

**3/19/24 Tuesday**

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British Public Spent £19m in Missile Costs for UK's Yemen War - Report

The UK has reportedly poured millions into protecting Israeli ships in the Red Sea since the conflict between Israel and Palestine first began in October, with UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak becoming Britain's ninth prime minister to use the RAF to bomb Yemen.

A [report](#) published to Declassified UK on Tuesday claims that the British public has spent up to £19m in missile costs alone for airstrikes over Yemen. As many as 53 missiles—some of which costs over a million British pounds each—have been fired by the Royal Navy and Air Force, the report said.

However the actual amount that Britain has spent on their defense costs is currently classified, the report clarifies, and will be published when the Ministry of Defence (MoD) releases its annual accounts in July.

The report also found that UK Secretary of State for Defence Grant Shapps is being forced to borrow money from other departments in order to pay for the war including from the Treasury's Contingencies Fund after having "requested funding from the Special Reserve for [the] Red Sea".

Schnapps said in parliament that so far the Royal Air Force (RAF) has struck 40 targets across Yemen in four waves of air strikes since January. The RAF used Paveway IV missiles which cost about £70,000 each in 2014. If 40 of those missiles were fired, the approximate cost would be £2.8m, the report writes.

US-led operations in the Red Sea to counter the Houthi blockade and attacks inside Yemen have failed to stop the militia's operations. Since January 12, when US and British strikes inside Yemen began, the Houthis have targeted at least a dozen commercial and military vessels in the region.

Meanwhile, at sea [the British Royal Navy](#) has used its destroyer HMS Diamond to shoot down Houthi drones beginning on December 16, and used Sea Viper missiles that cost at least £1 m each. The destroyer fired between three and eight Sea Vipers during a series of engagements in December and January.

Diamond has since been replaced by a frigate, HMS Richmond, which shot down two Houthi drones on March 9, and a video shared by the MoD apparently shows the ship firing four Sea Ceptor missiles.

The report estimates that Sea Ceptors cost about £2m each, and so if the replacement frigate fired four the cost would have been £8m. "In total, the munitions Britain has fired at the Houthis since December may have cost up to £19m," the report writes.

"There's always money to wage war abroad and never funds to fight poverty at home," Kenny MacAskill, an Alba MP for East Lothian told the report.

"The economic cost to us of launching air strikes against some of the poorest people on the planet compounds the environmental damage to our planet of flying thousands of miles to do

so,” MacAskill added. “Meanwhile, folk here go hungry and our planet burns. The elite are enriched but the rest pay the price.”

Yemen’s Houthi rebels said in November that they would attack any Israeli-linked or Israeli-bound ships passing through the Red Sea in retaliation for the Israeli [invasion of the Gaza Strip](#), leading the US to announce the creation of a multinational operation to secure navigation in the area. The [US and the UK have launched multiple strikes](#) against Houthi positions in a bid to degrade their ability to target commercial vessels.

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‘Losing a War is No Fun’: West Ignores Their ‘Biggest Political Disaster’

Russia’s economy has survived Western sanctions “far better” than predicted, recent reports show. Meanwhile, the European Union’s (EU) economy has been suffering drastically, causing working class voters to turn against aid for Ukraine.

The Greenville Post published an [article](#) on Tuesday which claims the European Union has become the site of the 21st century’s “biggest political disaster”. The article writes that Paris, France—which once saw leftist planning agendas filled with “protests, gatherings and strikes”—now seems to be a city where there is little talk of the “economic, political and confidence collapse” of the biggest economic bloc in the world.

Daniel Lazare, an independent investigative journalist and author, sat down with [Sputnik’s The Critical Hour](#) on Tuesday and discussed the recent piece.

“Well, I think Europe is losing the war,” said Lazare. “And losing a war is no fun. The situation in Ukraine is going very poorly. Russia clearly is winning, its economy is doing very well. The European economy, by contrast, is stalling. And if [Russia does make progress in the war](#), if the Ukraine government breaks in some way, then the results for Europe will be devastating.”

“I mean, this is not a faraway war for [the EU]. It’s a faraway war for America. But it’s a war on the doorstep of the EU. And the prospect of a Ukrainian collapse would cause panic in Poland, but also in Berlin and Paris, and [Macron has been making crazy noises](#) about sending troops to Ukraine, which is completely nuts. But then again, the guy is desperate and doesn’t know quite how to respond. And, the same kind of desperation is evident in other capitals as well,” he added.

Sputnik’s Garland Nixon noted that European governments have not done a “good job” of trying to convince their public that they have to suffer and sacrifice for the “democracy of the neo-Nazis”.

“The US is also quite confident that, as you said, the ruble will be turned to rubble, the Russian economy would be smashed, that they’d be, you know, they’d be closed out of the energy market and would be crying for mercy very soon,” said Lazare of the West’s attacks on Russia’s economy. “But that didn’t happen. [Quite the reverse](#). Russia was able to find outlets for its oil and gas. It developed markets with China and other nations. The US has wound up shooting itself in the foot. And the amazing thing is that this keeps happening again and again.”

Sputnik's Wilmer Leon added that the reason French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz don't want to address the collapse of their biggest economic bloc in the world is because it was done at the "behest of the United States".

"The US really engineered this war," said Lazare. "I don't want to let France and Britain off the hook because they were solidly behind US efforts, but this is an American-led effort which really installed a nationalist government in Kiev, which was itching for a fight with Russia, which got one and then, followed by a full scale military invasion in February 2022."

"The US thought it would win that war easily," he continued. "But now the war is going very poorly. And it turns out that the US really had a very poor idea of what it was getting into. Now, the problem is that the US will not suffer the consequences anywhere near to the degree the Europeans will."

"So, it's a case that they followed the US, they tag along happily behind it, and now they've got to pay the price for their own behavior. It's crazy, and I do agree that there's going to be a reckoning."

The EU's working class is growing increasingly opposed to conflict with Russia as their economy suffers from Western imposed sanctions which saw them lose access to cheap and reliable Russian energy. The economic growth forecast for Germany, for instance, was cut down to 0.2% in 2024 from a previous projection of 1.3%, according to a recent [report](#). Robert Habeck, Germany's Vice-Chancellor, has said the country is performing "dramatically bad."

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Face the Facts - Cartoon

The Kremlin rejected Washington's criticisms on Monday and said that Putin's win was a sign that Russian people have consolidated around him.

Russian President Vladimir Putin will serve for another term as president after winning 87% of the vote in an election with over 77% turnout. While the results should suggest a strong support for Putin among the Russian public, Western media has lambasted the results with doubts over the legitimacy of the election.

On Monday, Western governments came forward to condemn Putin's landslide victory as unfair and undemocratic, while non-Western countries, including Belarus, China, India, Saudi Arabia, North Korea, Iran, Syria, Libya, the Republic of the Congo, Turkiye, Kuwait, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, the Republic of Cuba, Myanmar, Honduras and many others, [congratulated](#) the seasoned leader. The condemnation by the West marks the worst divide between the West and Russia since the Cold War.

A White House spokesperson on Sunday said the Russian election was "obviously not free nor fair".

But later on Monday, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre acknowledged that Putin is the legitimate leader of Russia.

The US has had a long history of casting doubt on foreign elections that produce results contrary to their own foreign policy aims. In 1984, the US opposed Nicaragua's first democratic

elections in more than 50 years, because it did not align with their economic or security interests.

At the same time, the US supported elections in neighboring Central American countries considered to be far more repressive. The US then backed violent Contra death squads in the country, fueling a bloody civil war until Nicaraguans were compelled to vote for US-backed forces to quell the conflict.

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Macron 'Trying to Go Backwards' to Days of Imperial France?

Columnist Ted Rall argues President Emmanuel Macron's delusions of fighting Russia in the Donbass are not shared by most French people.

"Ever since its ignominious defeat in the Napoleonic wars, France is entrapped in the predicament of countries that get sandwiched between great powers," began a provocative [article](#) recently published on the Indian Punchline blog. As other European countries have accepted the United States as the great power of the Western world, France has never fully given up its global aspirations, argues M.K. Bhadrakumar.

And what better leader to carry the torch than one who once [confided](#) France needs a king and sometimes, according to his critics, appears to see himself as one?

Columnist and political cartoonist Ted Rall joined [Sputnik's The Critical Hour program on Monday](#) to discuss the case of Emmanuel Macron, his comments about the war in the Donbass, and whether the French president's megalomania borders on the pathological.

"One of the things I used to say during the early days of the war on terror was that the United States should follow the example of France," said Rall. "Which back in the 2000s seemed to have accepted its fate as a post-colonial, post-imperialistic power, albeit still an important country in Europe."

"France, at the time, seemed like it had... accepted that colonialism was a bad idea and that they needed to redirect their resources away from militarism and more toward their own people," he continued. "Maybe he didn't read his history. Maybe he's too young to remember that glorious period when France, finally in the 80s and 90s, was able to start establishing a major social safety net that created free college and socialized health care and everything else for its people. But he seems to have forgotten all that and he's trying to go backwards."

As much of the Western world moved towards neoliberalism in the 80s with leaders like US President Ronald Regan and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, France went in the opposite direction, elevating Socialist Francois Mitterrand to power. The French leader left a lasting legacy in the country, investing in infrastructure, social programs and grand construction projects. His focus on domestic concerns was largely shared in the 2000s by President Jacques Chirac, who rejected French support for the war in Iraq.

Macron has broken from tradition in a number of ways, implementing neoliberal economic policy and promoting a strident French militarism. Fortunately, according to Rall, his ambitions aren't shared by most of the French public.

“The good news is, I don't think that the French people – whether we're talking about the populist right, Marine Le Pen's party, or you're talking about the radical left represented by Jean-Luc Melenchon, or – not much of anyone else is in the mood to follow him down this path to destruction,” said the columnist. “And, for that matter, he doesn't really even seem to have much cooperation from other European powers in terms of direct involvement to go and fight in Ukraine, to fight the Russians in Ukraine.”

Rall insisted most French people are more worried about domestic concerns such as the economy, unemployment, and demographic issues rather than the conflict in the Donbass. And the last time the French military was directly involved in a major proxy war was in the 1960s, he noted.

Additionally, Rall claimed many French people are sympathetic to Russia's position.

“Russia is not a distant country to them,” he claimed. “There are lots and lots of French people who are descended, who are related to Russians. There was a huge white Russian migration after the Russian Revolution to France and very close ties between Russia and France that go back to the Tsarist era.”

“I just think they get it and they don't want to get involved in something that's so brazenly provocative,” Rall concluded.

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Israel Must Be Treated Like 'Pariah' State, Ended 'Forever' – Jewish Activist

Israeli-American activist Miko Peled had strong words for Israel, which he accuses of torture, genocide, and “all kinds of crazy, sadistic policies for 76 years.”

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced a trip to Egypt and Saudi Arabia this week seeking funds for Gaza's postwar reconstruction.

The visit comes as Israel continues its military operation in the besieged Gaza Strip where nearly 32,000 Palestinians have been [killed](#) per local authorities. In recent weeks people in the enclave's northern sector have [begun to succumb to starvation](#) as Israel enforces a tight blockade, with UNICEF director Catherine Russell [calling](#) the number of child casualties in the conflict “staggering.”

The continued suffering in Gaza caused [Political Misfits](#) host John Kiriakou to suggest the Biden administration is “putting the cart before the horse” with the trip. “First don't we have to ensure that there will still be living Palestinians in Gaza?” asked the former CIA officer. Anti-Zionist activist Miko Peled, who came to support the Palestinian cause after being born to a prominent Israeli general, [joined Kiriakou Tuesday](#) to discuss the country's continued assault on Gaza. “I think he's a servant of the Zionist state, of the state of Israel,” Peled said of Blinken. “I don't think there's any question about that.”

Peled criticized Blinken's focus on asking other states in the region to help fund aid for Palestinians, noting that, “a five minute drive from any spot in the Gaza Strip there's all the food, all the water, and all the medical aid that anybody could possibly need. Israel is denying them.”

“The party that needs to pay to rehabilitate Gaza is the party that created this catastrophe, which is Israel,” said Peled. “Can you imagine any scenario on Earth where the world begs Hitler for a ceasefire and trying to find the terms that are most favorable to Hitler as the genocide of the Jews and so many others is taking place in full force? Can you imagine a scenario like this?”

The activist recounted the similarities between Israel and other extremist governments, noting that “Israel has never had any problem with the most right-wing, antisemitic fascist regimes.” Throughout the Cold War Israel retained cordial relations with apartheid South Africa, even [offering to sell](#) nuclear weapons to the white supremacist regime.

Israel was also a key ally in the United States’ Cold War [campaign of violence and state terror](#) in Latin America known as Operation Condor. For decades Israel helped train police, militaries, and death squads in the region to repress popular movements. Israel also served as a key conduit for supplying weapons to Latin American dictatorships as the US Congress attempted to stem the flow from America.

Israel’s dark history of support for violence and repression in Latin America was noted recently by Colombian President Petro Gustavo, who has sharply criticized the country in the past months. Chile, Colombia, Honduras, and Brazil have all recalled their ambassadors from Tel Aviv while Bolivia has opted to suspend relations with the country entirely.

“A regime like [Israel] should not have a seat on the table, they should be thrown out,” said Peled, noting [the documented mistreatment of Palestinians](#) in Israeli prisons. “Palestinian suffering has got to stop, and it’s got to start from this point on and forever.”

Peled agreed with Kiriakou that Israel should be sanctioned and diplomatically isolated as happened to the apartheid South African regime in the 1980s.

Many observers have noted the similarities between Israel’s system of governance and the proposals of racial supremacists. Israel was once even [praised](#) by American neo-Nazi activist Richard Spencer, who [views](#) the country’s “Jewish nation state” law as a model for his desired white ethnostate. The comments caused significant embarrassment for Zionist groups, who were quickly forced to distance themselves from the endorsement of the notorious neo-fascist. “Support for Israel and right-wing politics both here and in Europe – particularly in Europe – those go hand in hand,” noted Peled, as Israel has seen strong support from rightwing figures like Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni in Italy and Dutch lawmaker Geert Wilders. “Israel has to be brought to its knees and as quickly as possible. The international community needs to impose severe sanctions. Israel should not be part of the conversation.”

“This is an insane state, an insane regime that’s been involved in torture and genocide and all kinds of crazy, sadistic policies for 76 years,” he added. “And it’s time to stop it and forever, not to bring it to the table, but to bring it to a point where it’s over, it’s ended.”

“My friends in the pro-Palestinian movement who are the most reliable in their support of Palestine by and large happen to be Jewish,” added Kiriakou. “There’s not this Israel-first mentality just because people happen to be Jewish.”

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## International Observer Compliments Transparency, Smoothness of Russian Elections

A US-based observer praised Russia's electoral process and claimed Western leaders should acknowledge Putin's domestic popularity.

"It's a very transparent process," said attorney and CEO Steve Gill Tuesday after returning from a trip to Russia where he served as an international observer for the country's presidential election.

Early projections showed Russian President Vladimir Putin will return to the Kremlin with a renewed mandate this year, garnering a healthy majority of the vote in a contest featuring the highest turnout in the country since 1991. Western media has [criticized various aspects](#) of the election, but Gill claimed everything ran smoothly from his vantage point in the southern Russian city of Samara. The former director of intergovernmental affairs for the US Trade Representative joined [Sputnik's The Final Countdown program](#) on Tuesday to share his thoughts.

"I've probably visited in this trip 20 different polling stations, watching as people cast their vote," said Gill. "First of all, they've got livestream video cameras in every precinct around the country, thousands of them... It is all livestreamed when the voting is taking place and then livestreamed when the counting is taking place." Gill noted that election observers were allowed to be present at each polling location.

"It's a very visible process. Nobody was being forced at gunpoint," he added, calling the election results a "super mandate" for Putin. "My advice to the West, to the US and Western Europe and Britain: pay attention to what the Russian people have said, not to what you wish they would say."

Host Angie Wong noted that various world leaders congratulated Putin on his victory, including Chinese President Xi Jinping and India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "I haven't heard anything from Joe Biden yet," she noted. "Usually you get a phone call... When is Joe Biden going to make that phone call, if ever?"

Gill said the US President would likely never acknowledge Putin's support within Russia, to the detriment of US-Russian relations and US foreign policy more broadly.

"Our policy is to continue to push Russia towards China, who's a bigger economic and military adversary and threat to the United States," he claimed. "So we're pushing them closer together, we're pushing Russia economically towards Saudi Arabia, towards India, towards the BRICS countries, Brazil and others. We're literally pushing them into the arms of – if not our adversaries, at least our competitors – in the economic world."

"And Russia is realizing that their economy is booming despite the thousands of sanctions that have been imposed," Gill added. "The main reasons that Vladimir Putin got reelected overwhelmingly by the Russian people is because they have 2.6% GDP [growth], they have 7% inflation."

[Russia's economy](#) has grown dramatically in the years since Putin was first elected President, recovering and surpassing the standard of living Russians enjoyed in the Soviet Union. In 2023 the Russian economy expanded more rapidly than any country in the G7 – something Putin often noted while campaigning.

Gill criticized the demonization of Russia under US President Joe Biden, claiming the country will eventually need to repair relations. Both countries would be better off, he claimed, if they were able to trade and cooperate economically as major world powers.

“World leaders see Biden for what he is,” he said. “Inept, incompetent, flailing; his policies are destroying the US economy and destroying our relationships around the world.”

“A weak America is not good to the world,” Gill warned. “A weak America isn't good really for China, for Russia or for the rest of the world – militarily, politically, or economically... A strong, vibrant, economically powerful and politically powerful around the world America is better for the world.”

Western media makes rare acknowledgement of heavy Ukrainian losses

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Business Insider, a US media outlet, offered a rare bit of candor on the Donbass proxy conflict with an article acknowledging heavy Ukrainian losses in the northeast.

The reporting by way of the UK's Times of London featured testimony from a Ukrainian fighter identified as “Lemur.”

“We can barely hold the line, let alone move forward,” a Ukrainian soldier confided of efforts in the crucial Kharkov region. “We are losing so many people, there are so many bodies we can't even bring them all back.”

Russia has made gains in the area after liberating the southern city of Avdeyevka last month. Crucial to the country's success is its air superiority, allowing Moscow to wipe out Ukrainian fortifications with glide bombs, the Western media noted.

The newspapers, citing observers, hope for F-16 fighter jets to arrive in Ukraine to enhance air-to-air capability of the Kiev regime, but the much anticipated aircraft from Western backers aren't expected to arrive for several more months.

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Macron “trying to go backwards” to the days of Imperial France?

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“Maybe he didn't read his history,” said Rall. “Maybe he's too young to remember that glorious period when France, finally in the 80s and 90s, was able to start establishing a major social safety net that created free college and socialized health care and everything else for its people. But he seems to have forgotten all that and he's trying to go backwards.”

But Rall says Macron's militarist ambitions aren't shared by most of the French public.

“The good news is, I don't think that the French people – whether we're talking about the populist right, Marine Le Pen's party, or you're talking about the radical left represented by Jean-Luc Melenchon, or – not much of anyone else is in the mood to follow him down this path to destruction,” said the columnist, noting that many French people have cultural and family ties to Russia.

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Israel must be treated like 'pariah' state, ended 'forever' – Jewish activist

Israeli-American activist Miko Peled, who is the son of a prominent former Israeli general, had strong words for US Secretary of State Antony Blinken during a discussion on Sputnik's Political Misfits program.

“I think he's a servant of the Zionist state, of the state of Israel,” Peled said of Blinken. He insisted Blinken should force Israel to fund efforts to rebuild Gaza, noting Israel is “the party that created this catastrophe.”

“Israel has never had any problem with the most right-wing, antisemitic fascist regimes,” added Peled. Throughout the Cold War Israel retained cordial relations with apartheid South Africa, even offering to sell nuclear weapons to the white supremacist regime.

Israel was also a key ally in the United States' Cold War campaign of violence and state terror in Latin America known as Operation Condor. For decades Israel helped train police, militaries, and death squads in the region to repress popular movements. Israel was once even praised by American neo-Nazi activist Richard Spencer, who views the country's “Jewish nation state” law as a model for his desired white ethnostate.

“[Israel] is an insane state, an insane regime that's been involved in torture and genocide and all kinds of crazy, sadistic policies for 76 years,” he added. “And it's time to stop it and forever, not to bring it to the table, but to bring it to a point where it's over, it's ended.”

The next time someone implies you are antisemitic for criticizing Israeli policy, share Peled's words of moral clarity with them.

International observer compliments transparency, smoothness of Russian elections

"It's a very transparent process," said attorney and CEO Steve Gill after returning from a trip to Russia where he served as an international observer for the country's presidential election. The former director of intergovernmental affairs for the US Trade Representative joined Sputnik's The Final Countdown program to share his thoughts after watching voting take place in the southwest Russian city of Samara.

"I've probably visited in this trip 20 different polling stations, watching as people cast their vote," said Gill. "First of all, they've got livestream video cameras in every precinct around the country, thousands of them... It is all livestreamed when the voting is taking place and then livestreamed when the counting is taking place." Gill noted that election observers were allowed to be present at each polling location.

"It's a very visible process. Nobody was being forced at gunpoint," he added, calling the election results a "super mandate" for Putin. "My advice to the West, to the US and Western Europe and Britain: pay attention to what the Russian people have said, not to what you wish they would say."

Gill noted Russia's substantial economic growth under Putin and said both the US and Russia would be better served if they were able to trade and cooperate economically as major world powers.

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US, Jordan Airdrop Food Into Northern Gaza - CENTCOM

WASHINGTON, March 20 (Sputnik) – The US and Jordanian militaries airdropped more food into Northern Gaza on Wednesday in a combined operation after the UN warned of an imminent famine amid the ongoing Israel-Hamas war.

"U.S. Central Command and the Royal Jordanian Air Force conducted a combined humanitarian assistance airdrop into Northern Gaza on March 20, 2024, at 12:15 p.m. (Gaza time) to provide essential relief to civilians in Gaza affected by the ongoing conflict," the US Central Command (CENTCOM) said.

A US Air Force C-130 aircraft dropped 6,000 pounds of food, including rice, flour, milk, pasta and canned foods.

The United States started humanitarian airdrops into the Gaza Strip in early March. US President Joe Biden, however, said the volume of supplies to the enclave was still insufficient. He vowed that the United States would build a temporary port to deliver more humanitarian aid to Gaza. Under the project, aid will be first supplied to a floating pier and then delivered to the shore by small vessels, the Pentagon said.

On October 7, Hamas launched a large-scale rocket attack against Israel from Gaza and breached the border, killing 1,200 people and abducting around 240 others. Israel launched retaliatory strikes, ordered a complete blockade of the Gaza Strip, and started a ground incursion into the Palestinian enclave with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas fighters and rescuing the hostages. Over 31,500 people have since been killed in the Gaza Strip, local authorities said.

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Biden Admin to Propose Alternative Rafah Options to Israeli Delegation Next Week - Reports

WASHINGTON, March 20 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration will propose several alternatives to an Israeli ground operation in Rafah as a high-level Israeli delegation is set to visit Washington next week, Axios reported, citing two US officials.

In a phone call on Monday, US President Joe Biden asked Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to send an interagency team to Washington to hear US concerns about Israel's Rafah planning and lay out an alternative approach to achieving its goals, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said. Netanyahu has agreed to send a delegation.

The Biden administration sees the upcoming meeting as an opportunity to move to a more constructive path with the Israelis, two US officials told Axios on Tuesday.

The White House believes it is not enough to tell the Israelis what not to do but there is a need to lay out a US alternative, the US officials said.

One idea is to postpone a military operation in the southern city and instead focus on stabilizing the humanitarian situation in northern Gaza, where the UN warns about "imminent famine," the officials said. The plan includes establishing shelters for civilians evacuated from Rafah, the report said.

The objective is to reduce the potential for massive civilian casualties in an invasion, one official said.

Another option involves securing Egypt's side of its border with Gaza in the first place, the report said. It would be carried out as part of a joint US-Egypt-Israel plan to destroy tunnels under the border and create infrastructure to prevent weapons smuggling into Gaza, the report said, citing US officials.

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Blinken to Travel to Israel on Friday – Reports

WASHINGTON, March 20 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will travel to Israel on Friday, CNN reported on Wednesday, citing an Israeli official.

Israel was not previously announced as part of Blinken's itinerary. As recently as Tuesday,

Blinken was publicly scheduled to travel to Jeddah and Cairo through March 22 for talks on a potential ceasefire and hostage release agreement between Israel and Hamas.

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US Navy Orders 17 More F/A-18 Super-Hornet Combat Fighters From Boeing - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 20 (Sputnik) - The US Navy has given Boeing a more than \$1,137 billion contract extension to order 17 more F/A-18 aircraft carrier-launched Super-Hornet combat jets, the Department of Defense announced in a press release.

"The Boeing Company [of] St. Louis, Missouri is awarded a ...\$1,137,300,000, ...modification ...contract ...[for] 10 F/A-18F Lot 46 aircraft, as well as two F/A-18F and five F/A-18E Lot 47 aircraft, the release said on Monday.

The contract will also pay for Phase One of the F/A-18E/F and EA-18G technical data package including the operation, maintenance, installation, and training data in support of F/A-18 and EA-18G sustainment, the release added.

Most of the work on the contract will be performed in Hazelwood, Missouri (46.7%) and El Segundo, California (35.8%) as well as at other locations within the continental United States, the Defense Department said.

Work on the contract extension is projected to take just over three years and is expected to be completed in April 2027, the Defense Department said.

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Nuland's Involvement in Ukraine Policy Foreshadowed Poor Outcome - Former US Congressman

WASHINGTON, March 20 (Sputnik) - Former US Congressman Ron Paul said in an interview with Tucker Carlson that people could have predicted the negative outcome of the United States interference in Ukrainian affairs by noticing the involvement of government personnel like outgoing US State Department official Victoria Nuland.

"Sometimes the people who are running the operation give you an idea, like Victoria Nuland," Paul said in the interview, released Tuesday when asked how he knew in 2014 that US involvement in Ukraine would turn out poorly.

Paul, who served in the US House of Representatives across five decades and thrice ran for president, was a frequent critic of the US interventionist foreign policy.

Officials like Nuland represent the "worst kind of warmonger," Paul said.

Earlier this month, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced that Nuland would leave her diplomatic role in the coming weeks. Nuland's departure is due to the failure of her anti-Russian foreign policy efforts, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova

said.

Nuland used her interest in Russia to destroy bilateral relations between Washington and Moscow, Zakharova said, adding that her contribution to undermining trust between the US and Russia was immense.

Nuland played a significant role in destabilizing Ukraine in 2014, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

It would be naive to expect the US to replace Nuland with a "peace dove," Russian Deputy Envoy to the UN Dmitry Polyanskiy told Sputnik.

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US House Passes Bill to Sanction People Who Undermine Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina

WASHINGTON, March 20 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives passed legislation to impose sanctions on people who undermine or threaten peace and security in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

House lawmakers passed the bill, dubbed the Upholding the Dayton Peace Agreement Through Sanctions Act, on Tuesday in a vote of 365 in favor and 30 opposed.

"Upholding the Dayton Peace Agreement Through Sanctions Act demonstrates the United States' unwavering dedication to advancing security and preventing violence. By holding accountable those who undermine peace agreements, we send a strong message that the international community will not tolerate actions that perpetuate conflict and human suffering," Congressman Mike Turner said in a statement on the bill.

The 1995 Dayton Accords helped end the Bosnian War and divided the country into the Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which are together recognized as a single state.

The legislation directs the federal government to impose sanctions on people who threaten the peace, security, stability, or territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, including efforts to obstruct the implementation of the Dayton Accords. The bill also targets people engaged in corruption related to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Moreover, the legislation establishes a US policy of supporting Euro-Atlantic integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina, condemning alleged efforts by Russia to fuel instability in the country and working with other regional actors to support the country's stability and territorial integrity.

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Russia'Does Not Care' About Biased Assessments of Election by Unfriendly Countries-Antonov

WASHINGTON, March 20 (Sputnik) - Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said that Moscow is not concerned about biased assessments made by unfriendly

countries, including the United States, regarding the presidential elections in Russia.

"We are absolutely not concerned about biased assessments coming from unfriendly countries. Moreover, the assaulting statements are accompanied by a stream of deliberate lies and mentoring lectures," Antonov said on Tuesday. "We do not teach anyone how to organize the electoral process and strengthen democracy. We demand the same attitude towards ourselves."

Antonov's comments come in response to an earlier statement by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken criticizing the latest vote.

"We do not accept lecturing and offensive attacks," Antonov said. "It is obvious that the US administration will continue the doomed "anti-Russia" project, try to split Russian society, and undermine the legitimacy of the actions of the country's top leadership."

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US Conducts Test of AGM-183A Air-Launched Hypersonic Missile - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 20 (Sputnik) - The United States conducted a test of a fully operation hypersonic missile prototype of the All-Up-Round AGM-183A Air-launched Rapid Response Weapon in Guam on Sunday, the US Air Force said in a statement.

"A B-521H Stratofortress conducted a test of the All-Up-Round AGM-183A Air-launched Rapid Response Weapon. This test launched a full prototype operational hypersonic missile and focused on the ARRW's end-to-end performance. The test took place at the Reagan Test Site with the B-52 taking off from Andersen Air Force Base, Guam on March 17, 2024, local time," the statement said on Tuesday.

While the statement did not disclose whether the test was successful, it noted that the test acquired valuable, unique data and was intended to further a range of hypersonic programs.

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Trump Says Judge's \$454Mln Judgement in New York Effort to Defund his Campaign

WASHINGTON, March 20 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump said New York Judge Arthur Engoron's decision to issue a \$454 million judgement in his state civil fraud case is an effort to defund his presidential campaign.

Earlier on Tuesday, Trump said that he may have to sell off some of his assets in order to secure a bond covering the \$454 million civil fraud judgment in New York.

"We have a lot of cash. We have a great company, but they want to take it away, or at least take the cash element away - billions of dollars in value, billions of dollars in properties, but they'd like to take the cash away so I can't use it on the campaign," Trump told reporters on Tuesday after voting in the Florida Republican primary.

On Monday, court records showed that Trump's legal team is struggling to obtain an appeal

bond for the \$454 million judgment because of the penalty's size, which many bond companies are reluctant to consider.

The civil fraud case against Trump was brought by New York Attorney General Letitia James for allegedly lying about the value of Trump properties, for which James sought \$370 million in fines and to ban Trump from the New York State real estate industry. Trump has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing in the case.

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#### SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, March 20 (Sputnik) –  
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN RUSSIA

\* Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said on Tuesday that he presented Russian Ambassador to Belgrade Alexander Botsan-Kharchenko with a congratulatory letter for Vladimir Putin following his victory in Russia's presidential election.

\* Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Sisi has congratulated Putin on his victory in the presidential election, the Egyptian leader's office said.

\* Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi has warmly congratulated Putin on his victory in the presidential election during a phone conversation, the Kremlin said.

\* The votes of Russians abroad showed different figures in different geographical locations, but, in general, Putin won, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

#### CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

\* EU leaders may discuss the statements of French President Emmanuel Macron about the possibility of sending Western troops to Ukraine, a senior EU official said on Tuesday.

\* France is preparing to send a military unit to Ukraine, and approximately 2,000 servicepeople will be deployed at the first stage, Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Director Sergei Naryshkin said.

\* German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius announced on Tuesday a new military aid package for Ukraine worth 500 million euros (\$542 million).

\* All the attempts of Ukrainian sabotage and reconnaissance groups to penetrate Russia's borders have failed, Russian President Vladimir Putin said.

\* Russia's Belgorod Region has decided to evacuate about 9,000 children to other regions due to Ukraine's shelling, Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said.

#### US CONGRESS DECISION ON SPENDING BILL

\* Congressional leaders and the White House have struck a deal on funding for the Department of Homeland Security, removing the last key obstacle to concluding the remaining 2024 spending bills before a government shutdown this weekend, Speaker Mike Johnson said on Tuesday.

\* US President Joe Biden announced that he has reached a deal with Congressional leaders on remaining spending bills for this fiscal year 2024, and will sign the package immediately once Congress passes it.

#### IOC DECISION ON RUSSIA

\* Currently 12 athletes from Russia have qualified for the 2024 Paris Olympics, and the maximum possible number of Russian participants would be 55, Communications Director of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) Christian Klaue said on Tuesday.

\* The IOC called on athletes and governments on Tuesday not to participate in the upcoming Friendship Games in Russia, set to take place from September 15-29, claiming that the sports event was politically motivated.

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#### Trump Says Putin Type of Person Open to Negotiations

WASHINGTON, March 19 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump said on Tuesday that Russian President Vladimir Putin is the type of person to be open to negotiations.

“Yeah, I think he is,” Trump said during an interview with former UK politician Nigel Farage when asked if Putin is the type of person with whom negotiations could occur.

Trump reiterated his position that Russia never would have launched a special military operation in Ukraine if he were still president.

Trump said that he got along “great” with Putin, as well as Chinese President Xi Jinping.

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#### US Gave Ukraine ‘Double, Maybe Triple’ \$75Bln Aid Estimate - Trump

WASHINGTON, March 19 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump said on Tuesday that the United States has potentially given Ukraine several times the amount of aid purported by analysts.

“Much more. Double, maybe triple that,” Trump said in an interview with former UK politician Nigel Farage, after Farage referenced a \$75 billion estimate for the amount of aid provided to Ukraine by the US.

The US has officially announced billions of dollars in military, governmental and humanitarian aid to Ukraine since the beginning of Russia’s special military operation in February 2022.

The Biden administration has warned that funds to support Ukraine will soon run out without further congressional action on the matter.

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## Canadian Government to Stop Sending Weapons to Israel – Reports, Citing Foreign Minister

WASHINGTON, March 19 (Sputnik) – The Canadian Government has decided to halt weapons exports to Israel following the passage of a non-binding motion at the House of Commons (HoC), the Toronto Star reported on Tuesday, citing Foreign Minister Melanie Joly.

“It is a real thing,” Joly was quoted as saying in the report.

Joly’s reported remarks come a day after the Canadian Parliament passed a non-binding motion tabled by the New Democratic Party (NDP) which urged Ottawa to work towards the establishment of the state of Palestine.

The NDP had initially sought through the motions wording to call on the government to recognize the State of Palestine, call for an immediate ceasefire, and for the suspension of weapon sales to Israel. However, the governing liberals pushed for a revision of its language as a condition for their endorsement.

The revised text of the motion ended up calling on Canada to commit to working with the international community “towards the establishment of the State of Palestine as part of a negotiated two-state solution and maintain Canada’s position that Israel has a right to exist.” It also added a call for Hamas to be disarmed and changed “suspension” for “cessation” or “ban.”

The motion was passed by a majority of parliamentarians in a 204-117 vote which included support from the Liberals, NDP, Bloc Quebecois and Green Party. The Conservatives opposed it alongside three dissenting Liberal lawmakers.

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## Trump Says US Will Have to Take Action Against Prince Harry if Royal Lied on Visa Forms

WASHINGTON, March 19 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump said on Tuesday that the United States would have to take action against the United Kingdom’s Prince Harry if he lied about drug use on his US visa application.

“If he lied they’ll have to take appropriate action,” Trump said during an interview with former UK politician Nigel Farage.

Last year, conservative US think tank The Heritage Foundation filed a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit against the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in an effort to publicly release Prince Harry’s visa records, after the royal admitted to taking a variety of drugs in his 2023 memoir.

The Heritage Foundation’s lawsuit also questioned whether DHS’ decision to admit Prince Harry into the US ought to be reconsidered in light of his admission of drug use, as well as whether the royal received preferential treatment in the immigration process.

US visa applicants are required to disclose past drug use. It is a crime in the US to give a false statement under oath in any document required by immigration laws or regulations.

Earlier this month, a US court ruled that DHS must turn over Prince Harry’s visa documents for review by a judge.

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US Supreme Court Allows Texas to Carry Out State Law to Arrest, Prosecute Illegal Migrants

WASHINGTON, March 19 (Sputnik) - The US Supreme Court is temporarily granting the state of Texas authority to carry out a state law known as SB4 that allows local authorities to arrest and prosecute migrants suspected of entering the United States illegally on the US southern border, a court document revealed on Tuesday.

The Supreme Court's decision to grant Texas permission to enforce SB4 is not final, and a lower court will continue to review the legality of the law, but it's possible the case may eventually return to the Supreme Court for a final ruling.

"I think it unwise to invite emergency litigation in this Court about whether a court of appeals abused its discretion at this preliminary step — for example, by misjudging whether an administrative stay is the best way to minimize harm while the court deliberates," US Justice Amy Coney Barrett wrote in an opinion of the court's majority decision.

The Biden administration is challenging the state of Texas on this matter, arguing that it is unconstitutional and that the federal government holds the responsibility to enforce immigration laws.

The White House in a statement said it fundamentally disagrees with the Supreme Court's decision allowing Texas' "harmful and unconstitutional law" to go into effect, arguing that it would make communities in Texas less safe, burden law enforcement, and sow chaos and confusion at the US southern border.

Texas Governor Greg Abbott signed SB4 into law in December as part of his efforts to address the record surge of illegal migration across the Texas portion of the US-Mexico border since President Joe Biden took over the White House in 2021.

The state law was initially set to go into effect on March 10.

Close to 8 million migrants have illegally entered the United States via the southern border since President Joe Biden came into office in 2021.

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Oil Up Fourth Time in Five Days, Brent Highest Since October

NEW YORK, March 19 (Sputnik) - Crude prices rose a fourth time in five days, nearing a five-month high, as traders braced for a global supply squeeze from outages at Russian oil refineries.

London-traded Brent crude, the global benchmark for oil, settled at \$87.38 per barrel, up 49 cents, or 0.6%, on the day. Tuesday's peak for Brent was \$87.80, its loftiest since an October high of \$92.32. Since the close of March 12, the global crude benchmark has gained 6.6% in four sessions, settling flat in just one. For all of last week, Brent rose 4%.

West Texas Intermediate, the benchmark for US crude, closed at \$8347 per barrel — up 75 cents, or 0.9%, on the day. Tuesday's session high for the so-called WTI was \$83.11, the highest since November's peak of 83.60. The US crude benchmark rose 7% over the last four sessions and slid 0.2% in one. For all of last week, WTI gained almost 4%.

The latest rally in crude has been sustained by outages at Russian oil refineries targeted by Ukrainian drones.

Prior to that, oil prices benefited from higher demand projections made by the International Energy Agency, which looks after the interest of the world's oil consumers. The Paris-based IEA raised its estimate for 2024 oil demand by 110,000 barrels per day to 103.4 million.

Crude prices also benefited from production cuts announced by OPEC+ for the second quarter. OPEC+ — an alliance grouping the 13-member Saudi-led Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries with 10 oil producing countries steered by Russia — intends to create a daily deficit of 2.2 million barrels per day in the global oil market until the end of June.

Adding to the bullish picture has been data showing a slide in US crude inventories, after a build of more than 28 million barrels from late January.

The CEO of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation also spoke to the demand side in oil on Tuesday. Shaikh Nawaf al-Sabah told the CERAWEEK energy industry in Houston, Texas that oil consumption was not expected to peak until 2030.

"The world population is going to increase by about 25% between now and 2050, but energy demand will increase faster than that," al-Sabah said in comments carried by CNBC. "That means that we're going to require more energy intensity for the population in the world."

Meanwhile, some 750 million people in the developing world have no electricity and nearly 2.5 billion have no clean cooking solutions, he said.

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Trump Files SCOTUS Appeal Seeking Immunity in 2020 Election Case

WASHINGTON, March 19 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump filed a US Supreme Court brief on Tuesday arguing for his immunity from prosecution for allegedly trying to overturn his 2020 election loss, court documents showed.

"The president cannot function, and the presidency itself cannot retain its vital independence, if the president faces criminal prosecution for official acts once he leaves office," Trump's attorneys wrote in the filing.

The appeal comes after a lower court earlier rejected the former president's request for immunity in the criminal case brought forth by Special Counsel Jack Smith.

The arguments parallel earlier ones made by Trump's legal team seeking to protect him from persecution, in addition to statements Trump himself has made along the campaign trail this year.

In August 2023, Smith charged Trump with four criminal counts in the election subversion case, including conspiring to defraud the United States, obstructing the congressional certification of Biden's electoral victory and conspiring to do so, and conspiring against right of Americans to

vote.

In February, a US federal appeals court ruled that Trump is not immune from prosecution in his 2020 election interference case, which Trump appealed to the Supreme Court.

The US Supreme Court agreed to hear the case on April 25, effectively postponing Smith's criminal trial.

Trump faces a total of 91 charges in four criminal cases in what the Republican politician calls an attempt by the Democratic establishment to prevent him from returning to the White House. The most severe counts might cost Trump 20 years in prison. If the punishment were to be determined by adding up the terms, he could be behind bars for more than 700 years.

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Former Belarusian Hockey Player Konstantin Koltsov Dies in Florida at 42 - Police

WASHINGTON, March 19 (Sputnik) - Former Belarusian hockey player for the Pittsburgh Penguins Konstantin Koltsov was found dead after jumping from a balcony at a resort in Florida, the Miami-Dade Police Department told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"On Monday, March 18, 2024, at approximately 12:39 am, Bal Harbour Police and Fire Rescue were dispatched to the St. Regis Bal Harbour Resort, 9703 Collins Avenue, in reference to a male that jumped from a balcony. The Miami-Dade Police Department, Homicide Bureau, responded and has taken over the investigation of the apparent suicide of Mr. Konstantin Koltsov. No foul play is suspected," Detective Argemis Colome said.

According to the National Hockey League (NHL) website, Koltsov participated in 144 NHL games from 2003 to 2006, tallying 38 points with 12 goals and 26 assists. He completed a full 82-game season with the Pittsburgh Penguins from 2003 to 2004.

Koltsov represented Belarus in the 2002 Salt Lake City Olympics, securing a fourth-place finish, and in the 2010 Vancouver Olympics. Following his tenure with the Penguins until 2006, he spent 10 seasons in the Russian Super League and Kontinental Hockey League, playing for various teams before retiring in 2016, the statement said.

Koltsov had been in a relationship with Aryna Sabalenka, the second-ranked women's tennis player from Belarus. Sabalenka, 25, secured her second consecutive Australian Open title in January.

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US Approves Possible \$260M In Sale of 612 Javelin Missiles, Equipment to Morocco - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 19 (Sputnik) - The State Department has approved a possible \$260 million sale of 612 Javelin missiles and related equipment for the government of Morocco, the US Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said on Tuesday.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the government of Morocco of Javelin missiles and related equipment for an estimated cost of \$260 million," DSCA said in a press release.

Besides 612 Javelin missiles, Morocco also requested to buy two hundred Javelin Lightweight Command Launch Units (LWCLUs) and related equipment, the release said.

Lockheed Martin and RTX Corporation will be the prime contractors for the delivery of the items, the release added.

The Javelin is a shoulder-fired anti-armor system that is capable of defeating a range of armored vehicles at a range of 2,500 meters.

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US Approves Potential \$2.2Bln Sale of Abrams Tanks to Bahrain - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 19 (Sputnik) - The US State Department approved a possible \$2.2 billion sale of M1A2 Abrams main battle tanks and related equipment to the government of Bahrain, the US Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said on Tuesday.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of Bahrain of M1A2 Abrams Main Battle Tanks and related equipment for an estimated cost of \$2.2 billion," DSCA said in a press release.

Besides the tanks, Bahrain also requested to buy four M88A2 HERCULES Combat Recovery Vehicles, eight M1110 Joint Assault Bridges, eight M1150 Assault Breacher Vehicles, eight Heavy Assault Scissor Bridge and other equipment and munitions, the release said.

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Pentagon Confirms Australia to Begin Building US-Designed GMLRS Systems in 2025

WASHINGTON, March 19 (Sputnik) – Australia will begin production of the US-designed Guided Multiple Launch Rocket Systems (GMLRS) on its territory in 2025 after the United States finishes the transfer of technical data and the provision on workforce certifications to its ally, Pentagon spokesperson Jeff Jurgensen said on Tuesday.

"We've been moving very quickly with our Australian allies and GMLRS co-production is a prime example. We're currently working on the transfer of technical data and the provision of workforce certifications that will enable Australia to begin building GMLRS in 2025," Jurgensen told Sputnik in a statement.

The statement added that Australia will also participate in the development of Precision Strike Missiles (PrSM), which can be used with the M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS).

Lockheed Martin's GMRLS rockets have GPS-aided navigation and extended range and are

also used in HIMARS.

The United States has been supplying Ukraine with HIMARS systems since June 2022 following an initial hesitance by the Biden administration to supply Kiev with a system that can be used to fire at Russian cities. Washington has delivered 39 HIMARS systems to Ukraine and more than \$361 million worth of GMLRS rockets to date.

The Wall Street Journal reported earlier this month that Australia expects to assemble thousands of the precision missiles by 2030 with the first batch of a dozen GMRLS test-fired at the end of 2025.

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State Dept Skeptical About Info on France Planning to Send 2,000 Troops to Ukraine

WASHINGTON, March 19 (Sputnik) - The United States is skeptical about information that France is planning to send 2,000 troops to Ukraine, State Department spokesperson Vedant Patel said on Tuesday, reiterating that the Biden administration has no plans to put US boots on the ground.

Russian Foreign Intelligence Service Director Sergei Naryshkin said earlier in the day that Paris is preparing to send a military unit to Ukraine, with approximately 2,000 servicepeople to be deployed in the first stage.

"First, I would just say I would take anything that is coming from Russian officials with a grain of salt. Second, this is something for our French partners to speak to, if true," Patel told a briefing. "President Biden has been incredibly clear that the US is not prepared to send troops to Ukraine."

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has also stressed that the alliance will not be sending troops to Ukraine, Patel added.

Following a Paris-hosted conference on Ukraine last month, Macron said Western leaders had discussed the possibility of sending troops to Ukraine and, although no consensus had been reached in this regard, nothing could be ruled out. EU countries, including Poland and Germany, hastened to dismiss such plans. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said that NATO had no intention of sending its forces to Ukraine.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that Russia had taken note of Macron's remarks and that some of the countries that participated in the Paris meeting on Ukraine had quite a "wise assessment" of the potential dangers of being involved in a conflict with Russia.

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Canada Contributes \$29.4Mln to Czech-Led Initiative to Buy Ammunition for Ukraine - Blair

WASHINGTON, March 19 (Sputnik) - Canada will contribute C\$40 million (US\$29.4 million) to a Czech-led initiative to purchase artillery ammunition for the Ukrainian military, Canadian Minister of National Defense Bill Blair said on Tuesday.

"Canada's committing over \$40 million to the Czech Republic initiative to purchase large quantities of artillery rounds for Ukraine. Our \$40 million contribution is going to enable the rapid delivery of several thousand rounds of artillery ammunition to Ukraine and most importantly, the ammunition that they have told us that they require," Blair said.

Canada will also donate a package of night vision equipment worth nearly C\$7.5 million (US\$5.5 million), Blair said.

In addition, Blair announced that Canada had officially joined the Ukraine Defense Contact Group (UDGC) Drone Capability Coalition jointly led by Latvia and the United Kingdom, whose goal is to supply Kiev with 1 million drones.

The first batch of the 800 multi-purpose SkyRanger R70 drones' donation worth C\$95 million (US\$18.4 million) announced by Canada in late February, will be delivered in the coming weeks, Blair said.

Western countries have been providing military and financial aid to Kiev since the start of Russia's military operation in Ukraine in February 2022. The Kremlin has consistently warned against continued arms deliveries to Kiev, saying it would lead to further escalation of the conflict. In April 2022, Russia sent a diplomatic note to all NATO countries on the issue of arms supplies to Ukraine. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has warned that any cargo containing weapons for Ukraine will become a legitimate target for Russian strikes.

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US Would Be in War With Taliban If Stayed in Afghanistan Indefinitely - Ex-Top US General

WASHINGTON, March 19 (Sputnik) - The United States would be drawn into a war with the Taliban (under United Nations sanctions for terrorism) if US forces remained in Afghanistan indefinitely, former Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Mark Milley said during a congressional hearing on Tuesday.

"If we stayed indefinitely, an open war would likely begin with the Taliban again with increased risk of additional casualties," Milley told the US House Foreign Affairs Committee during a hearing on the United States' withdrawal from Afghanistan.

However, Milley said he was not in favor of a unilateral withdrawal of US forces because of his assessment of the associated costs and risks.

The Taliban came to power in Afghanistan in the fall of 2021 amid the withdrawal of US troops from the country and the collapse of the US-backed government there.

The Taliban takeover has heightened the fears of some Central Asian nations concerning the spread of radical fundamental Islamic ideas, as happened in 1996 when the Taliban first came to power in Afghanistan for five years.

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US Rejects Russian Elections in Former Ukraine Territories - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 19 (Sputnik) - The United States continues to reject Russian elections held in territories that voted to leave Ukraine, US State Department Principal Deputy Spokesperson Vedant Patel said on Tuesday.

"I just want to use this opportunity to echo that all of those territories, we believe them to be Ukraine," Patel said during a press briefing, when asked about elections in territories contested by Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia.

Patel declined to preview any sanctions that the United States could impose on election monitoring officials in such territories.

Elections were held from March 15-17 in territories such as the Republic of Crimea, Donetsk People's Republic, Lugansk People's Republic, Kherson Oblast and Zaporozhye Oblast, as part of Russia's 2024 presidential election.

On Monday, the Russian Central Election Commission said President Vladimir Putin won another term in the leadership role with 87.28% of votes.

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Trump Says Might Have to Sell Assets to Secure Bond for \$454M In Civil Fraud Judgment

WASHINGTON, March 19 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump said on Tuesday that he may have to sell off some of his assets in order to secure a bond covering the \$454 million civil fraud judgment in New York.

"Judge Engoron actually wants me to put up Hundreds of Millions of Dollars for the Right to Appeal his ridiculous decision. In other words, he is trying to take my Appellate Rights away from me when I have already won at the Appellate Division, but he refuses to accept their already made decision. Nobody has ever heard of anything like this before. I would be forced to mortgage or sell Great Assets, perhaps at Fire Sale prices, and if and when I win the Appeal, they would be gone," Trump wrote on Truth Social.

The statement by Trump comes only a day after court records showed the former president struggling to obtain an appeal bond for the \$454 million judgment because of the penalty's size, which many bond companies are reluctant to consider.

Last month, Trump was ordered by a New York court to pay more than \$454 million in penalties, which includes interest, after being found liable in his civil fraud trial in New York.

The civil fraud case against Trump was brought by New York Attorney General Letitia James for allegedly lying about the value of Trump properties, for which James sought \$370 million in fines and to ban Trump from the New York State real estate industry. Trump has repeatedly denied

any wrongdoing in the case.

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US Cannot Say if Kiev's Attacks on Russian Refineries Could Spike Oil Prices - White House

WASHINGTON, March 19 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is unable to say whether the Ukraine drone attacks on Russia's refineries could spike global oil prices, but it is monitoring the situation, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters on Tuesday.

When asked whether there is a concern that Ukraine's attacks on Russian energy facilities processing oil could lead to higher global oil prices and if Washington conveyed that to the Ukrainians, Jean-Pierre said, "We are always monitoring, always watching."

"I don't have anything specific on what could potentially happen in that particular incident, but obviously, this is something that we monitor," Jean-Pierre added.

Ahead of the Russian presidential election, Ukraine intensified drone and other attacks inside Russia, including on the country's oil refineries.

Ukraine has been sending drones into Russian territory almost daily since it launched a counteroffensive in early June 2023. deploying brigades trained by NATO instructors and armed with Western equipment.

Three months later, Russian President Vladimir Putin declared that the counteroffensive had failed, with Ukraine suffering heavy casualties. Several Western officials also admitted that the Ukrainian counteroffensive had not been successful.

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said that the attacks are connected one way or another in an attempt to cast a shadow on the Russian presidential election and destabilize the situation in Russia.

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Canadian Border Authority Busts 1.5 Tons of Cocaine Worth \$143Mln in Port of Halifax

WASHINGTON, March 19 (Sputnik) - More than 1.5 tons of cocaine valued at C\$194 million (US\$143 million) were seized at the Port of Halifax in Nova Scotia, the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) said on Tuesday.

"In early March 2024, more than 1.5 tonnes of suspected cocaine was seized by CBSA border services officers at the Container Examination Facility in Halifax, Nova Scotia (NS). The seizure has been valued at approximately \$194 million," the border authority said in a statement.

The shipment's seizure was made in collaboration between CBSA Atlantic's Operations and Intelligence Divisions, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) in Halifax, and the United States Homeland Security Investigations, the statement said.

The US agency warned its Canadian counterparts on March 4 about the possibility of

contraband in a marine shipping container departing from California to Canada with a final destination in Europe, the statement said.

CBSA seized and examined the container on March 6 after which the concealed cocaine was found. Further investigation will be carried out by the RCMP, the statement added.

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Senate Intel Chair Says US Walking Away From Ukraine Would Be Historic Mistake

WASHINGTON, March 19 (Sputnik) - US Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Mark Warner said the United States would make a mistake of historic proportions if it walked away from helping Ukraine amid Russia's special military operation.

"My top priority right now is not having America walk away from Ukraine, it would be a mistake of historic proportions," Warner said during a panel discussion at the CrowdStrike Government Threat summit in Washington.

Earlier in the day, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said he is optimistic Congress will approve additional funding for Ukraine although it's been delayed for several months.

The United States ran out of funding for Ukraine aid in December, and in February Republicans in the Senate shot down a \$110 billion supplemental package, that included \$60 billion for Ukraine, because of disagreements over border reform policies in the legislation.

The Senate passed an alternate \$95 billion foreign aid bill that includes some \$60 billion for Ukraine but excludes any border security measures. The legislation is stuck in the House of Representatives as Republicans look into other options to get aid to Ukraine while also addressing the crisis on the US southern border.

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Ukraine Losing Ground on Battlefield Due to US Inaction - White House

WASHINGTON, March 19 (Sputnik) - Ukraine is losing ground on the battlefield due to the inaction of the US Congress, White House spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre said on Tuesday.

"Because of the inaction of Congress over the last couple of months, Ukraine is actually losing ground on the battlefield," Jean-Pierre said during a press briefing. "It is due to our inaction."

Congress has been deadlocked for months over a foreign aid supplemental bill that would provide funding for Ukraine, Israel, and Taiwan. While the Senate approved a \$95 billion version of the bill last month, Speaker Mike Johnson has refused to bring it to the House floor for a vote.

Russia has consistently warned against the continued arms deliveries to Ukraine, saying that they only prolong the conflict. Moscow also sees the Ukraine conflict as a hybrid war led by the United States.

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Biden Tells Netanyahu US Not Trying to Interfere in Internal Israeli Politics - Reports

WASHINGTON, March 19 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden reassured Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in a call earlier this week that he has no intention of interfering in Israeli politics, Axios reported on Tuesday.

Last week, US Senate Majority Leader called Netanyahu an obstacle to peace and urged new elections in Israel. Biden characterized Schumer's speech as "good," but White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said that it is up to Israelis to decide on the timing of the country's next election.

During a call on Monday, Netanyahu complained to Biden about Schumer's speech, the report said, citing two sources familiar with the call. In response, Biden told Netanyahu that his administration is not trying to undermine him or interfere in Israeli domestic politics, the report said.

Netanyahu said on Sunday that new elections in Israel could paralyze the country for months and bring the conflict with Hamas to a halt.

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Mississippi Ex-Deputy Sheriff Sentenced to 20 Years in Torture Case - Reports

WASHINGTON, March 19 (Sputnik) - Former Mississippi deputy sheriff Hunter Elward has been sentenced to 20 years in prison on federal charges related to his torture of two Black men in January 2023, CNN reported on Tuesday.

Elward had pleaded guilty last year to federal charges of discharge of a firearm during a crime of violence; conspiracy against rights; deprivation of rights under color of law; conspiracy to obstruct justice; and obstruction of justice.

Elward and five other officers tortured Michael Jenkins and Eddie Parker in their home in Braxton, Mississippi, for nearly two hours, culminating with shooting Jenkins in the mouth. The two victims filed a federal civil rights lawsuit last June.

The other five officers are scheduled to be sentenced this week.

All six officers are also awaiting sentencing on state charges in the case.

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### Canada Allocates \$10.8Mln in Development Assistance for Projects in Iraq – Ministry

WASHINGTON, March 19 (Sputnik) – Canada has allocated C\$14.7 million (US\$10.8 million) in development assistance to finance three projects in Iraq, Global Affairs Canada (GAC) said on Tuesday.

“Today, the Honourable Ahmed Hussen, Minister of International Development, met with Fuad Hussein, Iraq’s Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs. During this meeting, Minister Hussen announced \$14.77 million in development assistance funding for 3 projects in the country,” GAC said in a statement.

The assistance funding recipients are the International Center for Biosaline Agriculture, Action Against Hunger Canada and the National Democratic Institute, the foreign ministry said.

Canada’s assistance will go toward the Strengthening Evidence-Based Water Management project, Promoting Feminist Solutions to Climate Change-Driven Water and Food Insecurity project, and to the second phase of the Supporting Gender-Sensitive Local Governance Through Women’s Advisory Boards Program, GAC added.

The funds are part of Canada’s broader Middle East engagement strategy which was launched in 2016. To date, Ottawa has pledged over C\$586 million in funding for non-military assistance to Iraq. That includes funds for the humanitarian, security, stabilization and development spheres.

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### Pentagon Chief 'Says He's Optimistic' About Supplemental Aid for Ukraine

WASHINGTON, March 19 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said Tuesday that he was “optimistic” there would be progress on passing supplemental aid for Ukraine.

“I continue to see broad support in both chambers of Congress for Ukraine and so I'm optimistic that we will see some action moving forward,” Austin said at a press briefing.

He conceded however that it was something that “you can’t absolutely predict.”

Congress has been deadlocked for months over a foreign aid supplemental bill that would provide funding for Ukraine, Israel, and Taiwan. While the Senate approved a \$95 billion version of the bill last month, Speaker Mike Johnson has refused to bring it to the House floor for a vote.

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### US Should Immediately Deliver Arms That Taiwan Paid For - Congressman

WASHINGTON, March 19 (Sputnik) - US Congressman Young Kim on Tuesday called on the Biden administration to promptly deliver approved and paid-for weapons to Taiwan.

"I was appalled when I found out that there was \$21 billion worth of arms that Taiwan purchased and paid for - and we have not delivered them," Kim said. "So, I immediately introduced the Arms Exports Delivery Act and I think we have started delivering some but we still have about \$19 billion worth of weapons that Taiwan paid for. We need to do that delivery of arms immediately."

The congressman also said he believes the United States should help Taiwan gain admission to international organizations.

Taiwan has been governed independently of mainland China since 1949. China views the island as its province, while Taiwan - a territory with its own elected government - maintains that it is an autonomous country but stops short of declaring independence. Beijing opposes any official contacts of foreign states with Taipei and considers Chinese sovereignty over the island indisputable.

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US Government Funding Deal Will Perpetuate Deficit, Fail to Secure Borders - Senator

WASHINGTON, March 19 (Sputnik) - A government funding deal announced by the White House and congressional leadership will perpetuate the United States' multi-trillion-dollar deficit and fail to secure the country's borders from illegal migration, US Senator Mike Lee said on Tuesday.

Earlier on Tuesday, US President Joe Biden said that the White House reached an agreement with congressional leaders on a path forward for full-year government funding bills. The US House of Representatives and Senate are working to finalize a legislative package and bring it to the floor quickly for a vote, Biden said in a statement.

"We have reasons to be concerned that this bill will perpetuate a multi-trillion-dollar deficit, be laden with corrupting earmarks, and fail to force Biden to secure the border," Lee said in a statement via social media platform X.

Lee also expressed concerns that members of Congress will not have an adequate opportunity to review, debate and amend the spending legislation before it is brought to a vote. Leadership has yet to inform all lawmakers about the details of the legislation, Lee said.

US Congressman Thomas Massie likewise expressed concerns about the spending legislation. The legislation was written "behind closed doors," Massie said in a statement via social media platform X. Such practices are a return to "swamp mode" in Washington, Massie added.

The US Congress must pass remaining appropriations bills by March 22, lest lawmakers risk a partial federal government shutdown.

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## US to Prepare Contingency Plans for Whether Troops Stay or Leave Niger - Official

WASHINGTON, March 19 (Sputnik) - The United States is receiving mixed signals from Niger's transitional government about whether it will follow through with terminating the bilateral military agreement, but the US Defense Department continues to prepare contingency plans for a withdrawal of US forces from the country, Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Charles Brown said on Tuesday.

"There's been some mixed signals that we received ... we will continue to make plans and prepare whether we stay or or depart," Brown said during a press conference in Germany.

Brown pointed out that the United States will look into establishing partnerships with other nations in West Africa for counterterrorism operations.

On Saturday, Amadou Abdramane, a spokesperson for the Nigerien military, said that the National Council for the Safeguard of the Homeland (CNSP) had denounced with immediate effect an agreement that allowed US military personnel and civilian Pentagon employees to operate on Niger's soil. Abdramane said the decision was taken in the interest of the Nigerien people.

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## ANALYSIS - Western Leaders Can Only Envy Putin's Popularity, Domestic Support

WASHINGTON, March 19 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladimir Putin's sweeping reelection victory on Sunday revealed a level of popular support and approval that the leaders of all major Western nations, especially the United States cannot remotely match and can only dream about, veteran analysts told Sputnik.

Putin won more than 87.28% of the vote in a three-day election last week with a massive 77.44% voter turnout.

### RECORD OF ACHIEVEMENT

Putin's continuing popularity and credibility with his public almost a quarter century after first becoming their leader was based on his achievement on ending a period of enormous human suffering, national disintegration and economic collapse and following it with the longest and most prosperous era in his country's history, former US Army Lt. Col. and political commentator Earl Rasmussen, former vice president of Eurasia Foundation, said.

"It is not surprising that President Putin won reelection," Rasmussen said. "He turned Russia around from the apocalypse of the 1990s and reasserted Russia as a great power."

His popularity, regardless of which poll, "continually shows a support that western 'leaders' can only dream of," Rasmussen said.

The Russian electoral process had been dignified, credible and smooth running, Rasmussen pointed out.

"I think the recent elections for President of the Russian Federation was a resounding success. There were a record number of voters to include voters within Russia and those living abroad," he said.

Eyewitnesses testified to the validity and effectiveness of the Russian electoral process, Rasmussen observed.

"Those who I know who voted found the process well organized. Despite demonstrations people waited patiently to vote, even though many anticipated the outcome," he said.

#### BELIEF FOR FUTURE

The process also expressed the continuing optimism of the Russian people about the future of their country in the face of escalating Western hostility against it, Rasmussen emphasized.

"Those voting, showed their support for the country in voicing their belief for the future," he said.

Many in the West would seek to demonize the vote, Rasmussen acknowledged.

However, "the election clearly shows a massive support for President Putin and his policies, demonstrating a truly united Russia," he said.

Far from weakening Russia's credibility and prestige around the world, the election process and Putin's victory would only serve to enhance it, Rasmussen explained.

"The outcome will act to further strengthen his standing in Russia and internationally. With the exception of the West, the rest of the world will recognize the results and look forward to cooperating with Russia and the leadership Russia and her leader provides," he said.

#### LANDSLIDE VICTORY

Putin's victory also dealt a fatal blow to the continuing US-led efforts to delegitimize and topple him, American University in Moscow President Edward Lozansky explained.

"Putin's unquestionable landslide victory shows that the anti-Russia Collective Western crusade led by Washington, plus the upcoming US November elections, enters its final stage," he said.

The United States could still safely deescalate its irresponsible and dangerous confrontation with Russia if likely Republican candidate Donald Trump wins a second term as US president this November, Lozansky advised.

"Trump, in case of victory, is capable of reaching an honorable compromise with Putin, but [current President Joe] Biden is not," he said.

Washington policy planners remained wedded to their obsessive determination to confront and defeat Russia even though that hostility could only lead to a catastrophic nuclear war, Lozansky warned.

"The Crusaders are not giving up the idea of inflicting strategic defeat on Russia while according to Russia's military doctrine in view of its inevitability Putin will use nuclear weapons," he said.

Scores of millions of ordinary Americans now had to make their choice between peace and survival, or confrontation and catastrophic nuclear war, Lozansky advised.

"So, it is up to Americans to decide whether to stick to Biden and his cabal who provoked this war back in February 2014 by staging a pro-NATO coup [in Ukraine] or choose Trump, definitely not the angel, but the one who hasn't started a single war and believes that 'getting along with Russia is a good thing, not a bad thing,'" Lozansky pointed out.

#### FANTASIES EXPOSED

Former UK Ambassador to Syria and veteran diplomat Peter Ford agreed that Putin's massive victory exposed the decade-and-more long fantasies of US and UK policymakers and political leaders that the Russian leader was about to be squeezed out and that his country was going to disintegrate.

"The sour Western reactions to President Putin's victory - portrayed as hollow and meaningless

- serve only to underline how significant it was," he said.

The US and European publics had been fed a nonstop propaganda barrage of lies that the Russian people hated their government and that it was on the brink of collapsing, but the smooth and popular running of the election process had exposed all these claims as lies, Ford observed.

"A year ago, we were reading Western 'experts' fevered anticipations of Putin's military defeat and domestic overthrow - 'experts' who are all professional Russia-haters on the payroll of the Western military- intelligence-industrial complex. How bitter it must taste for them, this total upending of their hopes," he noted.

The three other presidential candidates in Russia's three-day marathon voting came far behind Putin. Nikolay Kharitonov of the Communist Party received 4.31% of the vote, followed by Vladislav Davankov of the New People party (3.85%) and Leonid Slutsky of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (3.20%).

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Former Trump Advisor Arrives at Federal Prison to Begin Four-Month Sentence

WASHINGTON, March 19 (Sputnik) - Peter Navarro, a White House advisor under former US President Donald Trump, reported to a federal prison on Tuesday to begin serving a four-month sentence for defying a congressional subpoena from the House January 6 committee.

Navarro attempted to delay the sentence pending an appeal, although an appeals court blocked his efforts earlier this month. Navarro was instructed to report to Federal Correctional Institution Miami on or before 2:00 p.m. EDT (18:00 GMT) on March 19.

"Every person who has taken me on this road to that prison is a friggin' Democrat and a Trump hater," Navarro said during remarks outside the prison on Tuesday.

Navarro has previously said that he had an honest belief that Trump invoked executive privilege, which he contends justified his decision not to comply with the congressional subpoena.

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US Would Like to Get Rid of Russian 'Malign Influence' in Cuba, Venezuela - SOUTHCOM

WASHINGTON, March 19 (Sputnik) - The United States would like to get rid of the alleged Russian "malign influence" in Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua, among other countries in the region, US Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) chief Laura Richardson said on Tuesday.

"We would like to get rid of that [Russian influence in Nicaragua, Venezuela and Cuba], mitigate that. It's no good, it's not good for democracies," Richardson said in a discussion at the Atlantic Council (designated an undesirable foreign organization in Russia).

Richardson said Russia aims to replace democracies in South America by supporting non-democratic leaders there and has been spurring negative perceptions of the United States. Earlier in March, Richardson said in a congressional testimony that Russia, China and Iran are allegedly undermining democracies in South America and have increased their diplomatic and economic presence in the region over the past year.

Russia has repeatedly rejected accusations put forth by the United States about its alleged disinformation campaign aimed at the United States.

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Canada's Inflation Rate Decelerated to 2.8% in February - StatCan

WASHINGTON, March 19 (Sputnik) – Canada's inflation rate slowed down to 2.8% in February from 2.9% in January amid a decline in cellular and mobile services as well as grocery prices, Statistics Canada (StatCan) said on Tuesday.

"The Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose 2.8% on a year-over-year basis in February, down from a 2.9% gain in January," StatCan said in its February CPI report.

The deceleration was particularly guided by indexes for cellular services, food purchased from stores, and internet access services, the agency said.

A year-over-year increase in gasoline prices, which rose 0.8% in February after a 4% decline in January, offset the deceleration in inflation.

Canadians were paying 26.5% less in February on a year-over-year basis for their cellular service plans, whereas the cost for accessing internet services was down 13.2% over the same period of time, StatCan said.

Additionally, food prices increased by 2.4% year-on-year in February, down from a 3.4% gain in January, StatCan said. This marked the first time that grocery prices rose at a slower pace than the overall inflation rate since October 2021.

StatCan said that despite less pronounced increases in grocery costs, prices continue to go up and remain significant. Canadians are still paying 21.6% more for their food compared to February 2021.

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Biden Says Reached Deal With Congressional Leaders On Remaining 2024 Spending Bills

WASHINGTON, March 19 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden announced on Tuesday that he has reached a deal with Congressional leaders on remaining spending bills for this fiscal year 2024, and will sign the package immediately once Congress passes it.

"We have come to an agreement with Congressional leaders on a path forward for the remaining full-year funding bills," Biden said in a statement. "The House and Senate are now

working to finalize a package that can quickly be brought to the floor, and I will sign it immediately."

Lawmakers must pass the spending legislation for the departments of State, Defense, Homeland Security, Labor and Health and Human Services before the end of the day on Friday to avoid a partial government shutdown.

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Trump Sues ABC News, Anchor George Stephanopoulos for Defamation - Court Document

WASHINGTON, March 19 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump sued ABC News and its anchor George Stephanopoulos for defamation, a court document revealed on Tuesday.

"Plaintiff President Donald J. Trump, by and through his counsel, sues Defendants, American Broadcasting Companies, Inc., ABC News, Inc. and George Stephanopoulos," Trump's legal representative Alejandro Brito said in the complaint.

The complaint was submitted to the Miami Division of the US District Court for Southern District of Florida.

The complaint said Stephanopoulos had stated several times during his weekly show This Week on March 10 that Trump had been found liable by multiple juries for the rape of former advice columnist E. Jean Carroll.

"These statements were and remain false, and were made by Defendant Stephanopoulos with actual malice or with a reckless disregard for the truth given that Defendant Stephanopoulos knows that these statements are patently and demonstrably false," the complaint said.

The complaint referred to Stephanopoulos' interview with US Congresswoman Nancy Mace, a rape survivor, in which he asked the lawmaker about her endorsing Trump.

"Plaintiff hereby requests a jury trial as to all issues so triable," the complaint said.

Trump seeks judgment against the defendants for damages, court costs and other things, the complaint added.

In late January, a jury awarded an additional \$83.3 million to Carroll, who said she was defamed and her reputation damaged by Trump for calling her a liar.

On March 8, Trump posted a \$91.6 million bond with the Federal Insurance Company as part of his appeal in the defamation case.

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US Admits On-the-Ground Presence Possible in Haiti - Southern Command

WASHINGTON, March 19 (Sputnik) – The US Southern Command conceded on Tuesday that there was a possibility that there would be US boots on the ground in Haiti.

"They could be at the end of the day. We wouldn't discount that at any time," Gen. Laura

Richardson, commander of US Southern Command, said at the Atlantic Council (designated an undesirable foreign organization in Russia).

She added that the US Southern Command was "prepared" if called upon by the State Department or Pentagon.

Richardson was evasive when asked to confirm reports that the US is planning to house Haitian refugees at Guantanamo Bay.

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#### Chicago Authorities Begin Evicting Migrants From Shelters After Months of Delay – Reports

WASHINGTON, March 19 (Sputnik) – The US city of Chicago has begun evicting migrants from shelters after months of delay in a haphazard manner, NBC reported on Tuesday.

In the first two days, authorities managed to evict less than 10 migrants, some of whom noted the poor organization of the process, which in many cases came as a big surprise, the report said.

There are 11,253 migrants across 23 shelters in the city while a total of 37,308 individuals arrived in Chicago since 2022 after Texas governor Greg Abbott began busing migrants to several Democrat-run cities in the country, according to the report.

City authorities expect to evict about 2,026 migrants by the end of April, but there is a chance that some of them will get extensions to stay in shelters due to a long list of exemptions, the report added.

It remains unclear where those who will be evicted from shelters will live and how city authorities are going to cope with this situation.

Fox News reported last week that evicted migrants will be housed in a specially equipped area on the outskirts of Chicago, which will serve as a temporary shelter. They will be able to reapply for a bed at the city shelter, the report added.

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US Congress Reaches Deal on DHS Funding, 2024 Spending Bill to Avert Shutdown – Speaker

WASHINGTON, March 19 (Sputnik) – Congressional leaders and the White House have struck a deal on funding for the Department of Homeland Security, removing the last key obstacle to concluding the remaining 2024 spending bills before a government shutdown this weekend, Speaker Mike Johnson said on Tuesday.

"An agreement has been reached for DHS appropriations, which will allow completion of the FY24 appropriations process. House and Senate committees have begun drafting bill text to be prepared for release and consideration by the full House and Senate as soon as possible," Johnson wrote in a social media post.