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US Under Secretary of State Nuland to Step Down in Coming Weeks – Blinken

WASHINGTON, March 5 (Sputnik) – US Under Secretary of State Victoria Nuland plans to step down in the coming weeks, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Tuesday.

"Victoria Nuland has let me know that she intends to step down in the coming weeks as Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs," Blinken said in a statement.

The State Department is grateful for Nuland's service, and "for the lasting mark she's made on this institution and the world," Blinken stated.

Under Secretary for Management John Bass will serve as Acting Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs until Nuland's replacement is confirmed.

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Massive Fire Erupts in Michigan, Raining Debris Up to Mile Away - Police

WASHINGTON, March 5 (Sputnik) - A massive fire erupted at the warehouse in the US state of Michigan, leaving two people injured and sending explosive materials flying in all directions, Clinton Township Police Department said in a statement on Tuesday.

The police shared that they responded to the call about the fire at the business stocking combustible materials at 8:50pm on Monday.

"Upon arrival, Officers observed exploding materials flying in all directions from the building," the statement said. "Personnel on scene established a perimeter of security and proceeded to evacuate area residents and businesses."

The police said that during their response, one firefighter sustained a minor injury, while a police vehicle and a fire vehicle were also damaged by the exploding projectile cannisters.

"A bystander sustained injuries associated with the incident and was transported to a local hospital," the statement said. "Crews remained on scene through to the early morning hours of March 5, 2024 clearing the roadway and area parking lots of debris."

The police warned residents earlier in a statement of the danger of the flying debris coming down "as far as a mile away," and urged people to stay inside and out of the vicinity.

The facility belongs to Select Distributors, whose website says it supplies novelty items, vape products, phone accessories, lighters, nitrous oxide and CBD oils, among other products.

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

US Under Secretary of State Nuland to Step Down in Coming Weeks – Blinken

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"Victoria Nuland has let me know that she intends to step down in the coming weeks as Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs," Blinken said in a statement.

The State Department is grateful for Nuland's service, and "for the lasting mark she's made on this institution and the world," Blinken stated.

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US, Jordan Conduct Joint Airdrop of Food Aid in North Gaza – Central Command

WASHINGTON, March 5 (Sputnik) – The United States and Jordan conducted a joint humanitarian operation on Tuesday to airdrop more than 36,000 meals in northern Gaza, according to the US Central Command.

"Central Command and the Royal Jordanian Air Force conducted a combined humanitarian assistance airdrop into Northern Gaza on March 5, 2024, at 2:30 p.m. (Gaza time) to provide essential relief to civilians affected by the ongoing conflict," according to a Central Command social media post.

It added that planes "dropped over 36,800 US and Jordanian meal equivalents in Northern Gaza."

The US confirmed its first airdrop of aid in Gaza in coordination with Jordan on Saturday.

The shift to airdrops occurred after at least 112 Palestinians were killed during an aid delivery in Gaza City on Thursday when Israeli troops fired as people congregated in anticipation of food aid trucks.

The Israeli military said that most died from being trampled or run over by the trucks. The IDF said it opened fire on several Gazans who moved toward an IDF tank and troops.

On Tuesday, the World Food Programme testified at the UN Security Council than more than half a million, or one in four people in Gaza were at risk of famine, amid nearly five months of siege imposed by Israel.

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Harris' Remarks on Gaza Toned Down by National Security Council – Reports

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WASHINGTON, March 5 (Sputnik) – National Security Council officials toned down parts of US Vice President Kamala Harris' speech on Sunday that called for an immediate ceasefire of at least six weeks in Gaza, NBC News reported on Tuesday, citing three US officials and a former US official.

The draft speech, which was reviewed in advance by the National Security Council, contained stronger remarks toward Israel regarding the horrific humanitarian situation in Gaza after nearly five months of war and siege and the need for Israel to immediately allow more aid trucks into Gaza.

The officials said that the edits had to do with tone rather than actual policy. Harris' communication director said it was "inaccurate" to characterize the speech as watered down.

It is protocol for senior White House officials to submit speeches regarding foreign policy to the National Security Council and West Wing staff for advance review, the officials said.

While Harris was restating rather than revising the Biden administration's recent policy stance while speaking in Selma, her forceful delivery and its timing that coincided with the anniversary of a key moment in the civil rights movement caught attention.

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US Banks Continue to Face Vulnerabilities Despite Recovering From Turmoil - IMF

WASHINGTON, March 5 (Sputnik) – The US banking sector continues to face vulnerabilities despite many regional banks recovering from the turmoil in 2023, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said on Tuesday.

"Vulnerabilities in the US banking sector persist. Shifts in market expectations regarding the timing and pace of interest rate cuts in the United States, coupled with substantial losses announced by a major US regional bank heavily exposed to commercial real estate (CRE), prompted a 10 percent decline in corresponding index6, highlighting that investor confidence in the sector remains unsteady," the IMF said in its report on global financial stability.

The fund expressed concerns over banks with high unrealized losses stemming from the recent interest rate increase and large potential liquidity pressures arising from uninsured deposits. "Other forms of less stable funding are now particularly salient for banks with concentrated exposures to CRE," it added.

The IMF pointed out that the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank (SVB) in 2023 substantially impacted financial markets. "This stress was the most important sector-specific shock since the global financial crisis," according to the report.

The banking turmoil also led to a sudden flight to quality in the sovereign bond market and an unprecedented repricing of market rate expectations, it added.

The US financial system was rocked by several high-profile bank failures triggered by the collapse of California's Silicon Valley Bank (SVB) in March 2023 after the massive withdrawal of money by depositors. Regulators later blamed the crisis on poor risk management by banks rather than Fed action on interest rates.

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Biden Admin. to End Excessive Credit Card Late Fees – White House

WASHINGTON, March 5 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden's Competition Council will significantly reduce credit card late fees to save consumers about $10 billion yearly as part of a new action plan to reduce living costs for Americans, the White House said in a press release on Tuesday.

"Today, The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) finalized a rule to slash credit card late fees from the current average of $31 down to $8, saving consumers $10 billion a year, or an average savings of $220 per year for the more than 45 million people who are charged these late fees annually," the press release said.

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Biden to Launch New 'Strike Force' to Crack Down on Unfair Pricing – White House

WASHINGTON, March 5 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden will launch a new "strike force" to crack down on unfair and illegal pricing as part of a new action plan to reduce the cost of living for Americans, the White House said in a press release on Tuesday.

"President Biden is committed to making sure corporations are held accountable when they try to rip off Americans, including when they break the law while keeping prices high. To that end, the President is establishing a new Strike Force on Unfair and Illegal Pricing co-chaired by the Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission," the press release said.

The new force will focus on price gouging in key sectors of the US economy, including prescription drugs and health care, food and grocery, housing, and financial services, the release added.

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RPT: PREVIEW - US Holds 'Super Tuesday' Nominating Contests in Decisive Day for Candidates

WASHINGTON, March 5 (Sputnik) - More than a dozen states across the United States will hold presidential nominating contests on so-called Super Tuesday, on which more than a third of Republican and Democratic delegates are up for grabs.

Fifteen states including Alabama, California, Colorado, Maine, Massachusetts, Texas and Virginia will hold Republican primary elections, in addition to caucuses in Alaska and Utah.

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Democrats will hold nominating contests in the same states, except for Alaska, as well as a caucus in the US territory of American Samoa. Moreover, the results of the Iowa Democratic caucus, held in January, will be released on Super Tuesday.

Former US President Donald Trump and former US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley will vie for more than 850 Republican delegates; the candidates must secure 1,215 delegates to win the Republican nomination.

Current US President Joe Biden will also seek to secure his status as the Democratic nominee by winning the more than 1,400 delegates at stake on Super Tuesday, with 1,968 required to earn the nomination.

Trump and Biden are the current frontrunners to win their respective parties' nominations. Trump has almost won every nominating contest so far, with the exception of the Washington, DC primary on Sunday. Biden has likewise emerged victorious in every Democratic nominating contest up to Super Tuesday.

On Monday, the US Supreme Court overturned a Colorado Supreme Court decision to remove Trump from primary election ballots in the state, which will vote on Super Tuesday. The US Supreme Court decision comes amid challenges to Trump's ballot access in several states.

The Republican Party is set to hold its nominating convention on July 15-18 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Democrats will hold their convention on August 19-22 in Chicago, Illinois. The parties' nominees will then face off on Election Day on November 5.

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Pro-Palestinian Protesters Interrupt Nikki Haley's Rally in Texas - Correspondent

DALLAS, March 5 (Sputnik), Lenka White - Dozen of pro-Palestinian protesters interrupted a rally of the GOP candidate for president, Nikki Haley, in Forth Worth, Texas.

"Cease fire now," all the protesters shouted, with half of them being of Middle Eastern origin.

As soon as the protesters began shouting their slogans, the Haley crowd began shouting even louder. One rally participant said her team didn't seem to want TV reporters in the back of the hall to pick up the anti-Haley noise.

Haley is known for her hawkish stance on US foreign policy, advocating strong support for US allies. Haley said the United States would give Israel whatever it needed and that Hamas should be eliminated.

More than a dozen states, including Texas, will hold presidential nominating contests on so-called Super Tuesday. Former US President Donald Trump and former US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley will vie for more than 850 Republican delegates; the candidates must secure 1,215 delegates to win the Republican nomination.

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US Economy Doing Well For Wealthy, Middle Class Hit Hard By Inflation - Senate Candidate

WASHINGTON, March 5 (Sputnik) - Although the US economy is currently doing well for the wealthy class, inflation is taking a big toll on the middle class and poor in the United States, Democratic US Senate candidate Lawrence Hamm told Sputnik.

"The US economy is doing well for the wealthiest in the country," Hamm, of New Jersey, said. "However, working people, the poor, and the middle class are being hit hard by inflation."

Hamm explained that tax cuts made by the previous Republican Bush and Trump administrations primarily benefited the rich, but added trillions to the national deficit, caused a decline in federal revenues, and cuts to social spending which have had a negative impact on the greater US public.

The United States is currently $34 trillion in debt after Congress passed legislation last June that suspended the debt ceiling until January 2025 in order to avert an unprecedented default on the federal government's debt.

International Monetary Fund Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva recently said the United States can show more discipline with respect to public spending as the strength of the US dollar and post-pandemic excesses in government expenditures are feeding into global inflation.

Public spending is among the major talking points in presidential elections due in November, with polls suggesting that voters increasingly believed higher federal spending was directly contributing to inflation.

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BAE Systems MethaneSat Satellite Will Monitor Methane Emissions Globally - Statement

WASHINGTON, March 5 (Sputnik) - BAE Systems announced in a release the successful launch from Vandenberg Air Force Base of the MethaneSat satellite to provide reliable scientific data about the sources and scale of methane emissions globally.

"BAE Systems is celebrating alongside its customers at the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) following the successful launch of the MethaneSAT satellite from Vandenberg Space Force Base in California," the release said on Monday.

The satellite will give the public reliable scientific information about the sources and scale of methane emissions globally with the ultimate goal of driving reductions in the near future, the release said.

"MethaneSAT's primary instrument includes a BAE Systems-built spectrometer that will identify and quantify methane emissions by measuring the narrow part of the infrared spectrum where the gas absorbs light reflected off the Earth," the release added.

The satellite will monitor emissions from the oil and gas sector, which accounts for about 40% of all human-caused methane emissions, and it will be able to revisit the same sites daily in most cases, according to the release.

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UNRWA Chief Confirms Internal Probe of Alleged Israeli Abuse of Palestinian Detainees

WASHINGTON, March 5 (Sputnik) - UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini during a press conference confirmed that the agency has an internal report of Palestinian complaints of mistreatment while in Israeli custody after October 7.

"There is a report which has not been made public of hundreds of detainees," Lazzarini said on Monday. "We have seen these people in detention, some of them for a couple of weeks, some of them for a couple of months, and most of them coming back completely traumatized by the ordeal they have gone through."

Lazzarini said, citing their probe, that several Palestinians were allegedly obliged to have their photo taken naked, some were subject to verbal and psychological abuse, and others were threatened to be electrocuted.

Moreover, there have been many cases where Palestinian detainees were sleep deprived or subject to extreme noise to prevent them from sleeping, Lazzarini said.

Dogs were also used by Israelis to intimidate Palestinian detainees, he added.

"There have been quite a number of various ways of putting people under pressure," Lazzarini said.

The age of the Palestinians allegedly abused by Israelis ranges from 15 to 80 years old, Lazzarini said.

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UNRWA Chief Says Not Concerned About Staff Amid Israeli Claims About Connections to Hamas

WASHINGTON, March 5 (Sputnik) - UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini said during a press conference that he is not concerned about the local staff the agency employs regardless of Israeli claims that some of them are connected with the Palestinian movement Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Johad.

"I have never received the slightest concern about the staff that we are employing," Lazzarini said on Monday.

Lazzarini was responding to Israeli claims that 450 UNRWA employees out of a total of 13,000 are active members of Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

Lazzarini said the only allegations he's received are related to Israel's accusations in January claiming that 12% of alleged UNRWA staffers participated in the October 7 Hamas attacks on Israel.

The United States, Canada, Australia, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Finland, Estonia, Japan, Austria, Romania and the United Kingdom suspended their donations to UNRWA following

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Israel's accusations that some of the agency's staff participated in the Hamas attacks on the Jewish state on October 7.

More than 30,000 Palestinians have been killed during Israel's military operations in Gaza since October 7 and more than 76,000 wounded, according to the local authorities. In addition, some 1.9 million Palestinians out of 2.3 million in Gaza have been displaced and it is estimated that a significant percentage of them are facing hunger and starvation.

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UNRWA Commissioner-General Lazzarini Says 50% Decline in Gaza Aid Following ICJ Ruling

WASHINGTON, March 5 (Sputnik) - UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini said during a press briefing that aid to Gaza has halved since January, despite the International Court of Justice's orders.

"Since that time, what have we seen is assistance has halved, has not increased...If I compare the flow of aid going into Gaza, between January and February, it has decreased by 50%," Lazzarini said on Monday.

In January, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled on provisional measures in South Africa's case against Israel over alleged genocide in the Gaza Strip. The court ordered Israel to take urgent measures to prevent acts of genocide and ensure the flow of humanitarian aid to the enclave. At the same time, the ICJ did not order an immediate ceasefire in Gaza.

On October 7, the Palestinian movement 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 Gaza, and started a ground incursion into the Palestinian enclave with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas fighters and rescuing the hostages. At least 30,000 people have been killed so far in the Gaza Strip, local authorities said.

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

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US Must Change Foreign, Economic Policies That Fuel Border Crisis - Senate Candidate

WASHINGTON, March 5 (Sputnik) - The United States must change its foreign and economic policies that may be contributing to mass migration in its region, Democratic US Senate candidate Lawrence Hamm told Sputnik.

"We must change US foreign policy and economic policies that are creating adverse conditions

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that force people to leave their home countries," Hamm, of New Jersey, said.

US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) data shows that the Biden administration has experienced three consecutive record-breaking years of illegal immigration on the US southern border. More than 7.2 million migrants have illegally entered the United States via the southern border since President Joe Biden came into office in 2021, according to CBP.

However, Hamm said he opposes the aggressive border security measures sought by Republicans, including controversial Trump-era immigration policies.

"I am opposed to the construction of Trump's border wall, I am opposed to the separation of families, I am opposed to placing immigrants, their families, and children in cages," Hamm said.

To resolve the crisis, Hamm said the US government should adequately fund federal immigration agencies, services, processes, and border security at levels needed to address the border crisis.

The federal government should also provide funding to states, cities, and towns impacted by the influx of immigrants in the United States, Hamma added.

Last month, Senate Republicans rejected a $118 billion national security supplemental package that includes $60 billion for Ukraine, and $14 billion for Israel and border policy reforms. Republicans claim the border security reforms in the bill would not do enough to resolve the border crisis.

"My take on the current gridlock Congress has on foreign aid funding and border security reforms is that at this particular moment, it is caused by conflicts between factions within the Republican right wing majority in the House of Representatives compounded by Donald Trump's influence on them, who does not want them to act affirmatively on these issues," Hamm said.

The Senate ended up sending a $95 billion foreign aid bill to the House of Representatives, which House Speaker Mike Johnson has been reluctant to take up at the moment while lawmakers prioritize passing full-year spending budgets instead of relying on short-term spending bills.

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US Lawmakers Invite Japan's Kishida to Address Congress on April 11 - Letter

WASHINGTON, March 5 (Sputnik) - US congressional leaders in a letter invited Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio to address a joint session of Congress on April 11.

"On behalf of the bipartisan leadership of the United States House of Representatives and the United States Senate, it is our honor to invite you to address a Joint Meeting of Congress on Thursday, April 11, 2024," the letter said on Monday.

The lawmakers highlighted that the relationship between the United States and Japan is important to address global security threats of mutual concern.

The letter added that an address to Congress by Kishida can help pave the way for increased bilateral collaboration in the Indo-Pacific region and around the world.

Congress is currently in a gridlock on approving additional foreign aid to Ukraine, Israel, Taiwan, and for security initiatives in the Indo-Pacific region.

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Russia Stands Against Blackmailing of UN Palestine Refugees Agency - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, March 5 (Sputnik) - Russia stands against any politicization of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and finds the actions of donors to effectively blackmail the agency immoral, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said.

"It is completely immoral and it is nothing more than donor blackmail and politicization of humanitarian issues," Nebenzia said in the UN Security Council chamber on Monday.

Nebenzia said such actions against UNRWA are only worsening the suffering of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and Russia condemns any discrediting of the agency.

On October 7, Hamas launched an attack against Israel from the Gaza Strip, killing some 1,100 people - military and civilians - and abducting 240 others. Israel implemented a complete blockade of Gaza, launched massive strikes and then undertook a ground invasion of the Palestinian enclave with the stated goal of eliminating Hamas and freeing the hostages.

More than 30,000 Palestinians have been killed during Israel's military operations so far and more than 76,000 wounded, according to the local authorities. In addition, some 1.9 million Palestinians out of 2.3 million in Gaza have been displaced and it is estimated that a significant percentage of them is facing hunger and starvation.

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

Russia has repeatedly called on both parties to stop the hostilities, saying that the two-state solution approved by the UN Security Council, which provides for the creation of an independent Palestinian state within the 1967 borders with its capital in East Jerusalem, is the only way to end the conflict.

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Pentagon Says US Doesn't Operate F-35s in Ukraine Contrary to Claims From Singapore

(Updates with more details background in paras 3-6)

WASHINGTON, March 5 (Sputnik) - A US Defense Department spokesperson told Sputnik that the United States does not operate F-35 fighter jets in Ukraine contrary to claims recently made by Singapore's Defense Minister Ng Eng Hen.

Last week, the Singaporean defense chief said during a session of the Parliamentary Committee on Public Procurement that the United States used F-35 fighter jets to locate and identify Russian air defense units in Ukraine and shared the information with its NATO partners.

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"It's not my place to speak for Singapore's MOD [Minister of Defense] or try to clarify his comments," the spokesperson said on Monday. "I can confirm that the US does not fly F-35's in Ukraine. Our support for Ukraine has always been focused on providing them with the security assistance they can use against Russian aggression."

The United States has provided well over $75 billion in military assistance to Ukraine since the start of Russia's special military operation in February 2022. Aid shipments began in 2022 with artillery munitions and training and have escalated to include tanks, advanced air-defense systems, missiles and cluster munitions.

The Kremlin has consistently warned against the West's continued arms deliveries to Ukraine, saying that they only prolong the conflict.

The Biden administration is eager to get more funding approved for Ukraine after it ran out of funds for Kiev in December and Congress has yet to approve more funding.

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Dismantling UN Palestine Agency 'Short-Sighted' - Official

UNITED NATIONS, March 5 (Sputnik) - Dismantling of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is short-term focused, the Commissioner-General of UNRWA Philippe Lazzarini said on Monday.

"Dismantling UNRWA is short-sighted," Lazzarini said in the Council chamber.

UNRWA is the primary humanitarian agency in the Gaza Strip, with over 2 million people depending on it for survival. In January, Israel shared data with the agency's leadership on the alleged involvement of some of its staff members in the October 7 Hamas attack and vowed to hold accountable anyone involved in "acts of terror."

The United States, Finland, Italy, Australia, Canada, Japan, the United Kingdom and some other countries responded by suspending funding for the agency. In early February, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres appointed an independent review panel led by former French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna to examine UNRWA activities.

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

Russia has repeatedly called on both parties to stop the hostilities, saying that the two-state solution approved by the UN Security Council, which provides for the creation of an independent Palestinian state within the 1967 borders with its capital in East Jerusalem, is the only way to end the conflict.

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US Military Struggles to Recruit Due to Foreign Intervention Policy - Former Army Colonel

WASHINGTON, March 5 (Sputnik) - The US military is struggling to recruit new soldiers due to concerns about the United States' policy of foreign intervention in recent decades, retired US Army Colonel Douglas MacGregor said in an interview with journalist Tucker Carlson.

"We're having problems recruiting for a very simple reason: people that have been through this over the last 20-30 years have said, 'What are we doing? What's the point of being in the military?' We go to these places. They look around in Iraq or they look around in Afghanistan and they say, 'There's nothing here. What am I doing here?' Oh, well, you're building democracy. And people burst out laughing. It's nonsense," MacGregor said in the interview, released Monday.

People in the US are ready to defend the county but do not see evidence of the US government doing that with the military, MacGregor said. Defending countries in the Middle East or Ukraine is not what soldiers sign up for, MacGregor said.

Military institutions take decades to build and are resilient because of replenishments in human capital, MacGregor said. Destroying the military establishment sets the conditions for the "total destruction" of the country, MacGregor said.

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UPDATE - US Arrests Airman for Transmitting Classified Information on Russia - Justice Dept.

(Updates with more details in para 3-5)

WASHINGTON, March 5 (Sputnik) - The US government has indicted a civilian employee of the US Air Force for transmitting classified information via an online dating platform, including about Russian military capabilities related to the conflict in Ukraine, the Justice Department said.

"A civilian employee of the US Air Force assigned to the US Strategic Command, at Offutt Air Force Base, was arrested Saturday, March 2, for allegedly conspiring to transmit and transmitting classified information relating to the national defense on a foreign online dating platform beginning in or around February 2022 until in or around April 2022," the Justice Department said in a press release on Monday.

The government alleges that David Franklin Slater, 63, from the US state of Nebraska, attended top secret meetings hosted by the US Strategic Command and transmitted classified information to a co-conspirator who he believed was a Ukrainian female whom the defendant met on a foreign dating website, the release said.

Slater's co-conspirator asked him to provide information on military targets and Russian military capabilities related to Moscow's special operation in Ukraine, the release added.

The airman is scheduled to make his first court appearance on Tuesday, March 5, and faces a

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maximum penalty of 10 years in prison, three years of supervised release and a fine of up to $250,000 for each count of conspiracy to transmit and the transmission of national defense information, according to the release.

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US Arrests Airman for Transmitting Classified Information on Russia - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 5 (Sputnik) - The US government has indicted a civilian employee of the US Air Force for transmitting classified information via an online dating platform, including about Russian military capabilities related to the conflict in Ukraine, the Justice Department said.
"A civilian employee of the US Air Force assigned to the US Strategic Command, at Offutt Air Force Base, was arrested Saturday, March 2, for allegedly conspiring to transmit and transmitting classified information relating to the national defense on a foreign online dating platform beginning in or around February 2022 until in or around April 2022," the Justice Department said in a press release on Monday.

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Likely US Voters Consider Trump Greater Supporter of Israel Than Biden - Poll

WASHINGTON, March 5 (Sputnik) - A greater percentage of likely voters in the United States view former President Donald Trump as a stronger supporter of Israel than current officeholder Joe Biden, a new Rasmussen Reports poll revealed.
A plurality of respondents, 40%, believe that Trump is a stronger supporter of Israel than Biden, a report on the poll said on Monday.
Twenty-seven percent (27%) of respondents believe that Biden is more pro-Israel than Trump, 21% believe they demonstrate an equivalent level of support and 12% are unsure, the poll report said.
The poll comes amid a conflict between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip, where 1,100 Israelis - both military and civilians - have died and more than 30,000 Palestinians. Some 1.9 million of the 2.3 million Palestinians in Gaza have been displaced and a significant portion is facing hunger and starvation.
The Biden administration has engaged in efforts to provide military assistance to Israel and humanitarian aid to the Palestinian civilians, as well as to encourage a ceasefire and hostage release deal between Israel and Hamas.
The poll surveyed 979 likely US voters from February 26-28. The poll maintains a margin of error of plus-or-minus three percentage points with a 95% confidence level.

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Biden Administration Asks Supreme Court to Block Texas Immigration Law SB4 - Filing

WASHINGTON, March 5 (Sputnik) - The Justice Department is asking the US Supreme Court to block a new Texas law known as SB4 that would allow state authorities to arrest and prosecute illegal immigrants, a court filing revealed.

"This suit was brought by the United States to enjoin the enforcement of a new Texas law, Senate Bill 4 (SB4), that would directly regulate the entry and removal of noncitizens," the court document said on Monday. "SB4, which was to go into effect on March 5, 2024, would impose state criminal penalties on noncitizens who unlawfully enter or reenter Texas from Mexico and would require Texas courts to order the removal of those noncitizens to Mexico without Mexico's consent and without observing the substantive or procedural requirements of federal law governing removal."

The Justice Department argues that Texas' actions are inconsistent with US law and enforcement of immigration laws is solely the responsibility of the federal government.

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

The state law will go into effect on March 10 if the US Supreme Court does not intervene.

Close to eight 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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Harris Reaffirms US Support for Israel During Meeting With Gantz - White House

WASHINGTON, March 5 (Sputnik) - US Vice President Kamala Harris has met with Israeli War Cabinet member Benny Gantz to affirm the United States' support for Israel in the war against Hamas but also expressed concern for the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, the White House said.

"She [Harris] reiterated US support for Israel's right to defend itself in the face of ongoing Hamas terrorist threats and underscored our unwavering commitment to Israel's security. The Vice President expressed her deep concern about the humanitarian conditions in Gaza and the recent horrific tragedy around an aid convoy in northern Gaza," the White House said in a statement on Monday.

The officials also discussed the situation in Rafah and the need for a credible and implementable humanitarian plan prior to contemplating any major military operation there given the risks to civilians, the statement said.

Harris urged Israel to collaborate with the United States and other global partners to boost and

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safely distribute humanitarian aid to Gaza, the statement added.

Last week, Gantz arrived in the United States for a series of meetings, including with Harris and Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

However, Gantz is visiting the United States without the approval of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who reportedly was upset and instructed the Israeli embassy in Washington not to facilitate Gantz's meetings.

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Oil Down On Demand Concerns Despite OPEC+ Pledging New Cuts

NEW YORK, March 5 (Sputnik) - Crude prices fell more than 1% Monday as demand concerns showed no signs of dissipating despite producer alliance OPEC+ pledging fresh output cuts that would constrain supply at least until the middle of the year.

US West Texas Intermediate crude for April delivery finished the day's trade down $1.23, or 1.5%. at $78.74 a barrel.

London-traded Brent crude for May delivery settled down 75 cents, or 0.9%, at $82.80.

The swoon came despite the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies, led by Saudi Arabia and Russia and known collectively as OPEC+, committing to maintaining their current run of 2.2 million barrels per day supply cuts until the end of June.

The producer alliance had been widely expected to extend its current pace of production cuts until the second quarter.

Yet, traders took little solace from the cuts when putting them against the larger perspective of tepid demand forecast in the months ahead.

Notwithstanding the lower close on the day, oil prices are still up on the year, with US crude showing an annual gain of almost 10% and Brent nearly 8%.

Russia and Saudi Arabia, who lead the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies, or OPEC+, committed to maintaining their current run of 2.2 million barrels per day supply cuts until the end of June.

Since 2024 began, oil prices have risen on fears that the Israel-Hamas war could disrupt crude shipments from oil-rich countries around the conflict zone. Houthi rebels supporting Hamas have particularly attacked vessels in the Red Sea, delaying some oil deliveries to Europe and Asia.

But some supply disruption expectations have been countered by a jump in non-OPEC crude production and signs of waning demand from top oil importer China, which is struggling with an anemic economy.

Surging stockpiles of US crude have also raised worries about demand for oil. Domestic crude inventories rose for a fifth week in a row and by around 27 million barrels since late January, according to data last week from the US Energy Information Administration.

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

US Doesn't Operate F-35s in Ukraine Though Singapore Minister Claims Otherwise - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 5 (Sputnik) – The United States military does not operate F-35 fighter jets in Ukraine though Singaporean Defense Minister Ng Eng Hen claimed otherwise, a Pentagon spokesperson told Sputnik in a statement.

"The US does not operate F-35s in Ukraine," the statement said on Monday.

In Late February, Ng Eng Hen said in his speech at the Committee of Supply Debates 2024 that the United States used its F-35s jets to locate and identify surface-to-air missile sites of Russian units in Ukraine, and shared this information with NATO partners.

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US Congressman Says Government Spending Bill Will Fund 'Edible Plant Vaccines'

WASHINGTON, March 5 (Sputnik) - Federal government spending legislation under consideration by the US Congress includes funding for research into edible plant vaccines, US Congressman Thomas Massie said in a statement via social media platform X.

"The House voted unanimously to stop funding transgenic edible plant vaccines, but that prohibition was left out of the new omnibus. So your taxpayer dollars will be funding edible plant vaccines, if the enormous spending bill passes this week," Massie said on Monday.

Massie shared a September 2021 University of California Riverside report on the use of plants to deliver mRNA vaccines to humans as an example of the sort of research funded by the bill. It is dangerous to "play God" with food products, Massie said.

Last week, US lawmakers passed a stopgap government funding measure that funds one portion of the government until March 8 and another until March 22. The US Congress is set to begin work this week on the first set of appropriations bills.

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US Congressman Says Reviving Legislation to Disqualify Trump From Election Ballots

WASHINGTON, March 4 (Sputnik) - US Congressman Jamie Raskin said on Monday that he is working with other lawmakers to revive legislation that could be used to try to remove former US President Donald Trump from ballots ahead of the 2024 presidential election.

"I am working with a number of my colleagues … to revive legislation that we had to set up a process by which we could determine that someone who committed insurrection is disqualified by Section Three of the 14th amendment," Raskin said in an interview with CNN.

Section Three of the 14th Amendment of the US Constitution prohibits people who have

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"engaged in insurrection" against the United States from holding public office.
Earlier on Monday, the US Supreme Court overturned a Colorado Supreme Court decision to remove Trump from primary election ballots in the state based on the constitutional provision.
The US Congress is responsible for enforcing Section Three for federal officeholders and candidates, not state officials, the US Supreme Court said.

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PREVIEW - US Holds 'Super Tuesday' Nominating Contests in Decisive Day for Candidates

WASHINGTON, March 5 (Sputnik) - More than a dozen states across the United States will hold presidential nominating contests on so-called Super Tuesday, on which more than a third of Republican and Democratic delegates are up for grabs.
Fifteen states including Alabama, California, Colorado, Maine, Massachusetts, Texas and Virginia will hold Republican primary elections, in addition to caucuses in Alaska and Utah.
Democrats will hold nominating contests in the same states, except for Alaska, as well as a caucus in the US territory of American Samoa. Moreover, the results of the Iowa Democratic caucus, held in January, will be released on Super Tuesday.
Former US President Donald Trump and former US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley will vie for more than 850 Republican delegates; the candidates must secure 1,215 delegates to win the Republican nomination.
Current US President Joe Biden will also seek to secure his status as the Democratic nominee by winning the more than 1,400 delegates at stake on Super Tuesday, with 1,968 required to earn the nomination.
Trump and Biden are the current frontrunners to win their respective parties' nominations. Trump has almost won every nominating contest so far, with the exception of the Washington, DC primary on Sunday. Biden has likewise emerged victorious in every Democratic nominating contest up to Super Tuesday.
On Monday, the US Supreme Court overturned a Colorado Supreme Court decision to remove Trump from primary election ballots in the state, which will vote on Super Tuesday. The US Supreme Court decision comes amid challenges to Trump's ballot access in several states.
The Republican Party is set to hold its nominating convention on July 15-18 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Democrats will hold their convention on August 19-22 in Chicago, Illinois. The parties' nominees will then face off on Election Day on November 5.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

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WASHINGTON, March 5 (Sputnik) -

RECORDING OF GERMAN OFFICERS' CONVERSATION

* The Russian Foreign Ministry said on Monday that it had asked German Ambassador in Moscow Alexander Graf Lambsdorff to explain the leaked audio recording of senior German military officers on supplying Ukraine with Taurus cruise missiles.

* Recommendations on safe remote communication will be distributed in the Bundeswehr after the audio recording of the officers' conversation was leaked, a German Defense Ministry representative said.

* It is surprising that Germany is not concerned about discussions about a possible attack on the Crimean Bridge, but about the fact of the conversation of its senior military officers was leaked, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said.

* The denazification of Germany is not over and if nothing changes consequences will be terrible, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said, commenting on a leaked audio recording of a conversation between high-ranking German military officers on security topics concerning Russia and Ukraine.

* Moscow hopes to learn the results of an investigation into an audio recording of a conversation between high-ranking German military officers on security topics concerning Russia and Ukraine tht was promised by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

GROSSI VISIT TO RUSSIA

* International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Rafael Grossi will travel to Russia's Sochi on March 5 and is scheduled to hold consultations with the Russian delegation on the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) on March 6, Russian Permanent Representative to International Organizations in Vienna Mikhail Ulyanov told Sputnik on Monday.

* There could be a meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Grossi, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Sputnik.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* Ukraine has lost over 490 soldiers and another Abrams tank in the Avdiivka direction, also known as Avdeyevka. over the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Monday.

* Peace talks between Russia and the current Ukrainian leadership are impossible, Russian Security Council Deputy Chairman Dmitry Medvedev said.

* Russia is preparing a list of evidence showing that Ukrainian military forces use toxic substances and will present it to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Russian Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade Kirill Lysogorsky, who heads the Russian delegation to the OPCW, said.

GLOBAL ENERGY

* The European Parliament will vote on a directive that bans supplies of liquefied natural gas (LNG) from Russia to the European Union in April, Energy Commissioner Kadri Simson said on Monday.

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* The EU member states have agreed to extend a recommendation to continue voluntary reducing gas demand in the European Union by 15% for one more year, the EU Council said.

ISRAEL INVASION OF GAZA

* The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip is "simply intolerable," US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday.
* The Biden administration is working to establish a maritime humanitarian assistance corridor for the Gaza Strip to augment the current aid mechanisms, Miller said.
* The work of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in Gaza is over and the organization must be defunded and dismantled given its involvement in Hamas' attack against Israel on October 7, Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations Gilad Erdan said.

ARMED INCIDENT IN GERMANY

* An armed man allegedly took several people hostage in a hospital in the German city of Aachen, the newspaper Bild reported on Monday.
* A woman who infiltrated a hospital in Aachen has barricaded herself in one of the hospital facilities, the police said.

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UPDATE - Speaking About Leaked German Talks Boosts Claims of Western Involvement in Ukraine - Kirby

(Updates with more information in penultimate para; modifies headline; erases an extra word in para 7)

WASHINGTON, March 4 (Sputnik) - White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said on Friday that speaking about the content of a leaked audio recording of talks between high-ranking German military officials about a potential attack on the Crimean Bridge with long-range Taurus missiles bolsters Russia's claims of Western involvement in the conflict in Ukraine.

"Speaking about the content of the leak plays right into Russian hands," Kirby said, adding that it would help Russian President Vladimir Putin to "sell" the narrative that the conflict directly involves the United States, NATO or the collective West.

Margarita Simonyan, the editor-in-chief of RT and the Rossiya Segodnya media group, published a recording of the February 19 conversation between four German military officers on Friday.

German news agency DPA reported earlier that the leaked audio recording was authentic.

On Saturday, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who has publicly repeatedly ruled out the possibility of supplying Ukraine with Taurus missiles, said that the government was investigating the leak.

The Russian Foreign Ministry requested an explanation from German Ambassador in Moscow

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Alexander Graf Lambsdorff. A hybrid war waged by the collective West against the Russian people was in full swing, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

It is surprising that Germany is not concerned about talks of a possible attack on the Crimean Bridge, but rather, about the fact that the conversation of its senior military officials was leaked, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said.

Moreover, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the content of the leaked audio recording points to direct involvement of the collective West in the conflict in Ukraine. If such an outcome is part of Western geopolitics, then it is "very bad," Peskov said.

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Russian Embassy Advises Trudeau to 'Shine Light' on Domestic Issues, Not Russia

WASHINGTON, March 4 (Sputnik) - Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau would be better off "shining light" on the results of his work addressing domestic issues, the Russian embassy said on Monday after the Canadian foreign ministry highlighted its efforts to "shine light" on Russia's alleged disinformation.

"May we kindly advise to PM @JustinTrudeau's cabinet to 'shine light' on the results of solving the Canadian problems for the Canadian constituents: like the lack of housing, homeless tent encampments, opioid crisis, the lack of access to clean, safe drinking water in First Nations, shrinkflation etc?" the embassy wrote on X.

The post was in response to a publication by the Canadian Foreign Ministry that said they were "shining light on Russia's disinformation operation."

The publication contained a link to Global Affairs Canada's website page dedicated to the allegations.

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UPDATE - Pentagon Leak Suspect Teixeira Pleads Guilty, Accepts 16-Year Sentence - Court Filing

(Updates with remarks from Justice Department, other details in paras 5-9)

WASHINGTON, March 4 (Sputnik) – Former US national guardsman Jack Teixeira has pleaded guilty to six counts related to leaking top-secret military intelligence documents and accepted a potential prison term of 200 months or more than 16 years, according to a court document published on Monday.

"Defendant understands and acknowledges that, as of the date of this agreement, the US Attorney intends to recommend that Defendant be incarcerated for 200 months," states the document, which Teixeira signed. "Defendant agrees not to seek any downward departures under the US Sentencing Guidelines."

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US authorities arrested Teixeira in April and indicted him on six counts of willful retention and transmission of classified information relating to national defense. The documents purportedly contained information regarding the conflict in Ukraine, US espionage activities, and other national security matters.

Initially, Teixeira pleaded not guilty to all counts but reportedly changed his mind last week.

The sentence will send a deterrent message to anyone else thinking of making US government secrets public, acting US Attorney Joshua Levy told a press conference after a hearing in which Teixeira entered his new plea.

"We think this sends a deterrent message," Levy said. "He is going to now spend many years behind bars. ... He removed hundreds of documents ... [and posted them] online. He knew what he did was wrong. But he did it anyway."

Levy said the government was recommending that Levy spend 200 months, or 16 and two-third years in federal penitentiaries, although under a minimum sentence he could get only 11 years. US District Judge Indira Talwani said in a Boston federal court that the sentence would be announced six months from now on September 27.

Texeira pleaded guilty to all six felony charges he faced under the indictment and federal prosecutors admitted he was not involved in any kind of espionage and had not sought to sell or make public the information for profit.

Texeira leaked the classified information in online chat rooms and boasted that he had access to information dealing with Israel, Palestine, Syria, Iran and China. Some of the documents dealt with troop movements in the Ukraine conflict.

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Kirby Says White House Declines to Speculate on German Audio Recording on Taurus Missiles

WASHINGTON, March 4 (Sputnik) - The White House has declined to speculate about the content of the audio recording of talks between high-ranking German military officials about a potential attack on the Crimean Bridge with long-range Taurus missiles.

According to National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby, "any validity that anybody gives to it" would only play into Russia's hands.

"Speaking about the content of the leak plays right into Russian hands," Kirby said. "The leak is an attempt by Russia to sow discord in the West," Kirby said during a press briefing, adding that it would help Russian President Vladimir Putin to "sell" the narrative that the conflict has to do with the West and Russia, and specifically with the United States and Russia, Kirby said.

The audio, which contained a February 19 conversation between four German military officers, was published by Margarita Simonyan, the editor-in-chief of RT and the Rossiya Segodnya media group on Friday.

The German news agency DPA reported earlier that the leaked audio recording was authentic.

On Saturday, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who has publicly repeatedly ruled out the possibility of supplying Ukraine with Taurus missiles, said that the government was investigating the leak.

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The Russian Foreign Ministry requested an explanation from German Ambassador in Moscow Alexander Graf Lambsdorff, while Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said following s hybrid war against the Russian people by the West, was in full swing.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that the content of the leaked audio recording points to a direct involvement of the collective West in the conflict in Ukraine and if such outcome is part of geopolitics, it is "very bad."

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US Monitoring Deteriorating Security Situation in Haiti with 'Grave Concern' – White House

WASHINGTON, March 4 (Sputnik) – The United States is monitoring the rapidly deteriorating security situation in Haiti with "grave concern," White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said on Monday.

On Sunday, an armed gang stormed Haiti's largest prison, freeing an unconfirmed number of inmates, media reported, adding that another, smaller capital prison had also been stormed. In response, the authorities of country's capital city of Port-au-Prince declared a 72-hour state of emergency and a curfew in an attempt to detain the offenders.

"We're monitoring Haiti's rapidly deteriorating security situation with grave concern. Through the weekend, senior US government officials remained in close contact with their Haitian counterparts and members of the international community to help stabilize the situation and to move quickly towards an enduring political solution," Kirby said during a press briefing.

The US is working with its international partners to expedite security assistance to the Haitian National Police, and to accelerate the deployment of the UN Security-Council mandated multinational security support mission headed by Kenya, Kirby added.

Kirby warned that the recent uptick in violence only delays the democratic transition in the country while it "destroys and upends" the lives of thousands of Haitians.

"We urge all actors: Put the people of Haiti first. Stop the violence and make the necessary concessions to allow for inclusive governance, free and fair elections, and the restoration of democracy." Kirby said.

Haiti has long been mired in a social and political crisis that escalated after the assassination of then-President Jovenel Moise on July 7, 2021. The country has faced an unprecedented increase in the activities of criminal groups, while the humanitarian situation has been further deteriorating due to natural disasters, such as severe floods, torrential rains and earthquakes.

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Former Twitter Executives Sue Musk For More Than $128Mln in Severance - Court Document

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WASHINGTON, March 4 (Sputnik) - Four former Twitter Executives are suing current company owner Elon Musk for more than $128 million in severance, court documents released on Monday showed.

"Musk's refusal to pay Plaintiffs is part of a larger pattern and practice of failing to comply with his payment obligations. His repeated failure to pay those to whom he owes money is well-documented and has been on full public display since his acquisition of Twitter," the lawsuit, filed by former executives Parag Agrawal, Ned Segal, Vijaya Gadde and Sean Edgett stated.

The lawsuit, which was filed in a California court on Monday asks the court to order Musk to pay the former executives their severance packages, which they allege were wrongfully withheld, in addition to damages, according to the court documents.

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Ex-Venezuela Official Pleads Guilty to Money Laundering, Bribery Scheme - US Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 4 (Sputnik) - Former Venezuelan military official Nepmar Jesus Escalona Enriquez has pleaded guilty in US court to charges of money laundering and bribery of foreign officials, the US Justice Department said on Monday.

"A former Venezuelan National Guard major pleaded guilty today to a money laundering scheme involving bribes to foreign officials and defrauding foreign financial institutions," the Justice Department said in a statement.

Escalona, who lives in Florida, participated in a scheme that included submitting fraudulent applications to the Venezuelan currency regulation authority to deceive the Central Bank of Venezuela, Banesco Bank and the Venezuelan customs authorities into releasing US dollars to him and his co-conspirators outside of Venezuela, the statement said.

"The fraudulent applications were submitted to purportedly finance food imports into Venezuela but in reality, were an artifice to enrich the conspirators. This conduct resulted in the transfer of nearly $1.7 million in US dollars from Banesco Bank into an account controlled by the conspirators," the statement said.

Escalona admitted that in at least one instance, he and his co-conspirators arranged for a series of bribes to be paid to officials in Venezuela to prevent the detection of their fraudulent scheme and admitted to engaging in illicit wire transfers of more than $420,000, the statement added.

The defendant pleaded guilty to one count of money laundering conspiracy. He is scheduled to be sentenced on May 23 and faces a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison, according to the statement.

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Maine Withdraws Decision to Keep Trump Off Ballot After Supreme Court Ruling

WASHINGTON, March 4 (Sputnik) - Maine Secretary of State Shenna Bellows announced on Monday she retracted her previous decision to declare former President Donald Trump ineligible for the presidential primary after the US Supreme Court reversed a similar move by a Colorado court.

"Consistent with my oath and obligation to follow the law and the Constitution, and pursuant to the Anderson decision, I hereby withdraw my determination that Mr. Trump's primary petition is invalid," Bellows said in a statement.

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American Airlines to Order 85 Boeing 737 MAX Aircraft For Long-Term Growth - Statement

WASHINGTON, March 4 (Sputnik) - American Airlines is ordering 85 new Boeing 737 MAX aircraft, the aerospace manufacturer and defense contractor announced in a press release on Monday.

"Boeing and American Airlines announced today the carrier will further modernize its global fleet with its first order for the largest 737 MAX airplane. American is committing to 115 of the 737-10 model, which includes a new order for 85 jets and a conversion of a previous order for 30 of the smaller 737-8 variant," the release stated.

The airline is also announcing options to purchase 75 additional 737-10 jets in the future, Boeing said.

"American will more than double its 737 MAX order book from about 70 airplanes to more than 150, supporting the airline's long-term growth strategy with highly efficient jets for its domestic and short-haul international network," the release said.

The 737-10 purchases are planned to complement American Airlines current fleet of 737-8 airplanes, allowing the company to tap into the 737 MAX family's commonality and flexibility features, Boeing explained.

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US Working to Establish Maritime Humanitarian Assistance Corridor for Gaza - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 4 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is working to establish a maritime humanitarian assistance corridor for the Gaza Strip to augment the current aid mechanisms, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday.

"We are also actively pursuing options to establish a maritime assistance corridor. We are in discussion with a number of partners about this initiative," Miller said during a press conference.

The US government's plan to establish a corridor is still in the development phase but the

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United States is confident that it could potentially augment the current, insufficient aid supply mechanisms, Miller said.

"We want to see aid come in through a maritime delivery route and we're exploring one," Miller said.

To that end, the US government is in contact with commercial partners and allies in the region to find the most efficient way to enact the maritime corridor, Miller added.

Over the weekend, the US Defense Department and the Jordanian Air Force worked together to airdrop 38,000 ready-to-eat meals into Gaza via Jordan's air space.

The Gaza authorities and international organizations have called the situation in Gaza "catastrophic," as Israel's blockade and military invasion of the Palestinian enclave has left a significant portion of the population of 2.3 million Palestinians facing hunger and some starvation. More than 30,000 Palestinians have been killed during Israel's military operations in Gaza and well over 76,000 have been wounded.

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US Supreme Court Overturns Colorado's Decision to Exclude Trump From Ballot

WASHINGTON, March 4 (Sputnik) - The US Supreme Court on Monday reversed a Colorado Supreme Court decision that excluded former President Donald Trump from 2024 presidential primary ballots in the state.

"For the reasons given, responsibility for enforcing Section 3 against federal officeholders and candidates rests with Congress and not the States. The judgment of the Colorado Supreme Court therefore cannot stand," the US Supreme Court said in its decision. "The judgment of the Colorado Supreme Court is reversed."

Colorado and other states have attempted to remove Trump from election ballots, citing his ties to the January 6, 2021 US Capitol riot and a constitutional provision that could ban participants of insurrection from holding public office.

Following the US Supreme Court ruling overturning the Colorado decision, Trump called the decision a "big win" for the United States.

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State Dept. Confirms Death of Jerusalem Embassy Employee, Says No Indications of Foul Play

WASHINGTON, March 4 (Sputnik) - The US State Department has confirmed the death of an embassy employee in Jerusalem, spokesperson Matthew Miller said.

"I can confirm the death of a direct hire employee of the US Embassy in Jerusalem," Miller said.

Miller added that the incident is under investigation, but there are no indications of foul play.

Earlier in the day, the media reported that an employee of the US embassy in Jerusalem had

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died.

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Canadian Gov't to Release 2024-25 Federal Budget on April 16 - Finance Department

WASHINGTON, March 4 (Sputnik) – The Canadian government will present its 2024-2025 federal budget on April 16 at the House of Commons, the Department of Finance said on Monday.

The budget will be introduced before the lower chamber on April 16 at approximately 4:00 p.m. ET by Canadian Minister of Finance Chrystia Freeland.

"Our economic plan is about building more homes, faster, making life more affordable, and creating more good jobs. This plan will unlock pathways to a good middle class life for the next generation—because Canada is stronger when everyone has an equal chance to succeed. Together, we are going to unlock and build a brighter, more prosperous future," Freeland was quoted as saying in a statement.

The budget is likely to become Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's second-last before the next federal election, which is scheduled to take place on or before October 20, 2025.

A poll by the Leger revealed in early December that four in five Canadians would like the government to cap its spending to avoid fueling inflation, and 79% would like to see a reduction in order to balance the national budget in the coming years. Over 70% of those polled also said that investments should be redirected toward healthcare, the housing strategy, and the reduction of inflation.

In mid-February, another poll by Leger showed that nearly two-thirds of Canadians (64%) thought that the inflation rate in groceries was getting worse and over 70% of those surveyed said the federal government should do more about the rising cost of groceries.

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US State Department Says Humanitarian Situation in Gaza is 'Simply Intolerable'

WASHINGTON, March 4 (Sputnik) - The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip is "simply intolerable," US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday.

"The situation is simply intolerable," Miller said during a press briefing on Monday.

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New York Times Doubts German-Made Taurus Missiles Can Make Difference in Ukraine Conflict

WASHINGTON, March 4 (Sputnik) - The New York Times published an article on Monday that casts doubt on whether the provision of German-made long-distance Taurus cruise missiles can actually make a difference in the conflict in Ukraine.

The authors wrote "it is far from clear" if the Taurus missiles are capable of making a decisive difference in the ongoing conflict even if Germany in the end delivers the missiles to Ukraine.

The situation with Taurus for Ukraine is reminiscent of sending Leopards to the country, when Berlin, despite being reluctant to send its best tank to the battlefield against Russia at first, nevertheless did so last year.

On Friday, Margarita Simonyan, the editor-in-chief of RT and the Rossiya Segodnya media group published the text of a conversation among four German military officers discussing a potential attack on the Crimean Bridge by using long-range Taurus missiles.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has repeatedly ruled out the possibility of supplying Ukraine with Taurus missiles, whose range is up to 500 kilometers (310 miles). On Thursday, Scholz said that he has refrained from supplying Taurus missiles to Ukraine as these are capable of reaching Russia's capital, Moscow.

Western countries have been providing military and financial aid to Ukraine in the hundreds of billions of dollars, and particularly since the start of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine in February 2022. The Kremlin has consistently warned against continued arms deliveries to Ukraine, saying it would lead to further escalation of the conflict.

In April 2022, Russia sent a diplomatic note to all NATO member 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 the Russian military.

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Trump Calls on Biden to End Weaponization of US Government, Secure Country's Borders

WASHINGTON, March 4 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump said on Monday that current officeholder Joe Biden should refrain from weaponizing the government against him, as well as secure the United States' borders from illegal immigration.

"President Biden, number one, stop weaponization. Fight your fight yourself. Don't use prosecutors and judges to go after your opponent, to try and damage your opponent so you can win an election. Our country is much bigger than that," Trump said during remarks at his Mar-a-Lago property.

Earlier on Monday, the US Supreme Court overruled a Colorado Supreme Court decision that would have banned Trump from appearing on primary election ballots in the state. The US Supreme Court ruling comes amid nominating contests for the 2024 presidential election, in which Trump is the leading Republican candidate.

Trump is also involved in several court cases, including for alleged mishandling of classified documents and ties to the January 6, 2021 US Capitol riot.

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Moreover, Trump called on Biden to “close the borders” immediately. The increase in illegal immigration under the Biden administration is unsustainable, Trump said.

Trump estimated that there are approximately 15 million illegal immigrants in the US, adding that there could be 20 million by the end of Biden’s term.

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Canada Will Not Send Troops to Ukraine Until Considered Safe - Defense Minister

WASHINGTON, March 4 (Sputnik) - Canada will not send military personnel to Ukraine until it is considered safe, Canadian Defense Minister Bill Blair said on Monday.

"It would have to be under circumstances in which it would be safe....those conditions as I said, do not currently exist," Blair said.

Blair explained that Canadian Armed Forces cannot have any combat role or what could be perceived as a combat role in Ukraine.

Canadian forces were previously in Ukraine to train Ukrainian Armed Forces but left the country amid Russia's special military operation in February 2022.

However, Blair underscored that Canada remains committed to supplying Ukraine with munitions and equipment and other material supports in order to assist them in their fight against Russia.

Blair highlighted that Canada is working on facilitating a contract deal to provide NASAMS air defense systems to Ukraine, including a delivery of up to 800 drones.

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US Extends National Emergency on Ukraine Over 'Extraordinary Threat' From Russia - Biden

WASHINGTON, March 4 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden in a notice on Monday said he is extending the national emergency declaration related to Ukraine due to the so-called extraordinary threat Russia's activities in the country pose to the United States.

"The actions and policies addressed in these Executive Orders continue to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States," Biden said. "For this reason, the national emergency declared in Executive Order 13660, which was expanded in scope in Executive Order 13661, Executive Order 13662, and Executive Order 14065, and under which additional steps were taken in Executive Order 13685 and Executive Order 13849, must continue in effect beyond March 6, 2024."

The national emergency is extended for another year, according to the notice.

The extension will maintain executive orders that have been issued in connection to the Crimean referendum in 2014 and leading up to Russia's special military operation in Ukraine.

These executive orders include sanctions imposed on Russia over its activities pertaining to

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Ukraine.

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Video Game Music Composer Marty O'Donnell Running for US Congress - Statement

WASHINGTON, March 4 (Sputnik) - US composer Marty O'Donnell is running to represent Nevada's 3rd congressional district in the US House of Representatives, the video game music creator said in a statement.

"It's time for me to step up and do my civic duty. To give back and try and change things for the better" the statement, release on Sunday, said. "I'm ready to go to [Washington,] DC and see if I can help bring back sanity and civility to the public discourse… We need bold leaders for such a time as this."

O'Donnell never wanted - and still does not want - to become a politician, but he is tired of seeing leaders in the United States influenced by "toxic divisions" that tear apart families and society, the statement said.

Attacks on family values have eroded the strength of society, which is fundamentally linked to the "vitality of the family structure" and O'Donnell wants to promote the traditional family as critical for children's development and success, the statement said.

Big technology and pharmaceutical companies, union bosses and media groups are attempting to control the US government and such influence needs to end, the statement said.

The federal government should take responsibility for border security or work with state governments to enforce existing immigration laws, the statement said.

"I'm not worried about the government being a safety net. I want the government to stop being an impediment," O'Donnel said in the statement.

Democratic US Congresswoman Susie Lee currently holds the Nevada congressional seat for which O'Donnell is running.

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Gulf Countries Condemn Israeli Threat to Launch Ground Operation in Rafah - Qatar UN Envoy

WASHINGTON, March 4 (Sputnik) - Gulf countries condemn Israeli threats to launch a ground military operation in Rafah, Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to the United Nations Sheikha Alya Ahmed bin Saif Al-Thani said on Monday.

"We also strongly condemn the Israeli threats to launch a ground military operation in Rafah," Sheikha Alya, who spoke on behalf of the Gulf Cooperation Council, said during the UNGA, stressing that the threats have increased the levels of escalation and violence.

On October 7, the Palestinian movement Hamas launched a large-scale rocket attack against Israel from Gaza and breached the border, killing 1,200 people and abducting around 240

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others. Israel launched retaliatory strikes, ordered a complete blockade of Gaza, and started a ground incursion into the Palestinian enclave with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas fighters and rescuing the hostages. At least 30,000 people have been killed so far in the Gaza Strip, local authorities said.

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

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Israel Envoy to UN Says UNRWA Role in Gaza 'Finished,' Agency Must Be Dismantled

UNITED NATIONS, March 4 (Sputnik) - The work of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in the Gaza Strip is over and the organization must be defunded and dismantled given its involvement in Hamas' attack against Israel on October 7, Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations Gilad Erdan said on Monday.

"After all that has been exposed about UNRWA it's very clear today: UNRWA will never again operate in Gaza as it has prior to October 7. Its role in Gaza is finished and it must be replaced. UNRWA must be defunded and dismantled," Erdan said during a UN General Assembly meeting.

Erdan alleged that as many as 12% of UNRWA's employees took part in Hamas' and Palestinian Islamic Jihad's October 7 attacks on Israel, a "proof" that it has been instrumental to their "terror machine."

The ambassador added that UNRWA was always part of the problem and noted that their schools have been a breeding ground for the incitement of hatred and martyrdom.

On October 7, Hamas launched an attack against Israel from the Gaza Strip, killing some 1,100 people - military and civilians - and abducting 240 others. Israel implemented a complete blockade of Gaza, launched massive strikes and then undertook a ground invasion of the Palestinian enclave with the stated goal of eliminating Hamas and freeing the hostages.

More than 30,000 Palestinians have been killed during Israel's military operations so far in Gaza and well more than 76,000 wounded, according to the local authorities. In addition, some 1.9 million Palestinians out of 2.3 million in Gaza have been displaced and it is estimated that half of them are facing hunger.

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

Russia has repeatedly called on both parties to stop the hostilities, saying that the two-state solution approved by the UN Security Council, which provides for the creation of an independent Palestinian state within the 1967 borders with its capital in East Jerusalem, is the only way to

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end the conflict.

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UNSC Should Not Consider Syrian Chemical File More Than Once in 3 Months - UN Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, March 4 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council should be mindful about how often it discusses the Syrian chemical file given that such discussions once in three months are sufficient, Russian Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Monday.

"Russia, like a number of other colleagues on the Council, has repeatedly said that considering the subject of the Syrian chemical file once every three months is more than enough," Polyanskiy said during a meeting of the UN Security Council.

The diplomat also said Russia has no doubts hat Monday's meeting at the UN Security Council will serve as a reason for the Western countries to engage in speeches against Syria.

Russia has continuously argued for reducing the number of meetings on the Syrian chemical file, saying that such meetings are inefficient.

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EU to Keep Investing in Defense Industrial Base Regardless of Elections in US - Official

WASHINGTON, March 4 (Sputnik) - The European Union (EU) will keep investing in its defense industrial base regardless of who will win in the November 2024 presidential election in the United States, European External Action Service Deputy Secretary General for Peace, Security and Defense Charles Fries said on Monday.

“Regardless of the outcomes of the next US elections, we will stay the course, we will continue to invest for our own defense, because it is simply our interest and our strategic responsibility,” Fries said during a discussion hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

On March 5, the European Commission will present the first defense industrial strategy containing specific proposals to spend more on security to be “war capable” as it was not the case two years ago when Russia began its special military operation in Ukraine, Fries said.

The strategy will offer EU members the chance to increase the production capacity of defense items beyond ammunition and strengthen European supply chains, Fries added.

In late February, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said that the European Union intends to double its ammunition production to more than 2 million shells annually by the end of 2025 and ramp up deliveries to Ukraine to 1.1 million shells by the end of 2024 after Brussels failed to deliver a million artillery shells by March 2024 as was promised to Kiev.

Western countries, including member states of the European Union, have been providing military and financial aid to Kiev to the tune of billions of dollars. and especially since the start of

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Russia's special military operation in Ukraine in February 2022.

The Kremlin has consistently warned against continued arms deliveries to Ukraine, saying such actions 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 the Russian military.

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US Committed to Engage Constructively on Draft Gaza Resolution - UN Deputy Envoy

WASHINGTON, March 4 (Sputnik) - The United States is committed to working constructively on the latest US-drafted resolution on Gaza in the upcoming days, US Deputy Ambassador to the UN Robert Wood said on Monday.

"We remain committed to engage constructively on our resolution in the days to come," Wood said.

Wood stressed that they will work through all channels to expedite humanitarian support for the Palestinian people.

Wood added that the United States will continue engaging on the text of the resolution.

The US has regularly impeded any resolution on Gaza that may hinder Israeli military operations. Washington blocked a Brazil-drafted resolution in October 2023, a resolution drafted by the United Arab Emirates that called for an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, in December 2023, and an Algeria-proposed draft resolution in February 2024.

On October 7, the Palestinian movement 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 Gaza, and started a ground incursion into the Palestinian enclave with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas fighters and rescuing the hostages. At least 30,000 people have been killed so far in the Gaza Strip, local authorities said.

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Russia has repeatedly called on both parties to stop hostilities, stating that the two-state solution approved by the UN Security Council, which provides for the creation of an independent Palestinian state within the 1967 borders with its capital in East Jerusalem, is the only way to end the conflict.

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Palestine's Envoy Says UN Should Sanction Israel Over Actions in Gaza Strip

WASHINGTON, March 4 (Sputnik) - The United Nations should impose sanctions against Israel over its actions in the Gaza Strip, Palestine's UN envoy Riyad Mansour said on Monday.

"Israel should be sanctioned, this is the time to do so in order to force them to behave and to comply with obligations under the Charter of the United Nations and belonging to this organization, not rewarded for its actions," Mansour said during the UNGA.

On October 7, the Palestinian movement 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 Gaza, and started a ground incursion into the Palestinian enclave with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas fighters and rescuing the hostages. At least 30,000 people have been killed so far in the Gaza Strip, local authorities said.

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US Implements New Sanctions on Zimbabwe for Corruption, Human Rights Abuses - White House

WASHINGTON, March 4 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed new sanctions against some of the most powerful persons and companies in Zimbabwe for their alleged engagement in corruption and human rights abuses, National Security Council spokesperson Adrienne Watson said on Monday.

"Today, the United States is employing a new set of tools in Zimbabwe, including the flagship Global Magnitsky sanctions program, to make clear that the egregious behavior of some of the most powerful people and companies in Zimbabwe matches the actions of the worst human rights abusers and corrupt actors globally," Watson said in a statement.

The US Treasury Department sanctioned earlier three entities and 11 individuals in Zimbabwe, the statement said.

Among the sanctioned persons are Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa and Vice President Constantino Chiwenga, the statement added.

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'Pentagon Leak Suspect Teixeira Pleads Guilty, Accepts 16-Year Sentence - Court Filing

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WASHINGTON, March 4 (Sputnik) – Former US national guardsman Jack Teixeira has pleaded guilty to six counts related to leaking top-secret military intelligence documents and accepted a potential prison term of 200 months or more than 16 years, according to a court document published on Monday.

"Defendant understands and acknowledges that, as of the date of this agreement, the US Attorney intends to recommend that Defendant be incarcerated for 200 months," states the document, which Teixeira signed. "Defendant agrees not to seek any downward departures under the US Sentencing Guidelines."

US authorities arrested Teixeira in April and indicted him on six counts of willful retention and transmission of classified information relating to national defense. The documents purportedly contained information regarding the conflict in Ukraine, US espionage activities, and other national security matters.

Initially, Teixeira pleaded not guilty to all counts but reportedly changed his mind last week.

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US Conducts 'Self-Defense' Airstrike Against Somalia's Al-Shabaab - Africa Command

WASHINGTON, March 4 (Sputnik) - The United States conducted a "collective self-defense airstrike" again the US-designated terrorist group al-Shabaab in Somalia over the weekend, the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) said in a release on Monday.

"At the request of the federal government of Somalia, US Africa Command conducted a collective self-defense against the al Shabaab terrorist group on Mar. 2," the release said.

The airstrike took place in a remote area in the vicinity approximately 45km northeast of Kismayo, the release added

The initial post-strike assessment indicated that two al-Shabaab members were killed and that no civilians were harmed, according to the release.

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