wreck is located about 370 miles off the coast of Newfoundland in Canada at a depth of 2.5 miles (4 kilometers).

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UN Chief Says Neo-Nazis, White Supremacists Are 'Fast-becoming' Threats Within Countries

UNITED NATIONS, June 19 (Sputnik) - The UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Monday that Neo-Nazi and white supremacist groups are creating security issues within some countries.

"Neo-Nazi and white supremacist movements are fast becoming the primary internal security threats in a number of countries," Guterres told UN members.

We must stay united against such global threats, he added.

Earlier, the New York Times highlighted what Western media has sought to downplay for the past year: the existence of neo-Nazis in the Ukrainian military and the proliferation of Nazi symbolism, including the Totenkopf "Death's Head" emblem used by the SS and the Sonnenrad "Black Sun," which was also heavily used by the Nazis and subsequent groups sympathetic to their ideology.

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Blinken Says After Meeting With Xi That US, China Have Not Agreed to Resume Military Ties

WASHINGTON, June 19 (Sputnik) - The United States and China have not agreed to resume military-to-military communication yet, but this remains a "work in progress" amid rising tensions in the bilateral relationship, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Monday.

"It's a work in progress. This is something that we need to do in the interests of both of our countries that is not only to re-establish and strengthen lines of communication across our government, which we have done, starting with this trip, and I believe visits to follow up by a number of my colleagues and then Chinese officials come to the United States," Blinken said in an interview. [I]f we're going to communicate clearly and try to avoid the competition, that we have, veering into conflict, but an aspect of that ... is military-to-military. We don't have an agreement on that yet. It's something we're going to keep working on."

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Operation Underway to Locate Tourist Submarine Missing Near Titanic Wreck - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 19 (Sputnik) - The Boston Coastguard has announced that an operation has been undertaken to locate a tourist submarine with an unknown number of people on board seeking to view the Titanic wreck after the vessel went missing in the Atlantic Ocean, BBC reported on Monday.

It remains unknown whether there were any people on board the submarine, the report said.

The Titanic, the largest luxury ship in the beginning of the twentieth century, struck an iceberg during her maiden voyage from Southampton to New York on April 15, 1912, and sunk in the Atlantic. The incident resulted in the death of more than 1,500 passengers and crew.

The Titanic wreck is located about 370 miles off the coast of Newfoundland in Canada at a depth of 2.5 miles.

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Canada Sanctions Seven Iranian Judges Over Alleged Human Rights Abuses – Global Affairs

WASHINGTON, June 19 (Sputnik) – Ottawa has imposed sanctions on seven judges of Iran's Revolutionary Courts over alleged systematic violations of human rights, Global Affairs Canada said on Monday.

"Today's sanctions list 7 individuals for their role in gross and systematic human rights violations in Iran's criminal justice system, notably Iran's Revolutionary Courts. As an institution closely tied to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the Ministry of Intelligence, the Revolutionary Courts are notorious for issuing death sentences and harsh prison terms following sham trials and based on evidence gathered under torture," the ministry's statement said.

Among the sanctioned judges of the Revolutionary Courts; Morteza Barati in Esfahan, Hadi Mansouri in Mashhad, Musa Asif Al Hosseini in Karaj, Seyed Mahmoud Sadati in Shiraz, and Heidar Asiyabi in Gorgan.

The Shiraz Advisory Judge of the Criminal Court Mehrdad Tahamtan, and Tehran's Supreme and Revolutionary Courts judge Mohammad Moghiseh were also sanctioned, the statement continued.

Effective immediately, the individuals are prohibited from entry into Canada under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the statement said, adding that further dealing with them is prohibited, and their Canadian assets will be frozen.

Global Affairs added that Canada rejects the death penalty in all cases and everywhere, considering it incompatible with human rights and dignity.

Imposed under the Special Economic Measures (Iran) Regulations, today's designations are the 12th package of sanctions imposed by Canada on Tehran since October 2022.

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UPDATE - US Judge Orders Trump, Lawyers Not To Release Any Materials in Classified Documents Probe

(Updates headline and para 1 to indicate that order applies to both lawyers and defendants)

WASHINGTON, June 19 (Sputnik) - A US judge has ordered former President Donald Trump and his lawyers not to release any materials in the ongoing classified documents probe to the media or members of the public, a court order showed on Monday.

"The Discovery Materials, along with any information derived therefrom, shall not be disclosed to the public or the news media, or disseminated on any news or social media platform, without prior notice to and consent of the United States or approval of the Court," US Magistrate Judge Bruce Reinhart said in the court order.

The order emphasizes that the discovery materials include "all non-classified" documents. It also stipulates that none of the materials can be copied or reproduced or shared with any witnesses testifying in the case.

Moreover, within 90 days of the conclusion of the case, all documents must either be destroyed or returned to the US government, according to the order.

Prosecutors in the case have 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 representation.

Trump has pleaded 'not guilty' to the 37 criminal charges he faces.

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

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US-Made Sniper Ammunition Still Reaching Russian Market Despite Sanctions – Reports

WASHINGTON, June 19 (Sputnik) – Thousands of US-made bullets for sniper rifles are still reaching Russia despite the numerous sanctions imposed on the country's military sector, Politico reported on Monday.

The bullets, fabricated by US-based company Hornady, have been disclosed in declarations of non-conformity by Promtekhkhologiya and Tetis, two companies located in Russia, and sanctioned by Washington, the report said.

Promtekhkhologiya declared in August 2022 that it planned to source a batch of 102,200 .338 Lapua Magnum lead bullets for use in the assembly of hunting cartridges for civilian weapons, the report said.

Meanwhile, Tetis has disclosed two recent shipments of Hornady bullets, including most recently a batch of 300,000 units in April.

Hornady's CEO Steve Hornady denied that any of its ammunition had been sold to Russia "in wartime," noting that the company cut its ties with the Russian market as soon as Russia's special operation in Ukraine began.

Promtekhkhologiya has also apparently secured shipments of ammunition from the European Union, despite the bloc's sanctions on Russia, the report said.

The Slovenian company Valerian sent 460,000 units that it called "Orsis hunting cartridges," mainly the .338 Lapua Magnum type, to Promtekhkhologiya on four separate shipments since February 24, 2022.

Promtekhkhologiya denied having filled custom declarations to import ammunition, the report said, and also denied having any ties with Hornady. Tetis reportedly did not respond to a request for comment on the issue.

According to the report, the apparent shipments add to the evidence that supplies of lethal and non-lethal military equipment continue to reach Russia even though western states have imposed unprecedented comprehensive sanctions on Moscow in response to its special military operation in Ukraine.

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UNSC to Hold Meeting on Ukraine on June 23, DiCarlo to Brief Council - Source

UNITED NATIONS, June 19 (Sputnik) - The United Nations Security Council will hold a meeting on Ukraine on June 23 with an expected briefing from Rosemary Di Carlo, a UN source told Sputnik on Monday.

Rosemary Di Carlo, who is the Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, visited Moscow in mid-June. It remains unclear what the topic of the briefing will be.

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Raytheon CEO Says Western Companies Can De-Risk But Not Decouple From China

WASHINGTON, June 19 (Sputnik) –Western business can de-risk their operations in China but are unable to completely cut ties with this vital market, Raytheon CEO Greg Hayes said on Monday.

"We can de-risk but not decouple," Hayes told the Financial Times in an interview, adding that he believed this to be the case for all companies, without exclusion.

Hayes noted that US trade with China reaches \$500 billion annually, and more than 95 percent of rare earth materials or metals either come from or are processed in China.

"There is no alternative," he said, adding that it would take "many many years to re-establish that capability either domestically or in other friendly countries."

In February, China imposed sanctions on Raytheon and its CEO Hayes for providing weapons to Taiwan. But those restrictions have had little commercial impact because Raytheon is not allowed to sell military equipment to China, and the company maintains its links with Beijing through its aerospace and aviation systems business, according to the Financial Times.

Two of Raytheon's subsidiaries — Pratt & Whitney and Collins Aerospace, along with other Western partners, supplied China's first jet aircraft, the C919, which started to fly in late May, the report added.

Hayes emphasized that Raytheon is looking for alternative partnerships in other countries but will not leave China despite all concerns and limitations. "We are looking at de-risking, to take some of the most critical components and have second sources, but we are not in a position to pull out of China the way we did out of Russia," he said.

He also expressed his belief that Raytheon's recent decision to rebrand itself as RTX, announced on Sunday, would allow the company to divide its commercial aerospace business from its defense activities, which will continue to operate under the Raytheon brand.

The company's CEO also confirmed that supply chain issues continue to impact the production of rocket motors for missiles for both Raytheon and Lockheed Martin, including Stinger missiles and Javelins.

"We've had quality issues, shortages of labor and materials," he said.

Hayes said earlier in June that Raytheon plans to deliver five more air defense systems to Ukraine by the end of 2024.

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US Judge Orders Trump Lawyers Not To Release Any Materials in Classified Documents Probe

WASHINGTON, June 19 (Sputnik) - A US judge has ordered the lawyers of former President Donald Trump not to release any materials in the ongoing classified documents probe to the media or members of the public, a court order showed on Monday.

"The Discovery Materials, along with any information derived therefrom, shall not be disclosed to the public or the news media, or disseminated on any news or social media platform, without prior notice to and consent of the United States or approval of the Court," US Magistrate Judge Bruce Reinhart said in a court order.

The order emphasizes that the discovery materials include "all non-classified" documents. It also stipulates that none of the materials can be copied or reproduced or shared with any witnesses testifying in the case.

Moreover, within 90 days of the conclusion of the case, all documents must either be destroyed or returned to the US government, according to the order.

Prosecutors in the case have 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 representation.

Trump has pleaded 'not guilty' to the 37 criminal charges he faces.

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