

**1/23/24 Tuesday**

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German Establishment Plan to Ban AfD is 'Orwellian'

On Tuesday, a German court ruled that public funding to a minor right-wing political party Die Heimat should be cut, calls for the same to be done to Alternative for Deutschland, the second most popular party in Germany started coming from establishment parties in the country. Markus Soder, the conservative leader for the southern state of Bavaria, said the ruling could be a "blueprint" for the AfD and earlier this month, Saskia Esken, the co-chief of the ruling Social Democratic Party, came out in favor of a ban.

Mark Sleboda, an international relations and security analyst based in Moscow [told Sputnik's Critical Hour](#) that such plans bring Germany to "new, crazy Orwellian heights."

"There is definitely a threat to democracy in Germany but it's not the AfD," Sleboda exclaimed. "It's the forces within the current political establishment parties that want to ban the AfD as more and more German voters turn to them over dissatisfaction with the current government's policies."

The rise of the AfD, Sleboda argues, is a direct consequence of the German government's stance on Russia, not only regarding aid to Ukraine but also sanctions which have raised energy prices in Germany and the flood of Ukrainian refugees into Germany, which exacerbated the refugee and migrant issue in Germany and is a major pillar of the AfD's platform.

"Although the AfD has been growing over the years, its sudden explosion is almost certainly due to the current government's position on Russia, meaning including not just the support of the Kiev regime, but also the blowback of the sanctions [they] installed [and] the Ukrainian refugees they brought in that have caused the whole, you know, a further exacerbation of the migrant issue, the refugee issue, as well in Germany," said Sleboda.

Sleboda notes that the AfD now represents 23% of all Germans and is leading the polls in every state that was a part of East Germany, and the response from the establishment is to "ban it."

"That is how scared they are of the people, you know, starting to pay attention to these unorthodox ideas diverting from current liberal domestic policy, but also pro-US foreign policy," he explained.

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Biden Not Able 'Get the Job Done' on Two-State Solution

The US, UK, Australia, Canada, Bahrain and the Netherlands carried out another wave of attacks on eight Houthi targets in Yemen on Monday in response to ongoing attacks on

commercial vessels in the Red Sea. According to the Pentagon, they hit troop housing and damaged the Houthi missile and air surveillance capabilities.

Dr. Hasan Unal, a professor of political science and international relations at Bashkent University in Ankara, Turkiye told [Sputnik's Fault Lines](#) that he cannot see the US objective in the region clearly and that the country's actions "may actually disrupt the whole shipping in the region as a result of the US-led military action against the Houthis."

"Without any political objective, if you get involved in any military conflagration, then you are dead meat," he added. "So I don't see [how] the United States and its current allies ... are going to gain anything concrete out of what they do."

Co-host Jamarl Thomas countered that the US' objective "is clear" though it may be "silly."

"We want to deter the Houthis from trying to deter the Israelis. It's like a chain of deterrence," he then asked if media reports that US President Joe Biden is pushing Israel toward a two-state solution have any effect, or if internal Israeli politics override everything else.

Unal brought up the Israeli invasion and occupation of Southern Lebanon in 1982 and how then-US President Ronald Reagan demanded Israel turn course.

"President Reagan basically picked up the phone and called up the Israeli prime minister and said 'Stop this' and then they did it," but this time Unal says "it is not easy for the American administration, particularly Biden, to do something similar."

"Israel is running an existential risk" to its security by opposing the two-state solution, but "you would need real US leadership" to convince Israel to move that direction Unal explained. "I'm not quite sure Joe Biden's administration is the one that can actually get the job done."

Benjamin Netanyahu is constrained by the right-wing movement in Israeli politics that he helped foster, Unal argued, noting when he brought a map titled "The New Middle East" to the UN and included no Palestinian territories. That makes it difficult for the Israeli Prime Minister to step back from Gaza.

"On the one hand," Unal continued, "we see the Israeli public [is] getting really tired of this." The Israel hasn't been engaged this long since 1948, Unal explained. "Israel has been bleeding and it's been losing men. And despite the duration... there doesn't appear to be an exit out of the conflict."

"They thought they were going to basically crush the whole of Gaza within perhaps days, or in a couple of weeks or so. And they were going to basically, ethnically cleanse the region."

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New Hampshire Primary 'May Be the End' of Nikki Haley's 2024 Campaign

With the New Hampshire primary happening right now, the nation is about to get a look at what a two-person race between former US President Donald Trump and former South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley looks like.

With the number of supporters steadily increasing for former US President Donald Trump, the road to clinch the GOP nomination for the 2024 election could soon be over for former UN ambassador Nikki Haley, an insider told Sputnik.

If Haley wants to stay competitive in the race, she will need to outperform the polls. The latest polling average from a popular poll aggregator has her down more than 37 points.

Amy DeLaura, a journalist and video director of the Washington Examiner, [told Sputnik's Fault Lines](#) on Tuesday that she believes Haley's fight for the 2024 ticket may be at its end.

After Florida Governor Ron DeSantis dropped out and endorsed Trump on Sunday, DeLaura noted the development not only hurt her because DeSantis supporters would likely go to Trump, but it also prevented her from claiming a moral victory in New Hampshire that she could have used to build momentum going into her home state of South Carolina.

"It's a two-person race now. So she doesn't have the whole point with, 'Look, I'm beating DeSantis who a year ago was the man,'" DeLaura explained. "Now, even if she does get second place - because that's all there is to get now, I don't think it's going to help her. I think this may be the end of her campaign, and she's not going to make it to South Carolina."

Haley appeals to moderates, DeLaura said, but she will need more than that to defeat Trump.

"We've been speaking to voters who are saying, 'No, we want someone who [is] a real Republican.' They're calling her RINO [Republican In Name Only] when we speak to voters.... But I would say her biggest problem is just that Trump has this incredible fan base here in New Hampshire. And even with the governor's support here [for Haley] - Chris Sununu - it just doesn't seem to be enough."

Another big problem Haley had, DeLaura added later, was that she wasn't consistent in her messaging, calling her a "fair-weather fan."

"Like the time she said, 'We need to have identities for everybody on the internet.' And people just lost it. She couldn't even explain it, walked it back, and there are so many moments on the campaign trail where she has done that," DeLaura recalled. "It just really lost her, I think, some of the more Republican votes. But she's going to need those votes in order to get a majority."

Fault Lines co-host Jamarl Thomas asked DeLaura what she thinks Haley wants to get out of her campaign since the nomination is looking less likely.

"So, if you were to ask me that question three months ago, I would have said the vice presidency. But I think it's too late now. I think Trump holds grudges. He fields loyalty, he says that all the time in his speeches, on his little Truth Social posts," she explained. "Loyalty is very important, and I think it's absolutely too late for Nikki Haley to jump on his ticket. I really think that's what she was running for initially."

On the issue of who will be Trump's vice president, DeLaura, Thomas and fellow co-host Melik Abdul agreed that Sen. Tim Scott (R-SC) should be on his short list if he can get married before the election.

"I think he knows he has to be married, or at least engaged before he goes to the White House, and he's locking it down," DeLaura said. "Everyone was saying 'oh, he's too nice to be president' but he'd be a really good balance, I think, to Trump[.]"

Most New Hampshire polling sites will close at 7 p.m. local time, but some will remain open until 8 p.m.

The Biden Administration is not the one "to get the job done" when it comes to pushing Israel toward a two-state solution, Dr. Hasan Unal, a professor of political science and international relations at Bashkent University in Ankara, Turkiye told Sputnik's Fault Lines.

“Israel is running an existential risk” to its security by opposing the two-state solution, but “you would need real US leadership for that,” Unal explained. “I’m not quite sure Joe Biden’s administration is the one that can actually get the job done.”

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Unal explained that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is constrained by internal Israeli politics and it would take a forceful hand from the United States to get him to pull back from Gaza.

“President Reagan basically picked up the phone and called up the Israeli prime minister,” Unal explained, referring to the 1982 occupation of Southern Lebanon by Israel. “[He] said ‘Stop this’ and then they did it,” but for the Gaza situation, Undal said “It is not easy for the American administration, particularly Biden, to do something similar.”

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The ongoing debate among German establishment parties over if the Alternative for Deutschland (AfD) party should be banned lift the country to “new, crazy Orwellian heights,” Mark Sleboda, an international relations and security analyst told Radio Sputnik on Tuesday.

“There is definitely a threat to democracy in Germany but it’s not the AfD,” Sleboda exclaimed. “It’s the forces within the current political establishment parties that want to ban the AfD as more and more German voters turn to them over dissatisfaction with the current government’s policies.”

“That is how scared they are of the people, you know, starting to pay attention to these unorthodox ideas diverting from current liberal domestic policy, but also pro-US foreign policy,” Selboda explained, noting that the AfD is the preferred party for 23% of Germans.

The recent explosion of the AfD’s popularity, Sleboda argues, is a direct result of the country’s stance on Russia, not just on aid to Kiev but also related fallout from the conflict.

“[The AfD’s] sudden explosion is almost certainly due to the current government’s position on Russia, meaning including not just the support of the Kiev regime, but also the blowback of the sanctions [they] installed [and] the Ukrainian refugees they brought in that have caused the whole, you know, a further exacerbation of the migrant issue, the refugee issue, as well in Germany,” Sleboda said.

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UNRWA Says Facility Sheltering 10Ks of Displaced in Khan Younis Hit, Mass Casualties

UNITED NATIONS, January 24 (Sputnik) - The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) said on Wednesday that its facility housing some 10,000 displaced people in Khan Yunis has been hit and set ablaze, causing mass casualties.

"Fighting is escalating in Khan Younis #Gaza - the @UNWRA Training Centre sheltering 10Ks of displaced people has just been hit - buildings ablaze and mass casualties – safe access to/from the centre has been denied for 2 days - people are trapped," UNRWA Director Thomas White wrote on X.

On Tuesday, the Israel Defense Forces said that it had managed to encircle Khan Yunis and eliminate "dozens of terrorists" over the past day.

On the same day, UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini said that six displaced people were killed when a UN-run shelter located in the city of Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip was hit during Israeli military operations on Monday.

On October 7, Palestinian movement Hamas launched a large-scale rocket attack against Israel from the Gaza Strip while its fighters breached the border, attacking both civilian neighborhoods and military bases. As a result, over 1,200 people in Israel were killed and some 240 others abducted. The IDF launched retaliatory strikes, ordered a complete blockade of Gaza, and started a ground incursion into the Palestinian enclave with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas fighters and rescuing the hostages. Over 25,000 people have been killed so far in the Gaza Strip as a result of Israeli strikes, local authorities said.

On November 24, Qatar mediated a deal between Israel and Hamas on a temporary truce and the exchange of some of the prisoners and hostages, as well as the delivery of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip. The ceasefire was extended several times and expired on December 1.

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US Destroyer Transits Through Taiwan Strait – 7th Fleet

WASHINGTON, January 24 (Sputnik) – The USS John Finn transited through the Taiwan Strait on Wednesday in order to "uphold freedom of navigation for all nations as a principle," according to a release from the US 7th Fleet.

"USS John Finn (DDG 113) conducted a Taiwan Strait transit on January 24 through waters where high-seas freedoms of navigation and overflight apply in accordance with international law. The ship transited through a corridor in the Strait that is beyond the territorial sea of any coastal State. John Finn's transit through the Taiwan Strait demonstrates the United States' commitment to upholding freedom of navigation for all nations as a principle," the release

stated.

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US Senator Suggests Lawmakers Will Need Much More Time to Pass Supplemental Funding Bill

WASHINGTON, January 24 (Sputnik) – Utah Senator Mike Lee suggested that he and his fellow Republican senators would need substantial time to review the stalled supplemental funding bill before taking any action on the floor.

“Tomorrow I will offer this resolution at the Senate GOP conference meeting: 'Resolved, the Senate Republican conference will oppose cloture on any supplemental spending bill containing border provisions without adequate time to review and offer and vote on floor amendments,'" Lee wrote in a social media post late Tuesday.

This threatens to draw out the months-long stalemate over the bill, as a cloture procedure would limit debate and ensure swift consideration of the legislation on the Senate floor.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell's has called on his fellow Republicans to pass the supplemental bill as quickly as possible.

But many Republicans in both the Senate and House are expecting a crackdown on the migrant crisis at the Mexico border in exchange for their support on President Joe Biden's request for more than \$100 billion in additional national security funds, including \$60 billion in Ukraine aid.

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US Appeals to China to Intercede With Iran on Houthi Attacks – Reports

WASHINGTON, January 24 (Sputnik) – The United States has asked China to use its influence with Iran to rein in the Houthi attacks on ships transiting through the Red Sea, the Financial Times reported Wednesday, citing US officials.

Washington has repeatedly appealed to top Chinese officials, with US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and his deputy Jon Finer meeting with CCP International Department head Liu Jianchao this month, the report said.

However, it does not appear that China has interceded with Iran thus far, the report added.

Iran denies sending weapons to the Houthis. It has also rejected the West's allegations of Iran's involvement in Houthi attacks on merchant ships in the Red Sea, saying that the group is acting on its own.

China has only issued mild public statements on ensuring safe passage for ships in the Red Sea, the newspaper observed.

The sources said that while Washington would continue to press the issue with China, it was

not optimistic that there would be meaningful change.

Commenting on the report, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said that Beijing has been in close communication with various parties and worked actively to alleviate the tension in the Red Sea. China calls for an end to "disturbance" caused to civilian ships and urges "relevant parties to avoid adding fuel to the fire" in the Red Sea and jointly safeguard the vital shipping route in accordance with the law, it said.

The ministry stressed that the Red Sea tensions are a manifestation of the spillover of the Gaza conflict, and the top priority should be to stop the hostilities as soon as possible.

In an apparent reference to US-UK strikes on Houthi positions, Beijing said that the UN Security Council has never authorized the use of force by any country against Yemen and stressed that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Yemen and other coastal countries of the Red Sea needs to be respected.

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Trump Says 'Very Honored' by New Hampshire Primary Win

CONCORD, N.H., January 24 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump told Fox News that he is very honored to win the Republican party primary race in the US state of New Hampshire. "I'm very honored by the result," Trump said on Tuesday night when asked to comment on his win.

Trump also said he looks forward to "going against the worst president in the history of our country."

Trump won a majority of the votes in the primary, with approximately one-quarter of votes reporting, the Associated Press reported at 8:30 p.m. ET, after final polls closed in the state.

Former US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley congratulated Trump on his victory, but vowed to continue her campaign despite the loss.

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US Warns Maduro That Recent Arrest of Officials Risks Sanctions Relief Deal - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 24 (Sputnik) - The United States warns Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro that the recent arrest of officials and other public figures may risk the partial sanctions relief deal made with Washington last year, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Tuesday.

The United States reached a deal with Maduro to ease certain sanctions on Venezuela's oil industry in exchange for the South American country holding a competitive, internationally monitored presidential election in 2024 and releasing so-called political prisoners.

"Actions that run counter to the spirit and the letter of the Barbados Agreement will have

consequences," Miller said in a release, adding that "we urge Maduro and his representatives to adhere to the electoral roadmap agreement, including by announcing a clear timeline for the 2024 presidential election, and to reinstate all political candidates."

Miller said the United States is deeply concerned by the arrest and detention of at least 33 Venezuelans, including members of the democratic opposition, civil society, former members of the military, and journalists. Miller added that arrests without due process run contrary to the October 2023 electoral roadmap agreement signed between the Unitary Platform and Maduro's representatives.

However, on Monday, Venezuelan Prosecutor General Tarek William Saab said that the country's security forces had thwarted preparations for five terrorist attacks and conspiracies, with 27 people detained in the case. The detainees are believed to have recruited Venezuelan military personnel and planned, in coordination with the US authorities, assassination attempts on Maduro, Venezuelan Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino Lopez and Freddy Bernal, the governor of the Venezuelan state of Tachira.

Padrino has alleged that US oil giant Exxon Mobil sponsored preparations for the 2023 foiled assassination attempts on Maduro with the aim of exploiting the rich resources of the disputed Essequibo region.

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Trump, Biden Set to Win New Hampshire Primaries With Half of Ballots Reported - AP

WASHINGTON, January 24 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump and current officeholder Joe Biden are both expected to win their respective party's primary election in New Hampshire, with more than half of all ballots processed in both races, the Associated Press reported.

Trump and Biden are projected to win the primary elections with a majority of votes, the report said on Tuesday night.

Trump beat former US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley in the primary, gaining further momentum after his Iowa caucus victory last week.

Biden did not appear on the ballot in New Hampshire due to the state defying the Democratic party's primary schedule. However, he is still expected to win the primary via write-in votes, the report said.

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US Conducts Strikes Against 2 Houthi Anti-Ship Missile Sites in Yemen - CENTCOM

WASHINGTON, January 24 (Sputnik) - The US military carried out strikes against two Houthi anti-ship missile sites in Yemen, the US Central Command (CENTCOM) said in a press release.

"On January 24 at approximately 2:30 a.m. (Sanaa time), US Central Command forces conducted strikes against two Houthi anti-ship missiles that were aimed into the southern Red Sea and were prepared to launch," the release said on Tuesday night.

US forces identified the missiles in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen and determined that they were an imminent threat to commercial vessels and US Navy ships in the region, the release added.

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Trump Says After Winning Primary Election New Hampshire 'Very Special Place' for Him

CONCORD, N.H., January 24 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump said after winning the New Hampshire Republican party primary race that the state is very special and important to him.

"It's a very special place to me, it's very important," Trump said on Tuesday night.

Trump won a majority of the votes in the primary, with approximately one-quarter of votes reporting, the Associated Press reported at 8:30 p.m. ET, after final polls closed in the state.

Former US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley congratulated Trump on his victory, but vowed to continue her campaign despite the loss.

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Trump Says 'Very Honored' by New Hampshire Primary Win on Tuesday

CONCORD, N.H., January 24 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump told Fox News that he is very honored to win the Republican party primary race in the US state of New Hampshire.

"I'm very honored by the result," Trump said on Tuesday night when asked to comment on his win.

Trump also said he looks forward to "going against the worst president in the history of our country."

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### Biden Projected to Win New Hampshire Democratic Party Primary - CNN

CONCORD, N.H., January 24 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden is projected to win the New Hampshire Democratic party primary election, CNN reported.

Biden has won a majority of Democratic primary votes in the election as of 9:00 p.m. ET, despite his status as a write-in candidate, the report said on Tuesday. US Congressman Dean Phillips has received approximately 20% support, with 9% of votes in, the report said on Tuesday evening.

Biden did not appear on the ballot due to New Hampshire defying the Democratic party's primary schedule.

US media also projected former President Donald Trump to win the New Hampshire Republican Party primary, moving the two candidates closer to a potential rematch in the 2024 presidential race.

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### Biden Campaign Says Trump Win in New Hampshire Indicates He Will Be Republican Nominee

WASHINGTON, January 23 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump's victory in the Republican party primary race in New Hampshire likely guarantees he will be the Republican nominee in the 2024 US presidential election, the Biden campaign said in a statement.

"Tonight's results confirm Donald Trump has all but locked up the GOP nomination, and the election denying, anti-freedom MAGA [Make America Great Again] movement has completed its takeover of the Republican Party," the Biden campaign said on Tuesday night

Trump won a majority of the votes in the New Hampshire primary, with approximately one-quarter of votes reporting, the Associated Press reported at 8:30 p.m. ET, after final polls closed in the state.

Former US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley congratulated Trump on his victory, but vowed to continue her campaign despite the loss in New Hampshire.

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### Haley Congratulates Trump on New Hampshire Primary Victory, Says Race 'Far From Over'

CONCORD, N.H., January 24 (Sputnik) - Former US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley congratulated former President Donald Trump on his victory in the New Hampshire Republican party primary on Tuesday evening, vowing to continue her campaign despite the loss.

"I want to congratulate Donald Trump on his victory tonight. He earned it," Haley said during remarks, after US media called the primary for Trump. "This race is far from over."

Haley added that there are dozens of states yet to hold their nominating contests. Trump has won a majority of votes in the primary, with approximately one-quarter of votes reporting, the Associated Press reported at 8:30 p.m. ET, after final polls closed in the state.

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Associated Press Calls Race in New Hampshire Primary in Favor of Trump

CONCORD, N.H., January 24 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump has won the Republican party primary in the US state of New Hampshire, according to the Associated Press. Trump squared off one-on-one against former US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley in the New Hampshire primary on Tuesday after several other Republican candidates dropped out of the race.

This is Trump's second straight victory in the Republican primaries following his record-setting win in the Iowa caucus.

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Trump Says 'Word is We Are Doing Really Well' in New Hampshire Primary

CONCORD, N.H., January 24 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump said in a statement that early figures in the New Hampshire primary show that he is doing really well after the first polls closed.

"So ridiculous that Democrats and Independents are allowed to vote in the Republican primary, especially since crooked Joe Biden has abandoned New Hampshire - but word is we are doing really well!!!!" Trump said via Telegram on Tuesday evening.

Trump is leading former US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley 54% to 45% with about 17% of votes reporting.

All voting stations in New Hampshire have closed at 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time.

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Trump Leads Haley in New Hampshire Primary Ahead of Poll Closures - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 24 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump leads former US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley in the New Hampshire Republican Party primary election, ahead of final poll closures at 8:00 p.m. ET, Fox News reported.

Trump holds approximately 53% of the votes and Haley holds approximately 46% support, with

more than 12% of the votes reporting in, the report said on Tuesday night, citing the Associated Press.

Last week, Trump won the Iowa Republican caucus, beating Haley and prompting Florida Governor Ron DeSantis to suspend his campaign and endorse the former president.

President Joe Biden has won approximately 58% of New Hampshire Democratic party primary votes as a write-in, the report said. US Congressman Dean Phillips holds approximately 21% of support in the Democratic primary, the report added.

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One Polling Station in New Hampshire Primary Shows Haley Over Trump - Official

CONCORD, N.H., January 24 (Sputnik) - A polling station in Concord, New Hampshire, favored former US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley over former President Donald Trump, John Williams, chairman of Concord's Ward 4, told Sputnik after the polling station closed.

"The total number of Republican ballots cast was 622, so therefore it looks like Nikki Haley received just over 50 percent with Trump not far behind," Williams said on Tuesday evening.

Williams said his ward cast 312 votes for Haley and 293 votes for Trump.

In addition, Democratic voters in Ward 4 mostly submitted write-ins for President Joe Biden, who was not on the ballot.

Biden's rivals Congressman Dean Philips had 113 votes and US author Marianne Williamson had 26 votes in Ward 4, according to Williamson.

Several polling stations in New Hampshire closed at 7:00 p.m. Eastern Time while others will close at 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time.

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New Hampshire Primary Has 'Very Strong' Turnout as Voting Continues - State Official

CONCORD, January 24 (Sputnik) - New Hampshire Secretary of State spokesperson Anna Sventek told Sputnik that there is a "very strong" turnout of voters in the state's primary election.

"We can confirm turnout looks very strong but we don't have specific figures at this moment," Sventek said on Tuesday evening.

The highlight of the evening is a one-on-one contest between former President Donald Trump, who won the Iowa caucus with 51% of the vote, and former US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley.

Several polling stations in New Hampshire closed at 7:00 p.m. ET while several others will remain open until 8:00 p.m. ET.

Earlier on Tuesday, New Hampshire Secretary of State David Scanlan said he predicted a record voter turnout in the primary elections.

John Williams, chairman of Ward 4 in the capital city of Concord told Sputnik earlier that he saw a 43% voter turnout in his ward and that the rest of the city may experience similar levels of voter turnout.

Williams also said about 90% of ballots submitted for Democrats were write-ins, although he could not specify which candidate they were for.

President Joe Biden is not on the ballot for the New Hampshire primary since the Democratic National Committee decided that the opening primary for their political party will be held in the South Carolina primary on February 3.

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#### US Congress Taiwan Caucus Chairs Say Arrived in Taiwan to Reaffirm Support After Election

WASHINGTON, January 24 (Sputnik) - US Congressional Taiwan Caucus co-chairs Ami Bera and Mario Diaz Balart arrived in Taiwan to reaffirm the United States' support for the island after the elections, the lawmakers said in a statement.

"The aim of the trip is to reaffirm US support for Taiwan following their successful democratic elections, express solidarity in their shared commitment to democratic values, and explore opportunities to further strengthen the robust economic and defense relationship between the United States and Taiwan," the statement said on Tuesday.

The lawmakers will also engage with senior officials and business leaders during the trip, the statement said.

On January 13, Taiwan held an election, in which voters chose Lai Ching-te of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) as president.

The Congressional Taiwan Caucus looks forward to working with Lai to strengthen US-Taiwan relations, the lawmakers said in a previous statement on the election.

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#### Biden Campaign Rally in Virginia Disrupted 8 Times by Protesters Demanding Gaza Ceasefire

WASHINGTON, January 24 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden's campaign rally in Virginia was disrupted eight times by protesters demanding a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, according to a White House press pool report.

Biden held a campaign rally in Manassas, Virginia, on Tuesday where he delivered a speech about women's abortion rights.

Biden's speech faced a handful of lengthy delays after he was repeatedly interrupted by protesters yelling in the crowd about Israel's invasion of Gaza.

Each time the demonstrators interrupted Biden, his supporters chanted "four more years" to flood the yelling from the protesters.

Protests have taken place many times across the United States, including large marches in Washington with hundreds of thousands of people attending, demanding a ceasefire in Gaza in light of the thousands of civilians killed and wounded amid Israel's military operations there.

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Iranian Minister Says US, UK Made Mistake in Attacking Yemen, Warns of Regional Escalation

UNITED NATIONS, January 24 (Sputnik) - Iran expressed concern that the United States and the United Kingdom committed a strategic error by launching military attacks on Yemen, Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said during a meeting of the UN Security Council.

"The United States and the United Kingdom made a strategic mistake with the military attack on Yemen, which will result in the risk of further expanding the scope of the role in the region," Amir-Abdollahian said on Tuesday.

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Biden Says Would Veto Any National Abortion Ban Passed in Congress

WASHINGTON, January 24 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said at a campaign rally that he would veto any national abortion ban passed by Congress.

"As long as I have power of the presidency, if Congress were to pass a national abortion ban, I will veto it," Biden said during remarks in the state of Virginia on Tuesday.

Abortion rights are still at risk, Biden said, adding that former President Donald Trump endorsed a federal abortion ban.

However, Trump recently said the issue of abortion rights should be resolved at the state level.

Trump during his time in the White House appointed three conservative Supreme Court justices who helped overturn the Roe v. Wade ruling, with which the federal government protected a woman's right to have an abortion. As a result, the issue of access to abortion was left to the US states to decide.

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US Military Forces Conducted 'Necessary' Strikes on Three Militant Sites in Iraq- Austin

WASHINGTON, January 24 (Sputnik) - US Military forces conducted 'necessary and proportionate' strikes on three Ketaib Hezbollah facilities in Iraq, Secretary of Defense Lloyd

Austin said on Tuesday.

"Today, at President Biden's direction, U.S. military forces conducted necessary and proportionate strikes on three facilities used by the Iranian-backed Kataib Hezbollah militia group and other Iran-affiliated groups in Iraq. These precision strikes are in direct response to a series of escalatory attacks against U.S. and Coalition personnel in Iraq and Syria by Iranian-sponsored militias," said Austin in a release.

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Johnson Says Biden Administration's US Border Plan Involves Billions in Funding, Amnesty

WASHINGTON, January 24 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration's plan to address increasing migration at the United States' southern border involves billions more in funding and mass amnesty, US House Speaker Mike Johnson said in a statement.

On Monday, US Vice President Kamala Harris, who has helped lead the Biden administration's border and immigration policy, said that the US must put more resources at the border and support a pathway to citizenship.

"Vice President Harris has had three years to secure the border... Yet, when asked about her solutions, she recommended that Congress grant mass amnesty and spend taxpayer dollars to process — not stop — more illegals. Her 'solution' is to spend billions of additional taxpayer dollars and incentivize the lawlessness and chaos," the statement said on Tuesday.

Harris' plan demonstrates why the Biden administration cannot be trusted to solve the situation at the border, the statement said. The plan would attract millions of more migrants and further harm US national and economic security, the statement said.

The White House and US Congress are negotiating a supplemental funding bill, which also includes border security measures. However, lawmakers have yet to reach a final agreement on the legislation.

Lawmakers have also pursued impeachment efforts against US Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas for allegedly failing to secure the border.

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White House Welcomes Turkish Parliament's Approval of Sweden's Bid to Join NATO - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, January 24 (Sputnik) - The White House welcomes the Turkish parliament's vote to approve Sweden's bid to join NATO following many months of the issue being in limbo, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said via X.

"We welcome the Turkish parliament's vote approving Sweden's application to join NATO. This has been an important priority for POTUS [president of the United States]. Sweden is a strong, capable defense partner whose membership in NATO will make the US and the Alliance safer

and stronger," Sullivan said on Tuesday.

Earlier in the day, Turkey's Grand National Assembly ratified the protocol on Sweden's accession to NATO. Now it is up to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to put the parliament's decision into force by signing it or not within the next 15 days.

Sweden, along with Finland, submitted its NATO application in May 2022, several months after Russia launched its military operation in Ukraine. Finland became a member of the alliance in April 2023. Sweden's application has been pending ratification by Turkey and still requires Hungary's ratification.

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Pentagon Says Can Not Confirm Reports of SDF Partnering With Damascus in Anti-IS Fights

WASHINGTON, January 24 (Sputnik) - The US Defense Department says that it can not confirm reports of the US discussing plans for the Syrian Democratic Forces to partner with Damascus, Pentagon Press Secretary Pat Ryder said in a press briefing on Tuesday.

Al-Monitor reported on Monday citing sources with knowledge of the deliberations that the Pentagon is discussing a plan for the SDF to partner with Damascus in the fight against the Islamic State (ISIS- banned in Russia ).

"I don't have anything on that. I haven't seen these reports," Ryder said.

The sources confirmed with the media outlet that the outlines of the new proposed strategy were raised during a meeting convened by the White House National Security Council at the request of the Pentagon for an Interagency Policy Committee (IPC) . State Department representatives, the CIA representatives as well as other relevant stakeholders, participated in the meeting , according to the report.

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), composed primarily of the Kurdish People's Defense Units (YPG), backed by the United States, control most of the Raqqa and Al-Hasakah provinces as well as several residential areas in the provinces of Aleppo and Deir ez-Zor. In particular, they control the greater part of the cities of Al-Hasakah and Qamishli. The official government in Damascus does not recognize the self-proclaimed autonomous administration of the northern and eastern Syria.

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Trump's Trial in New York Defamation Case Delayed Until Thursday - Court Filing

WASHINGTON, January 24 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump's trial in the defamation case involving E. Jean Carroll has been delayed until Thursday, a court filing revealed.

"Docket Annotation: Trial is continued to Thursday, 1/25/2024 @ 9:30 AM. Trial will not be held on Wednesday, 1/24/2024," the court filing said.

The US federal district court in the southern district of New York had initially delayed the trial from Monday to Wednesday after one of the jurors in the trial became ill.

Trump lawyer Alina Habba said she was not feeling well and told Kaplan that her parents have COVID-19, but since then she has tested negative for the coronavirus, according to the media reports.

Earlier this month, the second trial of Jean Carroll, who has accused Trump of harassment and libel, began in New York as she seeks additional compensation.

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Canada Transportation Safety Board to Investigate Crash in Northwest Territories – Notice

WASHINGTON, January 24 (Sputnik) – The Transportation Safety Board (TBS) of Canada said on Tuesday that it was deploying a team of investigators to investigate a plane crash in the country's Northwest Territories (N.T.W.).

"The Transportation Safety Board of Canada (TSB) is deploying a team of investigators to investigate an accident involving a BAE Jetstream aircraft registered to Northwestern Air Lease," the Safety Board's notice said. "The TSB is gathering information and assessing the occurrence."

TBS said the incident involving the aircraft happened in the vicinity of Fort Smith in Canada's N.W.T.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), the Canadian Rangers and the Royal Canadian Airforce (RCAF) all responded to reports of loss of contact with an aircraft outside of Fort Smith earlier in the day, media reported, citing an RCAF spokesperson.

Search efforts were supported by a CC 138 Twin Otter from 440 Squadron in Yellowknife and a CC 130J Hercules out of 424 Transport and Rescue Squadron in Trenton, as well as a CC 130H from 435 Transport and Rescue Squadron in Winnipeg, media further reported.

An RCMP spokesperson confirmed to media that the plane was later discovered West Fort Smith. However, details regarding the number of passengers, injured or dead were not disclosed.

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Trump Says Does Not View Haley as Potential Threat Ahead of New Hampshire Primary

WASHINGTON, January 24 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump said he does not perceive former Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley as a potential threat in the New Hampshire primary.

"No and I don't care if she stays. Let her do whatever she wants," Trump said on Tuesday.

Trump's remarks came in response to a reporter's question about whether he views Haley as a

threat in their contest to win the 2024 Republican party presidential nomination.

Later on Tuesday, New Hampshire will hold the first primary vote in the United States. The last polls are set to close at 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time (1:00 GMT on Wednesday).

Trump and Haley are the primary contenders after Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy suspended their campaigns after the Iowa caucus.

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#### SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, January 24 (Sputnik) -

##### CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

\* The United States and its allies on the Ukraine Defense Contact Group are planning to provide an initial operating capability for the Ukraine F-16 program this year, US Assistant Secretary of Defense Celeste Wallander said on Tuesday.

\* Germany announced during the Ukraine Defense Contact Group meeting its intention to lead a new armor capability coalition and Latvia to lead a drone capability coalition to support Ukraine in the conflict with Russia, Wallander said.

\* Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's territorial claims on Russia are an attempt to hide the problems the Kiev regime is facing, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

\* Russia has not discussed the ongoing situation in Ukraine with former US President Donald Trump, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told CBS in comments on Trump's statement about ending the conflict in Ukraine within 24 hours.

\* The explosions in Kiev and Kharkiv cannot be considered a response by Russia to Ukraine's strikes on the Donbas given that the Russian forces do not target civilian objects, Peskov said.

##### GAZA

\* Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on Tuesday held a meeting with Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi and the two agreed that it is important to reach a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

\* Lavrov held a meeting with Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyadh al-Maliki in New York and the two sides noted the need to end the bloodshed in the Gaza Strip as soon as possible, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

\* The United States is impeding all efforts to stop the ongoing conflict in Gaza, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said.

\* The United States is committed to preventing any reduction in Gaza's territory and will not lend support to such measures, NSC spokesperson John Kirby said.

\* The United States would support a ceasefire in Israel and Gaza for 30, 60, or even 90 days, Kirby said.

\* Israel must stop the occupation of the Gaza Strip, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said.

#### RUSSIA-EUROPE RELATIONS

\* Many European countries are currently making statements about an alleged "danger" from Russia, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Tuesday in comments on German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius' recent statement about a possible military conflict with Russia.

\* Russia values the fact that there are some voices in Europe that talk about the need to hold a dialogue to resolve the conflict in Ukraine, Peskov said.

#### RED SEA ATTACKS

\* UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Tuesday described the situation in the Red Sea as "deeply worrying" and called for a de-escalation of the current violence.

\* The United Kingdom's military action against Houthi targets taken on Monday is legal, just like London's previous strikes conducted on January 12, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's office said.

\* Cargo traffic through the Red Sea decreased by 22% in the past month due to Houthi attacks, and is expected to shrink further as shipping companies opt for other routes, European Commission Vice-President Valdis Dombrovskis said.

#### RUSSIA-EGYPT TALKS

\* Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Tuesday that he is in constant contact Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Sisi, including on issues related to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

\* Sisi said that he is deeply grateful to Putin for implementing the Dabaa nuclear power plant (NPP) project.

\* Russia expects that Sisi will attend the BRICS summit in Russia's Kazan scheduled for later in the year, Putin said.

\* The volume of orders by Russian state nuclear corporation Rosatom from Egyptian companies for the construction of El Dabaa NPP has exceeded \$1.2 billion, Rosatom head Alexey Likhachev said.

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Russia Proposes Consultations At Ministerial Level To Restore Palestinian Unity - Lavrov

UNITED NATIONS, January 23 (Sputnik) - Russia expressed the need for consultations at ministerial level to solidify decisions made by key regional players and formulate practical measures in backing the restoration of Palestinian unity, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on Tuesday.

"We should be convening consultations at the ministerial level to consolidate the decisions of key regional players and to come up with practical steps in support of the restoration of Palestinian unity," Lavrov said during the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) meeting.

Lavrov also said there will be a necessity for an international conference on the Middle East settlement process.

"The objective of such a conference would be the proclamation of a Palestinian state, coming

up with measures to ensure reliable security for Israel and the normalisation of Israel's relations with all Arab states and also Muslim states as a whole," Lavrov added.

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Lavrov Says World Cannot Bury Palestinian Sovereignty Idea Like It Buried Minsk Agreements

UNITED NATIONS, January 23 (Sputnik) - The international community cannot bury the idea of Palestinian sovereignty like it did with the Minsk agreements on Ukraine, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on Tuesday.

"We cannot bury the idea of Palestinian statehood just like we buried the Minsk agreements," Lavrov said during a meeting of the UN Security Council.

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One Arrested After Shots Fired, Molotov Cocktail Thrown Inside Edmonton City Hall - Police

WASHINGTON, January 23 (Sputnik) – Police in the city of Edmonton, the capital of Canada's province of Alberta, said on Tuesday that they arrested one individual after shots were fired and a Molotov cocktail was thrown inside the City Hall.

Earlier on Tuesday, the Edmonton Police Service (EPS) said it was investigating a weapons complaint at the City Hall. They also said that one person had been arrested.

"UPDATE (12:08 P.M.): Police continue to clear City Hall. We can confirm shots were fired and a Molotov cocktail was thrown inside City Hall," EPS said in an update shared on social media. "No injuries have been reported at this time".

Law enforcement will continue to provide updates on the situation as events unfold, EPS said. Police further urged the public not to provide details on the location and activities of the deployed officers in order to preserve theirs and public safety.

Roadways around the City Hall have been closed, EPS said, adding that it advises the public to avoid the area.

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Biden's Withdrawal From New Hampshire Primary Results in Low Voter Activity—Election Clerk

CONCORD, New Hampshire, January 23 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden's withdrawal from the primary in the state of New Hampshire has led to a low Democratic voter turnout, an electoral official told a Sputnik correspondent on Tuesday.

“I guess because Joe Biden is not on the ballot, not as many democrats are coming,” the official said.

The official also noted that at about noon local time, Republican voters have been more active compared to Democrats.

Earlier in the day, chairman of Ward 4 in the city of Concord John Williams said that voter activity in the primary for presidential candidates in the US state of New Hampshire will be lower than predicted.

Both Republicans and Democrats will hold their primaries in New Hampshire on January 23. Biden will not appear on the state’s ballot among the other 21 candidates following a scheduling conflict between the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and local officials, who claim that state law requires them to hold primaries at least seven days before any other state and not on February 6 or three days after the South Carolina’s primary.

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#### Haley Wins First Six New Hampshire Primary Election Votes in Clean Sweep Over Trump

CONCORD, New Hampshire, January 23 (Sputnik) - Former US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley won the first six votes counted in the New Hampshire primary election on Tuesday, beating former US President Donald Trump in a clean sweep to start the nominating contest. The first six votes were cast at midnight in Dixville Notch, a small community in the north of the state, which has practiced midnight voting for decades. Haley won all of the votes, which were counted and announced live.

Both the Republican Party and the Democratic Party are holding primary elections in New Hampshire on Tuesday. The final polls close at 8:00 p.m. ET. In New Hampshire, registered party members can only vote in their party’s primary but independent voters can vote in either party’s primary.

The first hours of the primaries saw a relatively weak flow of voters at polling stations, according to a Sputnik correspondent at the scene.

Although the New Hampshire Secretary of State predicted 40-50% turnout, current figures show a lower trajectory, Concord Ward 4 chairman John Williams told Sputnik. The polling station saw an equal balance between Democratic and Republican ballots, Williams said.

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#### Israel Should Not Decide Fate of Palestinians in Gaza - French Foreign Minister

UNITED NATIONS, January 23 (Sputnik) - Israel should not determine the fate of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip, French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Stephane Sejourne said on Tuesday.

"It is not for Israel to decide as to the fate of the Palestinian population in Gaza, where they should live on their land," Sejourne said during a meeting of the UN Security Council.

The French diplomat pointed out that no one besides the Palestinians themselves can decide how they should be governed in the future.

Sejourne also said that the international community has to do everything possible to prevent the current conflict in Gaza from expanding to the region.

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Russia Concerned by Israeli Leadership Calling Into Question 2-State Solution - Lavrov

UNITED NATIONS, January 23 (Sputnik) - Russia is voicing concerns about the Israeli leadership's stance to call into question the two-state solution formula to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on Tuesday.

"We're concerned by the Israeli leadership calling this formula into question," Lavrov said during a meeting of the UN Security Council.

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Guterres 'Deeply Troubled' by Israel's Inhumane Treatment of Palestinian Detainees

UNITED NATIONS, January 23 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Tuesday expressed serious concerns over reports of Israel's inhumane treatment of Palestinians detained during military operations in Gaza.

"I am also deeply troubled by reports of Israel's inhumane treatment of Palestinians detained during military operations," Guterres told a UN Security Council meeting.

Since the Israel-Hamas conflict escalated on October 7, OHCHR and rights groups have pointed to numerous reports from the north of Gaza of mass detentions, ill-treatment and forced disappearances of thousands of Palestinian men and boys, and a number of women and girls, at the hands of Israel Defense Forces.

OHCHR said in December that in some instances the treatment of the detainees could amount to torture. Many of those detained were forced to strip down to their underwear, were blindfolded and tightly handcuffed, and were filmed and photographed in deliberately humiliating positions prior to being transported to unknown places of detention.

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### US Impedes All Efforts to Stop Bloodshed in Palestine - Lavrov

UNITED NATIONS, January 23 (Sputnik) – The United States is impeding all efforts to stop the ongoing conflict in Gaza, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on Tuesday.

"Until now, our council has failed to provide an adequate answer to this truly momentous challenge. The reason is known: it is the stance of the US that is blocking all efforts and initiatives to stop bloodshed in the occupied territories," Lavrov said at a UN Security Council meeting.

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### Pentagon Says Will Conduct Review to Determine Cause of Sentinel Program Cost Increase

WASHINGTON, January 23 (Sputnik) - The Department of Defense (DoD) will conduct a "robust review" to determine what caused the significant increase in cost of the US Sentinel Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) program, DoD spokesperson Pat Ryder said on Tuesday.

"Last week, the US Air Force and DoD notified Congress that the Sentinel program had exceeded initial cost projections. As a result of that, DoD will conduct a robust review to determine what caused the cost growth and the way ahead for the program," Ryder said during a press briefing.

Bloomberg reported last week that the program to replace the Minuteman III missiles is estimated to cost nearly \$131.5 billion or 37% more than the original cost.

The US Air Force plans to acquire 660 test and operational Sentinel missiles, for which 400 new launch facilities will need to be built, the report said.

The Sentinel missiles are under development by the Northrop Grumman Corp., which has been tasked with replacing the existing stocks of the Minuteman missiles from the 1970s, the report added.

The Sentinel program is considered to be a key component in the modernization of the US air-land-sea nuclear triad, according to the report.

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### Pentagon Says Destroyed Over 25 Houthi Missile Launch Facilities Since January 11-Pentagon

WASHINGTON, January 23 (Sputnik) - The US Defense Department assesses that it has destroyed more than 25 Houthi missile launch facilities since January 11, Pentagon Press Secretary Pat Ryder said in a press briefing on Tuesday.

"Since January 11, we assess that we've destroyed or degraded over 25 missile launch and deployment facilities, more than 20 missiles, plus we've struck unmanned aerial vehicle coaster,

radar and air surveillance capabilities as well as weapons storage areas with good effects ,”  
Ryder said.

On Monday, the United States and the United Kingdom, with support from other allies, carried out additional strikes against Houthi targets in Yemen at eight different sites.

US strikes on Houthi targets in Yemen will not expand beyond degrading their maritime attack capability at the present moment in order to avoid any potential further escalation, a senior US Defense Department official told reporters on Monday.

The US-led coalition strikes on Monday targeted Houthi missiles, unmanned aerial systems and weapons storage areas, the official said, adding that early assessments show that the strikes achieved the desired effect of degrading the Houthis' capabilities.

The US is ready to take further action if deemed necessary, according to the Defense Department.

The Houthi movement, also known as the Ansar Allah movement, vowed in November to attack any ships associated with Israel until it halts military actions in the Gaza Strip. This led US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin to announce the creation of a multinational operation to secure navigation in the Red Sea. US and UK forces later launched major strikes against Houthi positions in a bid to degrade the rebels' ability to target commercial vessels.

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Canadian Military to Donate 10 Multi-Role Boats Worth \$15Mln to Ukraine - Defense Minister

WASHINGTON, January 23 (Sputnik) - The Canadian military will donate ten multi-engine boats worth C\$20 million (US\$ 14.8 million) in support of Ukraine maritime operations, National Defense Minister Bill Blair said on Tuesday.

"At today's meeting of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, I announced that Canada will donate ten multi-engine boats to Ukraine, valued at \$20 million, to assist Ukraine in maritime operations including search and rescue, troop and cargo transport, surveillance and reconnaissance," Blair said via the social media platform X.

Blair also announced that the Canadian military would contribute to the F-16 Training Coalition by providing instructors and airplanes as well as support staff in Denmark's and France's training efforts.

National Defense said in a statement that training is set to begin in February and continue through 2025, and the assistance to the coalition has been estimated at US\$11.1 million.

In addition, Canada has decided to provide English-language training to Ukrainian Air Force personnel at the Canadian Forces Language School, Blair said, further noting that Ottawa would be joining the Air Force and Armor capability coalitions.

Since the start of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine in February 2022, the Canadian government has committed more than US\$1.86 billion in military assistance to Kiev, proving Leopard 2 main battle tanks, armored combat support vehicles, anti-tank weapons, M777 howitzers and associated ammunition, among other items.

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Canadian Government to Appeal Ruling That Use of Emergencies Act 'Unreasonable' – Freeland

WASHINGTON, January 23 (Sputnik) – The Canadian Government will appeal a federal court's ruling that its use of the Emergencies Act to end the "Freedom Convoy" protests in 2022 was "unreasonable" and violated Charter rights, Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland said on Tuesday.

"We respect very much Canada's independent judiciary. However, we do not agree with this decision, and respectfully, we will be appealing it," Freeland said during a press conference held shortly after the ruling was made public.

Freeland said the 2022 protests posed an "incredibly" serious threat to Canada's economic safety, national security and public safety, adding that the government acted with the aim of securing the country's interests.

When asked whether she regretted freezing the bank accounts and credit cards of Canadians who took part in the truckers-led protests, and whether she respected civil liberties in her role as finance minister at that time, Freeland said she believed her actions were necessary.

"I was certain after a lot of deliberation with colleagues and many others that we took the right decision. I was certain at the time ... and I remain certain today," Freeland said.

Minister of Justice Arif Virani said the federal court's ruling contradicted the findings of the Public Order Emergency Commission, which was established by Ottawa to investigate Trudeau's use of the emergency measures to end the nationwide protests against COVID-19 mandates.

Commissioner Paul Rouleau concluded that Trudeau had reasonable grounds to believe that the protests created a national emergency that threatened the security of Canada and necessitated the use of special temporary measures.

"Justice Rouleau conducted a very public, comprehensive, and transparent investigation into the reasonableness of the government's decision. That decision stands at odds with the decision that was rendered today," Virani said adding that the appeal would proceed on the basis of the Commission's determinations.

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Pentagon Says Not Tracking Specific Material Support After Ukraine Contact Group Meeting

WASHINGTON, January 23 (Sputnik) - The Defense Department is not tracking any specific material support resulting from today's meeting of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, spokesman Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder said on Tuesday.

"I'm not tracking any specific material support resulting from today's meeting," Ryder said

during a press briefing.

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McConnell Says Has No Announcement on US Presidential Election, Trump Endorsement

WASHINGTON, January 23 (Sputnik) - US Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell said on Tuesday that he has no announcement to make at this time about his stance on the 2024 US presidential election, in which former President Donald Trump and former Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley are vying for the Republican party nomination.

"I don't have any announcement to make on the presidential election," McConnell said during a press conference, when asked about having not yet endorsed Trump.

Trump has received a number of endorsements from Republican lawmakers, including from the US House Republican leadership team and the House Freedom Caucus chair.

Trump will square off against Haley in the New Hampshire primary on Tuesday evening, which McConnell said he will be watching with great interest.

Last week, Trump beat Haley and Florida Governor Ron DeSantis in the Iowa caucus, prompting the latter to drop out of the race.

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Pentagon Says Tracking Reports of New Attack on Al-Asad Base in Iraq

WASHINGTON, January 23 (Sputnik) - The United States is tracking reports of a new attack on its Al-Asad base in Iraq, Pentagon Press Secretary Pat Ryder said on Tuesday.

"I am tracking reports today have another attack at Al-Asad," Ryder said in a press briefing.

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US Senators Blast Biden Air Force Nominee Dalton for Poor Performance, Bad Calls - Hearing

WASHINGTON, January 23 (Sputnik) - Members of the US Senate Armed Services Committee on Tuesday expressed doubts about confirming Biden administration nominee Melissa Dalton as the next Under Secretary of the Air Force.

"Regrettably, her performance in her [current] position gives me pause," Senator Roger Wicker said. "When she was at the post, the Department of Defense was caught flat footed as a Chinese balloon traversed the continental United States and flew over military sites. When Congress sought more information, she along with others in the department, avoided

constitutionally authorized oversight."

Wicker added that he was also concerned about Dalton's handling of responsibilities on the US southwestern border with Mexico and she had also failed to deliver the homeland planning guidance until the end of 2023, over a year after the release of the national defense strategy.

"This track record casts a shadow on this nomination. On top of it all she has virtually no experience with the Air Force," Wicker said.

The senator said he finds Dalton's performance in her previous role so unsatisfactory that he has "real doubts it is going to get any better in the next role."

Senator Mike Rounds said during the hearing that Dalton had not been forthright to the Armed Services Committee.

Rounds warned Dalton that she had "some work to do" to regain the committee's confidence.

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Guterres Says Israel Denies Access to Majority of Northern Gaza Humanitarian Missions

UNITED NATIONS, January 23 (Sputnik) - The United Nations needs access to northern Gaza to deliver lifesaving assistance to civilians but Israel denies access to the majority of humanitarian missions, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Tuesday.

"We need access to the north. In the first two weeks of January, out of 29 planned humanitarian missions to deliver lifesaving supplies north of Wadi Gaza, only 7 were accomplished, fully or partially," Guterres told the UN Security Council.

The majority of missions were denied access by Israel, the UN chief added.

Dozens of humanitarians have also been waiting for months to receive their visas from Israel, he said.

Guterres reiterated his call for rapid, unhindered, expanded and sustained humanitarian access throughout Gaza.

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UN Secretary-General Urges Israel to Stop Occupation of Gaza

UNITED NATIONS, January 23 (Sputnik) - Israel must stop the occupation of the Gaza Strip, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Tuesday.

"Israel's occupation must end," Guterres said during a meeting of the UN Security Council.

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## US Senator Says Border Security-Ukraine Aid Talks Still Have Handful of Issues to Resolve

WASHINGTON, January 23 (Sputnik) - US Senator Chris Murphy said on Tuesday that senators and White House officials involved in negotiations for a deal on the US border security and Ukraine aid bill still have a handful of issues to resolve.

"We still have a handful of issues to resolve," Murphy said in a press conference. "I am hopeful that our Republican colleagues will work with us to wrap up the supplemental, both the policy changes and the funding necessary to effectuate the policy changes, in the next few days so that we can answer the call for Ukraine."

US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer added that he would give senators enough time to review the draft text of the final version of the supplemental bill before it goes to the floor for a vote.

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## Yellen Briefs Shmyhal on US Efforts to Provide More Aid to Ukraine - Treasury

WASHINGTON, January 23 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen has briefed Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal about ongoing efforts in Congress to secure more aid for Ukraine, the Department of the Treasury said on Tuesday.

"Today, US Secretary of the Treasury Janet L. Yellen met virtually with Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal," the Treasury Department said in a press release. "Secretary Yellen reiterated the [Biden] administration's ongoing efforts to secure \$11.8 billion in direct budget support as part of the national security supplemental request before Congress and underscored the importance of Congress acting on financial support for Ukraine as quickly as possible."

Earlier on Tuesday, US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said the negotiations between the White House and the Senate on a deal for supplemental funds to provide Ukraine more than \$60 billion and strengthen US border security are ongoing.

However, Schumer pointed out that although significant progress has been made, much work still remains to be done.

Last week, President Joe Biden said he hopes the Senate and White House will reach a deal this week on his supplemental request to Congress for more than \$100 billion for US national security priorities.

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## US to Work With Turkey on Reopening Black Sea to Commercial Shipping – Pentagon

WASHINGTON, January 23 (Sputnik) – The United States is willing to work with Turkey and other littoral countries of the Black Sea to create conditions for "completely" reopening it to

commercial shipping after disruptions amid the Ukraine conflict, US Assistant Secretary of Defense Celeste Wallander said on Tuesday.

"We want to work with the littoral countries of the Black Sea, including Turkey, on conditions under which we can move away from the state of conflict in which Turkey decided to ... invoke that provision of the Montreux Convention ... so that there is a permissive environment in which we can effectively reopen the Black Sea to commercial shipping, completely," Wallander said during a press briefing.

Earlier in January, the administration of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan informed NATO allies that minesweepers donated to Ukraine by the United Kingdom would not be allowed to sail through the Turkish straits of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles in line with the 1936 Montreux Convention.

Turkey invoked Article 19 of the Convention to shut the straits to all foreign warships after the start of the Russian military operation in Ukraine in February 2022.

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US Has Already Lost Race for Hypersonic, Directed Energy Weapons - Senator

WASHINGTON, January 23 (Sputnik) - The United States has already lost the race to develop hypersonic and directed energy weapons to its rivals, Independent Senator Angus King said during a hearing of the US Senate Armed Services Committee on Tuesday.

"We are woefully behind on the issue of directed energy," King said. "On hypersonics and directed energy, we have lost the race or we are badly losing the race. We have a lot of catching up to do. This should be a hair on fire catching up priority,"

In the Red Sea, the US Navy was currently forced to use multi-million dollar missiles to shoot down inexpensive drones fired by the Houthi rebels in Yemen that cost less than 1% of the price of the US systems, King said.

"The missiles we are using are costing \$2 million to \$4 million each. That is like using a howitzer to shoot a duck," King added.

Earlier on Tuesday, the National Defense Industrial Association and the Emerging Technologies Institute said in a new report that the Biden administration and the Defense Department had failed to give US business and industry the clear direction and leadership it needs to develop directed energy weapons systems and as a result it will not be able to produce such weapons for a long time to come.

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Guterres Says Red Sea Situation 'Deeply Worrying,' Calls for De-Escalation

UNITED NATIONS, January 23 (Sputnik) – UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Tuesday described the situation in the Red Sea as “deeply worrying” and called for a de-escalation of the current violence.

“The situation in the Red Sea is also deeply worrying,” Guterres said during a UN Security Council meeting.

The UN chief in particular noted that Houthi attacks were disrupting global trade and that the United States and United Kingdom have launched airstrikes on Yemen.

He urged all parties to reduce tensions and called for a halt to attacks on civilian vessels.

“De-escalation is essential – and all attacks on merchant and commercial vessels in the Red Sea must cease immediately,” he said.

The Houthi movement, which controls large parts of northern and western Yemen, vowed in November 2023 to attack any ships associated with Israel until it halts military actions in the Gaza Strip. This led US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin to announce the creation of a multinational operation to secure navigation in the Red Sea.

US and UK forces later launched major strikes against Houthi positions in Yemen in a bid to degrade the rebels' ability to target commercial vessels.

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US Senator Urges Publishing Top Officials' Schedules After Austin Hospitalization Incident

WASHINGTON, January 23 (Sputnik) - US Senator Joni Ernst on Tuesday called on the Biden administration to publish the schedules of all federal department heads following the incident involving Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin's hospitalization for cancer treatment that was kept secret for three days.

“Biden and his bureaucrats can reschedule their beach getaways until January 2025 when they all will be out of office, permanently. In the meantime, I’m calling on the White House to start posting the schedules of the heads of every agency and department,” Ernst said via the social media platform X.

Ernst said she was shocked to learn that Austin spent much of the past month recovering from surgery, which he failed to disclose even to the Deputy Secretary or to Biden.

Ernst said she is awaiting a response from the Office of Management and Budget by February 23 and expects to receive an explanation of additional steps to get federal employees back in the office.

“Since even President Biden can’t trust leaders to be where they say they are, you must audit those calendars, on a quarterly basis at minimum, and let us know if leaders continue to pull the wool over our eyes,” Ernst said.

Austin was hospitalized on January 1 due to an infection following prostate cancer surgery in late December and has not been in office since then, prompting numerous calls for his resignation.

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Guterres Welcomes Any Effort to Help Hostage Release Amid Reports of Israeli Truce Offer

UNITED NATIONS, January 23 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Tuesday that he would continue efforts to facilitate the release of remaining hostages held in Gaza amid reports of Israel proposing to Hamas a two-month pause in hostilities in exchange for freeing the hostages.

"It was also reported yesterday that Israel is proposing a two-month pause in hostilities in exchange for a phased release of all remaining hostages," Guterres told a UN Security Council meeting. "I will continue, in my limited capacity, to pursue all efforts to contribute to their release."

The meeting at the United Nations Security Council is a ministerial meeting with several foreign ministers attending, including top Russian diplomat Sergey Lavrov.

On October 7, Palestinian movement Hamas launched a large-scale rocket attack against Israel from the Gaza Strip while its fighters breached the border, attacking both civilian neighborhoods and military bases. As a result, over 1,200 people in Israel were killed and some 240 others abducted.

Israel launched retaliatory strikes, ordered a complete blockade of Gaza, and started a ground incursion into the Palestinian enclave with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas fighters and rescuing the hostages. Over 25,000 people have been killed in the Gaza Strip as a result of Israeli strikes, local authorities said.

On November 24, Qatar mediated a deal between Israel and Hamas on a temporary truce and the exchange of some of the prisoners and hostages, as well as the delivery of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip. The ceasefire was extended several times and expired on December 1. More than 100 hostages are still believed to be held by Hamas in Gaza.

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Senator Says Must Replace Boeing With Alternative After Failure to Build Long-Range Tanker

WASHINGTON, January 23 (Sputnik) - Boeing has failed to successfully build the KC-46 as a reliable next generation long range tanker for the US Air Force over the past decade and now the US government and Congress need to find another company to do the job, Senator Tommy Tuberville told the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) on Tuesday.

"To continue to give a company [Boeing] second, third [and] fourth chances to build something they obviously can't build we need to look at another alternative," Tuberville, an Alabama Republican, said.

Tuberville said Boeing had now spent ten years unsuccessfully trying to solve major problems with the aircraft which is meant to replace the aging Boeing KC-135 air refueling fleet but they

had still failed to do so.

"For ten years we have been trying to build this KC-46. We need a long range tanker," he said.

In 2019, the US Government Accountability Office (GAO) said in a report that Boeing was delivering the KC-46 Pegasus air tankers to US Air Force (USAF) with "critical deficiencies".

Consequently the decision to approve full-rate KC-46 production was postponed until July or September 2024.

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Trump Says He Would Never Ask DeSantis, Ramaswamy to Withdraw From Presidential Race

WASHINGTON, January 23 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump said on Tuesday that he never would have asked Governor Ron DeSantis and Vivek Ramaswamy to pull out of the presidential race.

"I would never ask anybody to pull out, I didn't ask Ron [DeSantis] to pull out, I didn't ask for Vivek [Ramaswamy] to pull out," Trump said on CNN.

On Sunday, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis announced he chose to drop out of the 2024 US presidential race and endorse Republican front-runner Trump in his bid for reelection.

Last week, entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy also suspended his campaign and endorsed Trump after the former president's victory in the Iowa Republican caucus vote.

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US Still Delivering Military Capabilities to Ukraine Contracted in 2022-2023 - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, January 23 (Sputnik) – There are still military capabilities being delivered as scheduled to Ukraine that were contracted back in 2022-2023, US Assistant Secretary of Defense Celeste Wallander said on Tuesday.

"There is still a pipeline of capabilities that were contracted for either in 2022 or 2023 and those continue to be delivered at pace as scheduled," Wallander said during a press briefing.

The United States is unable to continue supplying Ukraine with the same amount of new military capabilities at the pace that Washington has been able to in 2022 and 2023, Wallander said.

The Biden administration announced its latest package a military assistance for Kiev in December noting that it had exhausted all the funds authorized by Congress.

In October, the White House asked Congress for more than \$100 billion in supplemental funding, including more than \$60 billion for Ukraine, but Republican lawmakers have refused to approve the request without measures to strengthen border security and restrict immigration.

Western countries have been providing military aid to Ukraine since the start of the Russian military operation in February 2022. The aid evolved from artillery munitions and training in 2022

to heavier weapons, including tanks, later that year and in 2023. The Kremlin has consistently warned against continued arms deliveries to Kiev.

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Trudeau's Use of Emergencies Act to Quell Protesters 'Unreasonable'-Court Ruling

WASHINGTON, January 23 (Sputnik) - The invocation of the Emergencies Act by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau giving extraordinary powers to his government to quell the so-called "Freedom Convoy" protesters was unreasonable, the Federal Court of Canada ruled on Tuesday.

In early 2022, Canada saw a massive wave of protests led by the so-called "Freedom Convoy," demanding that the federal and provincial governments lift all COVID-19 mandates. For over a month, truckers and protesters blockaded numerous highways, border crossings and major cities, including the downtown and Parliament Hill of the capital - Ottawa.

On February 14, Trudeau invoked the Emergencies Act for the first time in Canada's history, revoking it on the 23rd after the protests had been cleared. Although it allowed the government to swiftly put an end to the protests, opposition parties, civil society and other actors questioned the necessity and legitimacy of Trudeau's use of such measures.

"It is declared that the decision to issue the Proclamation and the associated Regulations and Order was unreasonable and ultra vires the Emergencies Act," point 4 under the court ruling section, said. "It is declared that the regulations infringed section 2 (b) of the Charter and declared that the Order infringed section 8 of the Charter and that neither infringement was justified under section 1," point 5 reads.

However, the Court's ruling comes in contradiction to the Public Order Emergency Commission established by Ottawa to inquire into the reasons which led Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to enact the emergency measures he used to end the nationwide protests against COVID-19 mandates.

Commissioner Paul Rouleau had determined in late April 2022 that Trudeau's Cabinet had reasonable grounds to believe that there was a national emergency arising from threats to the security of Canada, that necessitated the taking of special temporary measures.

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White House Says Biden's \$60Bln Ukraine Aid Request 'Adequate'

WASHINGTON, January 23 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration believes that its request for more than \$60 billion in new military funding for Ukraine is "adequate," White House Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"I won't negotiate in public here," Kirby said during a briefing, when asked if the White House is

open to scaling back its request for Ukraine assistance amid Republican calls. "The president's supplemental request that we put forward way back in October was thoughtful, it was carefully done and crafted ... We believe that was an adequate request."

US Senators and Biden administration officials have been negotiating for weeks to reach a deal to provide the White House with more than \$100 billion in supplemental funds for Ukraine, Israel, and other priorities, including US border security.

Republican lawmakers have made it clear they will only support Biden's supplemental request if it includes meaningful policy changes to stop the influx of migrants arriving at the US southern border.

US House Speaker Mike Johnson, after attending a meeting with Biden last week, told reporters that the current status quo on Ukraine is unacceptable.

Johnson also said Congress needs a clearer explanation from the Biden administration about its strategy in Ukraine, the endgame, and accountability for US funds, adding that US border security must be the top priority.

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Pentagon Failed to Give Industry Needed Direction on Directed Energy Weapons - Report

WASHINGTON, January 23 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration and the Department of Defense have failed to give US business and industry the clear direction and leadership it needs to develop Directed Energy Weapon (DEW) systems and as a result it cannot produce such weapons for a long time to come, the National Defense Industrial Association (NDIA) and the Emerging Technologies Institute (ETI) said in a new report on Tuesday.

"Without a clear and sustained demand signal from DoD, [the Department of Defense] and therefore a return on investment, industry is hesitant to make the investments necessary to have secure, healthy, and resilient DEW supply chains," the report said.

The Defense Department has often wavered in its commitment to fielding DEWs at scale, the report charged.

"(C)urrent DEW supply chains, including critical raw materials, the manufacturing base and workforce, and testing infrastructure, are incapable of supporting DEW deployment at scale. ... The current DEW supply chains are only able to produce small quantities of systems with long lead times," the report warned.

Addressing these vulnerabilities was going to be a formidable task and therefore a series of concrete steps by the US government, industry, and academia was necessary, the report recommended.

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### US, Allies to Provide Initial F-16 Operating Capability to Ukraine in 2024 – Pentagon

WASHINGTON, January 23 (Sputnik) – The United States and its allied members of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group are planning to provide an initial operating capability for the Ukraine F-16 program in 2024, US Assistant Secretary of Defense Celeste Wallander said on Tuesday.

“We are aiming to provide an initial operating capability for Ukraine with its F 16 program in 2024, which would entail trained pilots, platforms, but in addition, trained maintainers and sustainers, infrastructure and spare parts, ammunition, all of these pieces that the coalition's responsible for,” Wallander said during a press briefing.

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### Germany, Latvia to Lead Two New Capability Coalitions to Support Ukraine – Pentagon

WASHINGTON, January 23 (Sputnik) – During the 18th iteration of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group Meeting on Tuesday, Germany announced its intention to lead a new armor capability coalition and Latvia to lead a drone capability coalition to support Ukraine in its conflict with Russia, US Assistant Secretary of Defense Celeste Wallander said.

“Today, Germany announced that it would lead the armor capability coalition and Latvia has announced that it will lead a drone coalition,” Wallander said during a press briefing.

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### US Does Not Want To See Territory Of Gaza Reduced In Any Way, Does Not Support That -Kirby

WASHINGTON, January 23 (Sputnik) - The United States is committed to preventing any reduction in Gaza's territory and will not lend support to such measures, Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"We [the US] do not want to see the territory of Gaza reduced in any way, we [the US] won't support that," Kirby said.

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### Biden Authorized Latest Round of Strikes on Houthi Positions - White House

WASHINGTON, January 23 (Sputnik) - The latest round of strikes against Houthis was authorized by President Joe Biden, White House Strategic Communications Coordinator John

Kirby said on Tuesday.

"These additional strikes yesterday required additional conversations and discussions across the national security team and the president made the decision to authorize this particular round of strikes very recently," Kirby told a briefing, adding that the discussions included Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin.

The Pentagon is still conducting a battle damage assessment, Kirby stated.

On Monday, the United States and the United Kingdom, with support from other allies, carried out additional strikes against Houthi targets in Yemen at eight different sites.

US strikes on Houthi targets in Yemen will not expand beyond degrading their maritime attack capability at the present moment in order to avoid any potential further escalation, a senior US Defense Department official told reporters on Monday.

The US and allied strikes on Monday targeted Houthi missiles, unmanned aerial systems and weapons storage areas, the official said, adding that early assessments show that the strikes achieved the desired effect of degrading the Houthis' capabilities.

The US is ready to take further action if deemed necessary, according to the Defense Department.

The Houthi movement, also known as the Ansar Allah movement, vowed in November to attack any ships associated with Israel until it halts military actions in the Gaza Strip. This led US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin to announce the creation of a multinational operation to secure navigation in the Red Sea. US and UK forces later launched major strikes against Houthi positions in a bid to degrade the rebels' ability to target commercial vessels.

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White House Would Support Ceasefire for 30, 60, or 90 Days Between Israel and Gaza - Kirby

WASHINGTON, January 23 (Sputnik) - The United States would support a ceasefire in Israel and Gaza for 30, 60, or even 90 days, White House Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"Sure, absolutely. If that would require it. That would give us the opportunity to get hostages out and get more aid in. We would absolutely support the humanitarian pause, have a longer length than the week that we were able to accomplish," said Kirby during a press briefing.

The comments come after Kirby was asked by a reporter if the White House would support a ceasefire of 30, 60, or 90 days.

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US Having 'Sober, Serious' Talks About Another Middle East Hostage Deal - Kirby

WASHINGTON, January 23 (Sputnik) - The United States is engaged in sober and serious discussions to facilitate a hostage deal between Israel and Hamas, White House Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"The conversations are very sober and serious about trying to get another hostage deal in place," Kirby said during a press briefing.

On October 7, Palestinian movement Hamas launched a large-scale rocket attack against Israel from the Gaza Strip while its fighters breached the border, attacking both civilian neighborhoods and military bases. As a result, over 1,200 people in Israel were killed and some 240 others abducted. Israel launched retaliatory strikes, ordered a complete blockade of Gaza, and started a ground incursion into the Palestinian enclave with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas fighters and rescuing the hostages. Over 25,000 people have been killed in the Gaza Strip as a result of Israeli strikes, local authorities said.

On November 24, Qatar mediated a deal between Israel and Hamas on a temporary truce and the exchange of some of the prisoners and hostages, as well as the delivery of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip. The ceasefire was extended several times and expired on December 1. More than 100 hostages are still believed to be held by Hamas in Gaza.

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Voter Activity in New Hampshire Primary to Be Lower Than Predicted – Ward Moderator

CONCORD (New Hampshire) January 23 (Sputnik) – Voter activity in the primary for presidential candidates in the US state of New Hampshire will be lower than predicted, John Williams, the chairman of Ward 4 in the city of Concord, told a Sputnik correspondent on Tuesday.

"The [New Hampshire] Secretary of State was predicting somewhere around 40-50% turnout. The numbers we are having right now show maybe a slightly lower trajectory than that for today's election," Williams said.

According to Williams, so far it is hard to tell who is voting more active, Democrats or Republicans.

"So at this point in time, it's a little hard to tell..." Williams said. "However, I can say just by observing the check-in process here, I think so far, we've had an equal balance between Democratic ballots and also Republican ballots being taken."

At the same time, Williams refused to comment on the reaction of voters after US President Joe Biden decided to skip the primaries in New Hampshire noting, that voters can always select whatever person they would like by writing their name into the ballot.

Both Republicans and Democrats will hold their primaries in New Hampshire on January 23. Biden will not appear on the state's ballot among the other 21 candidates following a scheduling conflict between the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and local officials, who claim that state law requires them to hold primaries at least seven days before any other state and not on February 6 or three days after the South Carolina's primary.

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#### Flow of Voters In New Hampshire Remains Weak After Polls Opened

NEW HAMPSHIRE, January 23 (Sputnik) - The first hours of the primaries in New Hampshire were marked with a relatively weak flow of voters in polling stations, a Sputnik correspondent reported from the scene.

Many people were able to vote after the polling stations opened but less and less came in afterwards, a representative at one of the election commissions explained.

"Lunchtime expected to be active again, and everything will calm down later until 5 pm," she said.

Every voter receives a sticker with drawings selected from a competition among children in New Hampshire, as well as sweets.

A few activists can be seen near several polling stations holding rosters in support of different candidates, including US President Joe Biden, who refused to participate in the primaries in New Hampshire.

One of the activists, pensioner and former doctor Sarah Henry, pointed out that Biden continues to be a "great president" despite his decision to skip the primaries in her state. "All of us have a chance to stand up for him, and I am doing this," she said.

The state of New Hampshire holds the first primary vote in the nation on Tuesday. The last polls are set to close at 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time (1:00 GMT) on Wednesday.

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#### Comer Says Hollywood Lawyer Kevin Morris Loaned Hunter Biden \$5Mln in 2019-2020

WASHINGTON, January 23 (Sputnik) - US House Oversight Chairman James Comer said on Tuesday that his committee learned that Hunter Biden obtained at least \$5 million from Hollywood lawyer and Democrat donor Kevin Morris in the run-up to the 2020 presidential election.

"Kevin Morris's massive financial support to Hunter Biden raises ethical and campaign finance concerns for President Joe Biden. Shortly after meeting Hunter Biden at a Joe Biden campaign event in 2019, Kevin Morris began paying Hunter Biden's tax liability to insulate then-presidential candidate Joe Biden from political liability. Kevin Morris admitted he has 'loaned' the president's son at least \$5 million," Comer said in a statement.

According to the lawmaker, the generous financial support to Hunter Biden to pay for his personal expenses and many years of overdue tax liabilities helped Morris to gain access to Joe Biden and the White House, proving once again the corruptibility of the Biden family.

Kevin Morris admitted in an interview with the committee that the loans provided to Hunter Biden have a payment term in 2025, or after the next presidential election, and even can be

forgiven.

On Thursday, the House Judiciary and Oversight committees said in a joint release that Hunter Biden will appear before Congress for a deposition on February 28 amid an ongoing investigation into his financial dealings.

On December 13, Biden was set to provide testimony to the panels as part of their probe into alleged criminal activity by the Biden family. However, he instead held a press conference, where he said he would only answer questions in an open hearing.

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Biden Admin. Working on Order to Safeguard American Data from Foreign Threats-Reports

WASHINGTON, January 23 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is working on an executive order to stop foreign adversaries from accessing sensitive personal data related to Americans and those connected to the US government, Bloomberg reported on Tuesday.

According to the report, the White House considers the exploitation of sensitive data by other nations a significant threat to national security and foreign policy, accessing such highly sensitive data can lead to espionage, cyberattacks, and blackmail, granting them a strategic advantage over the US.

The report said that the administration intends to reveal an upcoming executive order instructing the US Attorney General and Department of Homeland Security to impose undisclosed restrictions on data transactions that pose potential threats to national security.

Furthermore, the report said the draft order addresses how foreign adversaries legally access Americans' personal data utilizing intermediaries like data brokers, third-party vendor agreements, employment contracts, or investment agreements.

The report added that entities owned, controlled, or operated by countries of concern frequently have an obligation to provide such data to the government upon request.

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Canada's Cap on International Students 'Part of Responsible Govt.' – Trudeau

WASHINGTON, January 23 (Sputnik) – Canada's decision to impose a two-year cap on the intake of international students is part of what a responsible government must do to properly manage immigration, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Tuesday.

“Over the past few years, we've seen a massive increase in the number of international students and that's why we are studying the numbers for the next two years,” Trudeau told reporters. “This is part of what a responsible government must do to ensure immigration continues to function smoothly and Canadians continue to support it.”

Trudeau added that the measures aim to ensure that international students can fully benefit

from their time in Canada and that Canadian authorities are equipped to handle them in appropriate ways.

On Monday, Canadian Minister of Immigration Marc Miller announced that Ottawa would enforce a two-year cap on the intake of international students over the next two years. The measure will cap the number of study permits at 364,000 this year, a decrease of 35% from 2023.

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Russia Says US Must Stop Hostilities, Ceasefire Vetoes in Order to Stabilize Middle East

WASHINGTON, January 23 (Sputnik) – Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, in an interview with CBS, said that the US must stop its hostilities and stop vetoing UN ceasefire resolutions in order to resolve the crisis in the Middle East, the Russian Foreign Ministry said on Tuesday.

“Stop the fighting. Don't use veto when a resolution is proposed to declare humanitarian ceasefire. You used vetoes twice. There is no reaction from the Security Council as regards to demand a ceasefire. And of course, don't drag on like your predecessors did for decades on creating the Palestinian state,” Lavrov said.

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Canadian Government to Revive 'Team Canada' Strategy Ahead of US Elections – Trudeau

WASHINGTON, January 23 (Sputnik) – Ottawa will revive its “Team Canada” approach to relations with the United States ahead of the upcoming US presidential election in a bid to ensure a mutually beneficial relationship regardless of the outcome, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Tuesday.

Trudeau also announced that he and other ministers during today's Cabinet retreat would hear ideas from a panel of experts on Canada-US relations on how to ensure that Ottawa is ready for whatever choice American voters make.

"I have asked our Minister of Trade and our Minister of Industry ... working with Ambassador Kirsten Hillman who's here today for the panel to pull together as we did a number of years ago, a Team Canada approach including businesses, entrepreneurs, organized labor, civil society groups, different orders of government to make sure that we're ready to continue to benefit as Canadians from a strong relationship with the United States," Trudeau said during a press conference.

Hillman alongside Trade Minister Mary Ng and Industry Minister Francois Philippe-Champagne will be tasked under the new approach with defending Canadian interests in the US, as well as advancing opportunities for Canadian businesses and workers.

Trudeau acknowledged that the upcoming US election poses challenges for Canada, but

stressed his government would be ready to deal with anything "tossed" at it.

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US Sanctions Russian Citizen Ermakov for Alleged Hack of Australian Insurance Firm

WASHINGTON, January 23 (Sputnik) - The United States on Tuesday imposed sanctions against Russian citizen Alexander Ermakov for his alleged role in a 2022 cyberattack on Australian private health insurance company Medibank, the Treasury announced in a release.

"Today, the Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), in coordination with Australia and the United Kingdom, designated Alexander Ermakov (Ermakov), a cyber actor who played a pivotal [role] in the 2022 ransomware attack against Medibank Private Limited, an Australian healthcare insurer," the release said.

It also accused Russia of providing a safe haven to ransomware actors and enabling ransomware attacks by "cultivating and co-opting criminal hackers."

In November 2022, hackers demanded that Medibank pay a ransom of \$9.7 million for the personal data of 9.7 million of its customers. The company refused to pay the ransom.

Australian Federal Police Commissioner Reece Kershaw said the hackers were a group of cybercriminals based in Russia.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said that the Australian government had not provided any evidence of the involvement of Russian hackers nor had Canberra used official channels to address the matter.

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Trump Reelection Would Bring 'Unpredictability,' Canada to Prepare - Trudeau

WASHINGTON, January 23 (Sputnik) – The return of former President Donald Trump as a result of the 2024 US election would involve a "certain amount of unpredictability," but Canada is preparing for any eventuality, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Tuesday.

"Obviously, Mr. Trump represents a certain amount of unpredictability, but we will make sure we're pulling together and preparing for whatever eventualities," Trudeau told reporters.

The prime minister stressed the need to further develop constructive cooperation with the United States, regardless of the administration in place.

Trudeau said his government must prove to its American counterparts that bilateral economic integration and partnerships throughout different sectors are beneficial to both countries.

"What worked best, what works with all American presidents is to demonstrate that what is good for Canada is also good for the United States and vice versa," Trudeau stated.

The prime minister recalled that he has worked with three different administrations in the White House, all with their own perspectives and approaches. However, despite differences, Canada's

commitment to "standing up" for its interests and values remains unchanged, he added.

On Saturday, Canadian Ambassador to the US Kirsten Hillman urged Ottawa to reinvigorate relations with the team of former President Trump so as to be ready to work together if he wins this year's election, given the US's importance as Canada's closest economic partner and ally.

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Annual Doomsday Clock Reiterates 'Unprecedented Level of Risk' – Atomic Scientists Group

WASHINGTON, January 23 (Sputnik) – The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists issued its annual Doomsday Clock assessment on Tuesday, warning that the world continued to face an "unprecedented level of risk" from dangerous technologies of its own making.

"Today, we once again set the Doomsday Clock to express a continuing and unprecedented level of risk. It is 90 seconds to midnight," Rachel Bronson, president and CEO of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, said in a live broadcast.

In January, the clock was moved to 90 seconds to midnight, the closest ever to global catastrophe, with the Bulletin citing the conflict in Ukraine as a potential point of nuclear escalation and an undermining of efforts to combat climate change.

Bronson said the Ukraine conflict still "poses an ever-present risk of nuclear escalation" and cited the war in Gaza as "further illustration of the horrors of modern war, even without nuclear escalation." Additionally, nuclearized countries were engaged in modernization programs that threatened a new nuclear arms race.

Bronson also noted that the planet experienced its hottest year on record in 2023, and recent advances in AI could "improve or threaten civilization" in various ways.