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5/29/24 Wednesday

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US Leaders Pushing for Three-Front War When They Can't Handle One

On Monday, a bipartisan group of US representatives visited Taiwan against the protests of Beijing, promising Taiwanese lawmakers that the US-supplied weapons would be coming soon and publicly warning China from invading the island.

The meeting, which included the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Rep. Michael McCaul (R-TX), was the latest in a string of meetings between US and Taiwanese officials that have taken place during the Biden administration.

The saber-rattling of China by the United States is insanity, as it cannot handle the crises it is already facing, retired senior policy analyst Michael Maloof told Sputnik's The Critical Hour on Wednesday.

"We don't have the means to fight that [one-front] war, let alone, a three-front war. Right now, we're doing very poorly. The United States is doing very poorly just trying to work through a proxy against Russia," Maloof explained. "If you have a direct confrontational approach to war with Russia, then China and… Iran, there's no way the United States is going to be able to sustain that."

On Wednesday, Yemeni Houthi forces announced that they had brought down a US MQ-9 Reaper reconnaissance and strike drone. The US claimed that the drone was lost due to technical problems but it was the sixth such drone to be lost over Yemen since the Houthi movement began blockading the Red Sea against ships it says are connected to Israel.

Despite a nearly $1 trillion budget, the United States military is unable to secure a major shipping lane from a government they don't officially recognize in one of the poorest countries in the world, resulting in a 50% reduction of shipping through the Suez Canal compared to last year.

In 2022, Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), then speaker of the House, visited Taiwan against the protests of Beijing. Then, US President Joe Biden claimed he did not authorize her visit, but this statement caused some reasonable doubts.

The next year, then-Taiwanese head of administration Tsai Ing-wen traveled to California where she and other Taiwanese politicians met with then-House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-CA). Again, US and Taiwanese officials attempted to soften the diplomatic outcry from China by claiming it was just part of a layover on her tour of Central America. Again, China didn't buy it.

On this latest trip, Washington provided no pretenses. The bipartisan delegation met with the newly elected head of Taiwanese administration and publicly promised them weapons and further support.

"There should be no doubt, there should be no skepticism in the United States, Taiwan or anywhere in the world, of American resolve to maintain the status quo and peace in the Taiwan Strait," Rep. Andy Barr (R-KY), the co-chair of the Taiwan caucus said while meeting Taiwan's new head of administration Lai Ching-te.

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"If the island in an unprovoked manner was invaded, then it would be to the American people and the United States Congress and my committee that has the power to declare war, how to deal with that," McCaul said.

China condemned the visit, saying it violates official US policy, which recognizes the People's Republic of China as the legitimate government of all of China, including Taiwan.

"In disregard of China's strong opposition, relevant members of the US Congress still decided to visit Taiwan, which violates the one-China principle, the three China-US joint communiqués, and the US government's own political commitment to maintaining only unofficial relations with the Taiwan region, and sends a severely wrong signal to 'Taiwan independence' separatist forces," Chinese spokesperson Mao Ning said at a press conference. "China firmly opposes it and has made serious protests to the US. We will take necessary measures to firmly defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity."

Yet lawmakers in the US are openly brag about the war not only with China but with Russia and Iran as well, all significantly more powerful opponents than the Yemeni Houthis.

It should also be noted that part of the reason for the bipartisan trip to Taiwan was to assure Taiwanese leadership that the weapons would be forthcoming since they had been delayed due to shortages in US stockpiles largely brought on by the US funding of Ukraine.

"We don't have the industrial capability right now [to fight a war with China.] We'd have to shift our industries," explained Maloof. "It would take a considerable amount of time given the sophistication of the weapons we use, as opposed to WWII."

Maloof explained that the rhetoric coming out of Washington is "very dangerous and it's very inciteful," noting that "we didn't believe [Russian President Vladimir] Putin when he said 'these are my red lines' and we crossed them many times and he finally acted in Ukraine… Now we're seeing the consequences of that. And I'm afraid we haven't learned any lessons from any of our previous experiences. And we're probably condemned to repeat them again, and with much greater consequences as a result."

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Western Opposition to Georgian Foreign Agents Law Reveals Why It Is Essential

On Tuesday, the Georgian parliament overcame a Presidential veto to pass a new 'foreign agents' legislation that requires foreign-funded Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to register as foreign agents and disclose their donors.

This seemingly reasonable legislation was supported by 84 MPs out of 150, comfortably more than the 76 required to overcome a veto according to the Georgian constitution.

Officially known as the Transparency in Foreign Influence Act, the bill would not ban NGOs from the country, and would instead require any NGO, media outlet, or individual receiving more than 20% of their funding from abroad to register as an entity "promoting the interests of a foreign power" and disclose their donors or receive a fine of up to $9,500.

Last week, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that the US plans to impose visa restrictions on Georgian legislators who supported the legislation. Nevermind that Washington has its own foreign agents legislation, the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) which the

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Joe Biden administration recently used alleged minor violations to arrest and charge the leader of the African People's Socialist Party with crimes that could land him in prison for more than 15 years.

Meanwhile, a spokesperson for the EU warned that the legislation will harm Georgia's "EU path" and said its "Member States are considering all options to react to these developments."

Like good little lap dogs, the Western media has followed suit, calling the legislation pro-Russian, an assertion only backed by the fact that Russia similarly took action against foreign NGOs influencing its domestic politics.

There are about 10,000 NGOs registered in Georgia, about one for every 400 Georgians and Western NGOs have been used to foment revolutions around the world in the past.

"A lot of what we do today was done covertly 25 years ago by the CIA,"Allen Weinstein, one of the founders of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), said in 1991. Since that time, the NED has been linked to influencing elections, revolutions and coups (both failed and successful) in numerous countries including Venezuela, Nicaragua, Haiti and most significantly, in Ukraine in 2014.

The NED, along with USAID are two of the most prominent and well-funded US-based NGOs, both of which receive most of their funding from Congress. Both operate in Georgia.

"No one in Georgia is pro-Russian. What they don't want is another war with Russia," explained senior research fellow at the Global Policy Institute and journalist George Szamuely on Sputnik's The Critical Hour. "But what they don't want above all else is a violent revolution in Georgia. And clearly, they know that this is what's going on. This is the plan here [by Western influences]. And that's why they're so adamant about this legislation."

Szamuely noted that Georgia was invited to join NATO at the same time Ukraine was, and it does not want to be used as a battering ram by the West against Russia. "[Georgia is saying] we don't want to go down the Maidan path, we don't want to… be pushed into a war that we cannot possibly win, that we're going to lose more territory as Ukraine has lost territory and Georgia lost territory in 2008 and that's what these NGOs are trying to do."

Last week, Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze said that a high-ranking EU Commissioner threatened him by bringing up the attempted assassination of Slovakian President Robert Fico who was shot four times by a pro-Ukrainian activist.

"In my conversation, the European Commissioner listed a number of measures Western politicians can take after [Georgia passes] the transparency law and, while listing these measures, [the Commissioner] said 'look what happened to Fico, you should be very careful,'" Kobakhidze said.

The EU Neighborhood and Enlargement Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi later admitted to making the comments but claimed Kobakhidze took them out of context.

"Democracy in the American and essentially, the Western definition is governments doing as they're told by their American and Western masters," Szamuely asserted.

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The West Depends on Putin's Rationality to Avoid WWIII

Ukraine's NATO benefactors are depending on Russian President Vladimir Putin's rationality so they can act irrationally. Throughout the special military operation, Western leaders have ignored Putin's warnings against escalation and they continue to push Russia as the situation becomes more desperate for Ukraine on the battlefield.

While Ukrainian military officials insisted they needed permission to strike inside Russia to counter coming Russian attacks in the Kharkov region, it has since used Western weapons to attack targets irrelevant to the special military operation.

Over the past week, Ukraine claimed that it struck two Russian early warning radar systems designed to detect long-range ballistic missile attacks, including nuclear strikes. Neither system that was targeted was turned toward Ukrainian territory, which seems to implicate an alternative motive than affecting the Ukrainian theater.

The attack represented a significant escalation of the conflict and came as NATO countries toyed with the idea of sending their troops to Ukraine to fill Kiev's manpower shortage.

"The fact that Russia is winning on the battlefield in Ukraine only makes them more desperate to strike through that sock puppet harder," explained international relations and security expert Mark Sleboda on Sputnik's Fault Lines on Wednesday.

Since Russia has proven more than capable of defeating NATO equipment and tactics on the battlefield, it has little reason to fear a conventional land war against NATO countries in Ukraine, but that could easily spiral into a nuclear war which forces any rational actor to behave with caution.

"NATO representatives, especially in Europe, should be aware of what they are playing with," Putin said at a press conference in Uzbekistan on Tuesday.

Western countries don't fear allowing Kiev to strike inside of Russia because they already have and those countries didn't suffer any significant consequences, noted Sleboda.

"They don't believe that Russia will strike back except against Ukraine, which they don't really care about," he said.

On Wednesday, the Head of the Delegation of the Russian Federation to the Vienna Negotiations on Military Security and Arms Control, Konstantin Gavrilov warned that "A potential aggressor needs to realize that, if attacked, we reserve the right to act 'as the situation demands,' so to speak, and use all our capabilities," adding that any response to violating Russian redlines "may be truly devastating."

With its numerous successes on the battlefield over the past several months Russia has no reason to seek escalation, but Western countries continue to try to provoke Russia into a wider war despite the consequences it could hold for all of civilization.

"[Russia is] winning at an ever faster and less deniable rate right now, so they're trying very hard not to respond to NATO escalations and provocations," explained Sleboda. "But because [of] the desperation that the West is feeling and [since] nothing they're doing is changing a thing on the battlefield, their escalation and provocations keep getting bigger and harder to ignore."

A recent study by Nature estimated that a nuclear war between the United States and Russia would result in around 5 billion deaths worldwide.

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"Because [of] the desperation that the West is feeling and [since] nothing they're doing is changing a thing on the battlefield, their escalation and provocations keep getting bigger and harder to ignore."

"I would suggest that attacking Russia's nuclear launch early warning system is one of those [escalations] that right now the Russian government is really trying to decide how they can and should respond to that," Sleboda warned.

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"A lot of what we do today was done covertly 25 years ago by the CIA," Allen Weinstein, one of the founders of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), said in 1991. Since that time, the NED has been linked to influencing elections, revolutions and coups (both failed and successful) in numerous countries including Russia, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Haiti and most significantly, in Ukraine in 2014.

"No one in Georgia is pro-Russian. What they don't want is another war with Russia," explained senior research fellow at the Global Policy Institute and journalist George Szamuely on Sputnik's The Critical Hour. "But what they don't want above all else is a violent revolution in Georgia. And clearly, they know that this is what's going on. This is the plan here [by Western influences]. And that's why they're so adamant about this legislation."

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The meeting, which included the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Rep. Michael McCaul (R-TX), was the latest in a string of meetings between US and Taiwanese officials that have taken place during the Biden administration.

On this latest trip, the bipartisan delegation met with the newly elected leader of the Taiwanese separatist government and publicly promised them weapons and support if mainland China attempted to exert its sovereignty over the island.

"There should be no doubt, there should be no skepticism in the United States, Taiwan or anywhere in the world, of American resolve to maintain the status quo and peace in the Taiwan Strait," Rep. Andy Barr (R-KY), the co-chair of the Taiwan caucus said while meeting Taiwan's new leader Lai Ching-te.

The saber-rattling of China by the United States is insanity, as it cannot handle the crises it is already facing, retired senior policy analyst Michael Maloof told Sputnik's The Critical Hour on Wednesday.

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Blinken Urges Czechia to Consider US Small Nuclear Reactors to Strengthen Energy Security

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told his Czech counterpart Jan Lipavsky that Prague should consider US-made small modular nuclear reactors to bolster the country’s long-term energy security, State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Thursday.

"He [Blinken] encouraged consideration of U.S. small modular nuclear reactors as a solution to help strengthen Czechia’s long-term energy security," Miller said in a statement.

Their discussions also touched on the importance of the strong bilateral relationship between both countries based on common "transatlantic values" as NATO allies, the statement said. Blinken thanked Prague for its continued support for Ukraine and welcomed its military modernization efforts, it added.

During the meeting, Blinken and Lipavsky also signed a memorandum of understanding to enhance bilateral cooperation in fighting "foreign disinformation," the statement said. The top diplomats also discussed concerns about the alleged involvement of Chinese entities in the "reconstitution" of Russia’s defense industrial base, according to the statement.

Secretary Blinken previously traveled to Moldova and is now in Czechia to meet with senior officials and participate in a foreign ministers' meeting ahead of the NATO summit in Washington.

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Austin, Gallant Discuss Need to Open Rafah Border Crossing for Continued Aid - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin during a call with his Israeli counterpart discussed the urgent importance of opening the Rafah border crossing for the continued flow of aid, Pentagon press secretary Pat Ryder said on Thursday.

"Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III spoke with Israeli Minister of Defense Yoav Gallant May 29 to discuss Israel's operations in Gaza, the need to sustain increased deliveries of humanitarian assistance, and the urgent importance of opening the Rafah Border Crossing for the continued flow of aid," Ryder said in a statement.

The two leaders also discussed efforts to improve real-time communications between

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humanitarian providers and the Israeli military, he added.

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Macron to Host Biden for State Visit on June 8 – White House

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) – French President Emmanuel Macron will host US President Joe Biden for a state visit on June 8 during the latter's June 5-9 trip to France, according to a White House release.

"… in Paris on June 8, President Emmanuel Macron of France and Mrs. Brigitte Macron [will] host President Biden and Dr. Biden for a State Visit," the release stated.

On June 6, Biden will deliver remarks and participate in engagements with the first lady to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the Allied landings in Normandy.

On June 7, the US president will deliver remarks at Pointe du Hoc, France about "the importance of defending freedom and democracy," the release said.

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Professional Line Sitters Charge $50 Per Hour for Access to Trump Trial

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) - As the first criminal trial against Donald Trump approaches its end, the queue of journalists and members of the public who want to reserve a spot in the courtroom of the Manhattan criminal court grows every day, a Sputnik correspondent reported on Thursday.

Trump's trial on charges of falsifying business records in connection with payments to porn actress Stormy Daniels is underway in a court in New York - a city that, according to local people, "never sleeps."

The hearings have been going on for more than a month, and from the very beginning, journalists have had to line up from early hours to get a place in the courtroom.

Only 65 reporters can be allowed into the courtroom to watch in person the judge, the prosecution, the defense and Trump himself.

The adjacent broadcast room can accommodate 114 representatives of the press.

On Wednesday, the trial entered the jury deliberation stage, fueling interest in the process. Some New Yorkers realized that they could cash in on the history-making process.

Some professional line sitters take $50 per hour to secure a spot for you in the courtroom.

"We have around 40 people. If you wanna spot reserved, you just call us after 8 pm and we'll get it done," one of them told Sputnik. "It's $50 per hour. So you have to order minimum 2 hours."

US media reported that one person paid $1,800 in order to be the first in a queue.

Court hearings in the case take place five days a week. Hundreds of journalists are covering the trial, including those in and around the court. Twelve jurors must reach a unanimous decision in order to issue a verdict of "guilty" or "innocent."

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Trump is accused of falsifying records to cover up an alleged hush-money payment to adult film actress Daniels. Trump has denied the accusations against him, as well as denied having engaged in an alleged affair with Daniels.
Trump has called the case a form of election interference amid the 2024 US presidential race and claimed that the case never should have been brought to trial.

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french president macron to host biden for state visit on june 8 during us president's trip to france from june 5-9 - white house

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US Bans Entry to 5 Current, Former Ugandan Officials - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) - The US State Department on Thursday imposed visa restrictions on five current and former Ugandan officials for their alleged involvement in corruption and human rights violations.
"The Department of State is publicly designating five current and former Ugandan officials for their involvement in significant corruption or gross violations of human rights," the statement said.
Parliament Speaker Anita Among was included due to her alleged involvement in "significant corruption tied to her leadership of Uganda's Parliament," according to the statement.
Former Minister of Karamoja Affairs Mary Goretti Kitutu, former Minister of State for Karamoja Affairs Agnes Nandutu, and Minister of State for Finance Amos Lugolobi are being designated for "significant corruption related to conduct that misused public resources and diverted materials from Uganda's neediest communities," the State Department said.
All four officials allegedly abused their public positions for their personal benefit.
Additionally, the US is designating Peter Elwelu, former deputy chief of the Ugandan Peoples' Defence Forces (UPDF), in connection with "gross violations of human rights."
The State Department accuses Elwelu of involvement in extrajudicial killings that were committed by members of the UPDF at the time of his leadership.
The US is also taking steps to impose visa restrictions on multiple other Ugandan officials for "undermining the democratic process and repressing members of marginalized or vulnerable populations in Uganda," the statement added.

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US Army Pays $480Mln to Palantir for Maven AI Tech to Scan Enemy Areas - Pentagon

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WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) - The US Army is paying nearly half a billion dollars for a prototype version of a new Artificial Intelligence (AI) system that will use its algorithms to monitor enemy activities in hostile areas, the Department of Defense said in a press release.

"Palantir USG [of] Palo Alto, California was awarded a $480 million ... contract for the Maven Smart System prototype," the release stated on Wednesday.

Work on the project is scheduled to take five years with an estimated completion date of May 28, 2029, the Defense Department said.

Palantir's MAVEN Smart System (MSS), along with the National Geospatial Agency (NGA) Broad Area Search - Targeting (BAS-T) system, uses AI generated algorithms and memory learning capabilities to scan and identify enemy systems in military Areas of Responsibility (AOR), according to published sources.

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US Navy Extends Pratt and Whitney Maintenance Contract on F-35 Engines - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) - The US Navy is ordering maintenance services costing more than $380 million from Pratt and Whitney to continue their sustainment work on the F135 propulsion systems that power the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter over the next three months, the Department of Defense announced in a press release.

"Raytheon Technologies Corporation, Pratt and Whitney Military Engines [of] East Hartford, Connecticut is awarded a ...$380,604,448 modification ... contract ... to provide for F135 propulsion system annual sustainment," the release stated on Wednesday.

The contract will also cover program management, financial and administrative activities, propulsion integration, replenishment spare part buys, engineering support, material management and configuration management, the Defense Department said.

Work on the contract is expected to be completed in August 2024, the release said.

Pratt and Whitney will also handle product management support, software sustainment, security management, Joint Technical Data updates, and support equipment management, as well as depot level maintenance and repair for all fielded propulsion systems, the release added.

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US Air Force Gives Leidos $738Mln Contract for Washington DC IT Services - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) - The US Air Force has given Leidos an almost three quarters of a billion dollar contract to provide it with information technology (IT) and telecommunication services in the Washington, DC and Pentagon region, the Department of Defense said in a press release.

"Leidos [of] Reston, Virginia was awarded a $738,446,386 ...contract for Air Force National Capital Region (NCR) information technology services," the release said on Wednesday.

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Under the contract, Leidos will provide a full range of classified and unclassified information technology and telecommunication services in the National Capital Region, the Defense Department said.

"This contract also provides services to the National Military Command Center's strategic watch, crisis response, and worldwide monitoring missions," the release added.

Work on the project will be performed at Joint Base Andrews in the US state of Maryland and in the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia over the next five and a half years and is expected to be completed by September 2, 2029, the Defense Department said.

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AI Likely to Threaten 'Wider Range of Jobs' During Next Economic Downturn - IMF

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) - Artificial intelligence (AI) may pose risk to a wider range of jobs during the next global economic downturn than was the case in the past, International Monetary Fund (IMF) First Deputy Managing Director Gita Gopinath said.

"In the next downturn, AI is likely to threaten a wider range of jobs than in past cycles, including higher skilled cognitive jobs. An estimated 30% of jobs in advanced economies are at risk of being replaced by AI," Gopinath said during the AI for Good Global Summit in Switzerland.

Gopinath said the emerging and low-income markets may lose up to 20% of the existing jobs, which represents an unprecedented level of losses that the world had not seen before.

"That could also lead to unprecedented numbers of long-term unemployed, because many of the displaced workers will lack the requisite skills in an economy where AI is increasingly prevalent," Gopinath said.

To avoid such developments, the world must ensure tax systems do not inefficiently favor automation over people, she said.

Gopinath also urged governments to take measures to help people cope with the impacts of utilizing AI.

"To protect workers from AI labor market disruptions, heavier investments in education and training are essential," Gopinath said.

Policymakers also must adopt measures to lower financial and supply-chain amplification risks, Gopinath added.

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PREVIEW - Austin Heads to Singapore, Set For First In-Person Meeting With Chinese Counterpart

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin is set to have his first face-to-face meeting with his Chinese counterpart Admiral Dong Jun at a major defense conference in Singapore this week amid a broader effort to restore bilateral military ties between the two countries.

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Austin held a video teleconference with Dong on April 16, but the two defense ministers will meet in person for the first time on the sidelines of the annual Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore being held May 31 to June 2.

The last time defense chiefs from the two countries met was in November 2022, when Austin met Dong's predecessor, then-Defense Minister Wei Fenghe.

China suspended military-to-military dialogue with the US in 2022 amid soaring tensions over then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan.

Though US President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping agreed last November to restore some military-to-military communications, issues including Taiwan and the South China Sea remain a source of sharp dispute between the two nations.

Earlier this week, the State Department's China coordinator lambasted a senior Chinese diplomat over Beijing's "dangerous and destabilizing" actions in the South China Sea and military actions near Taiwan, while China's Foreign Ministry demanded that the US stop playing the "Taiwan card."

A Pentagon spokesperson on Wednesday declined to reveal what key topics will be discussed during Austin's meeting with Dong, but the last time the two spoke, they covered a range of security-related topics including Taiwan, the South China Sea, North Korea and Ukraine.

Chinese Embassy spokesperson Liu Pengyu in comments to Sputnik noted that the two militaries have conducted a series of exchanges and cooperation aimed at stabilizing and improving the bilateral relationship.

Beijing hopes the US side will work with the Chinese government in good faith to avoid conflict and confrontation, he added.

At the summit in Singapore, Austin will also participate in a series of other meetings, including with Singapore's new Prime Minister Lawerence Wong and other senior Singaporean officials. He will also engage in a multilateral meeting with his counterparts from Southeast Asia, and a Trilateral Ministerial Meeting (TMM) with his counterparts from Japan and South Korea.

Austin is also scheduled to travel to France and Cambodia after his stop in Singapore.

While in Cambodia, Austin will meet with senior government officials.

Austin will conclude his trip in France to participate in several commemorative events for the 80th anniversary of D-Day on June 6.

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Human Rights Group Bashes Haley for Writing 'Finish Them' on Israeli Bomb Meant for Gaza

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) - Human rights group Amnesty International has bashed former US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley for writing "finish them" on an Israeli bomb during her visit to the region amid a humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip caused by Israel's military operation that has harmed tens of thousands of civilians.

"Former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley signed Israeli artillery shells with the message 'Finish Them!,'" the group said in a statement on X on Wednesday. "Conflict is no place for stunts. Conflict has rules. Civilians must be protected."

On Sunday, Israel struck a refugee camp northeast of the city of Rafah. The Palestinian civil

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defense service said that at least 40 people died and dozens were injured as a result. On Monday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the airstrike on the refugee camp a "tragic incident," adding that an investigation is underway. The Israel Defense Forces said that it used "precise munitions."

Israel sent troops into the city of Rafah on May 7, seven months after an attack by Palestinian movement Hamas on Israeli territory unleashed the worst escalation of conflict in the Gaza Strip in decades. Israel's war cabinet vowed to expand the operation in Rafah until it accomplished its declared goal of eliminating all Hamas fighters.

According to UN estimates, more than 945,000 people have been displaced from Rafah due to Israeli strikes since May 6.

On October 7, 2023, Palestinian movement Hamas launched a large-scale rocket attack against Israel and breached the border, attacking both civilian neighborhoods and military bases. Nearly 1,200 people in Israel were killed and some 240 others abducted during the attack. Israel launched retaliatory strikes, ordered a complete blockade of Gaza, and started a ground incursion into the Palestinian enclave with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas fighters and rescuing the hostages. Over 36,000 people have been killed so far by Israeli strikes in the Gaza Strip, according to local authorities. More than 100 hostages are still believed to be held by Hamas in Gaza.

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US Navy Years Behind, Already Over Budget in Designing New Class of Frigates - Report

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) - The US Navy is encountering more problems with designing its new proposed force of 20 Constellation-class frigates and even before the first one is properly designed, they are three years behind schedule and billions of dollars over budget, a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report said.

"Delays in completing the ship design have created mounting construction delays," the report said on Wednesday. "The Navy acknowledges that the April 2026 delivery date, set in the contract at award, is unachievable. The lead frigate is forecasted to be delivered 36 months later than initially planned."

Over at least two decades, the Navy's Constellation class Guided Missile Frigate program plans to acquire and deliver up to 20 frigates - multi-mission, small surface combatant warships at a combined cost of over $22 billion, the report said.

However, the Navy lacks visibility into the true scope of work remaining to stabilize the frigate's functional design and the extent to which ongoing delays in completing the design will have on construction of follow-on ships, the report said.

"It is, therefore, uncertain when fleet operators will have the new frigates available for mission tasks," the report also said.

The Navy's decision to begin construction before the design was complete is inconsistent with leading ship design practices, the report added.

Then, design instability caused weight growth and therefore the frigate's 3D design was still incomplete over a year after construction began, according to the report.

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Biden Admin. Considering Allowing Ukraine to Strike Russia With US Weapons - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is considering lifting restrictions on Ukraine to strike targets on Russian territory with US-supplied weapons despite earlier statements that it has not given such authorization, Politico reported.

Amid a worsening situation on the battlefield for Ukraine and the daily advance of Russian troops, the Biden administration is increasingly inclined to change its policy and allow Kiev to attack targets on Russian territory, the report said on Wednesday.

The issue is "under consideration" while US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby continue to state that there have not been any changes in policy.

No decision has been made yet and chances are that the Biden administration will continue to limit Kiev's ability to choose targets in Russia, the report added.

According to an internal document obtained by the newspaper, Ukraine continues to insist in its communications with the United States that the US restrictions "significantly reduce the effectiveness of partners' assistance and neutralize the efforts made."

On Wednesday, 60 former US officials and scholars sent a letter to President Joe Biden demanding that he lift existing restrictions amid the deteriorating situation on the battlefield for the Ukrainians in the Kharkov (also known as Kharkiv) region.

The signatories of the letter include former US Special Representative for Ukraine Negotiations Kurt Volker; former US Army Europe Commanding General Ben Hodges; former Supreme Allied Commander Europe Philip Breedlove; and former US ambassadors to Russia and Ukraine.

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Pentagon Awards $4Bln in Contracts to Bolster Defense Against Weapons of Mass Destruction

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) - The US Defense Department announced that it awarded $4 billion worth of contracts to multiple firms as part of a national initiative to bolster the United States' capability to counter weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

Applied Research Associates, Booz Allen Hamilton, Leidos, Peraton, SRC, Two Six Labs, Noblis, Parsons Government Services and Signalscape were awarded a multiple award, indefinite-delivery/indefinite-quantity contract with a maximum cumulative ceiling of $4,000,000,000 for the Defense Threat Reduction Agency's (DTRA) Research and Development Directorate, The Defense Department said in a press release on Wednesday.

The companies will perform a broad range of services, including research, development, test and evaluation, procurement, among others, to ensure the United States is able to counter WMD threats from adversaries, the release said.

"Work under this program is divided into three pools: artificial intelligence, machine learning, data science, and software development (Pool 1); operations and countermeasures in a

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chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear environment (Pool 2); and targeting, information operations and irregular warfare (Pool 3)," the release said.

Work for these contracts is expected to be completed between May 2029 to May 2034, the release added.

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NATO Only Meets 5% of Air Defense Needs to Protect Its Eastern Flank - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) - NATO currently meets only 5% of its air defense needs to protect its eastern flank against a full-scale attack, the Financial Times reported.

The report said on Wednesday that NATO's new defense plan significantly increases air and missile defense requirements in quantity and readiness, which includes investments in new air defense capabilities and in fighter jets.

NATO's stockpiles have been reduced as member states struggle to ramp up air defense production after slashing military budgets.

However, the military alliance remains confident its capabilities to deter Russia remain strong.

The NATO member states' foreign ministers will convene in Prague on Thursday for a two-day meeting to lay the groundwork for the aliance's leaders' summit in Washington in July.

The summit is expected to put a key emphasis on European defense capabilities.

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Judge Dismisses Trump Trial Jury After Hours of Deliberation, No Decision - Reports

(Updates with more details in para 5; modifies dateline)

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) - New York Supreme Court judge Juan Merchan dismissed the jury in the so-called "hush money" case involving former US President Donald Trump, after they failed to reach a decision during several hours of deliberation, NBC News reported.

Merchan dismissed the jury for the day and ordered them not to discuss the case or search for information about it, the report said on Wednesday.

The jury will resume deliberations on Thursday at 9:30 a.m. ET.

Trump is accused of falsifying records related to an alleged hush-money payment to adult film actress Stormy Daniels. Trump denies the accusations and has condemned the case as a form of election interference amid the 2024 US presidential race.

Trump said that he thought the day went "very good," in response to a question by reporters about his thoughts on the first day of jury deliberations in the case, following the conclusion of the court session.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Sputnik) -

GAZA STRIP

* White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said on Wednesday that there is a new proposal on a Gaza ceasefire and the Biden administration is doing everything possible to get it advanced.

* Establishing a ceasefire in Gaza and returning to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process seems "quite illusory" at present, given the current escalation of the conflict there, Russian Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Anna Evstigneeva said.

* The hostilities in Gaza will last at least another seven months, Israeli National Security Council chief Tzachi Hanegbi said.

CONFERENCE ON UKRAINE IN SWITZERLAND

* The United Nations will send a representative to the upcoming Swiss-hosted peace conference on Ukraine, but its exact representation has yet to be determined, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Wednesday.

* One cannot imply a lack of support by the United States for Ukraine regardless of which member of the Biden administration will represent the country at the upcoming peace summit in Switzerland, White House National Security Communications Adviser John Kirby said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* The naval aviation of the Russian Black Sea fleet discovered and destroyed an unmanned Ukrainian navy boat en route to Crimea, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Wednesday.

* The United States has not encouraged Kiev to strike targets outside of Ukraine, Secretary of

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State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday, but added that Ukraine has to make its own decisions.
* The German government cannot answer the question whether Ukraine has the right to carry out strikes deep into the territory of Russia, German government spokesperson Steffen Hebestreit said.
* Canada is providing weapons to Ukraine with no restrictions on strikes inside Russia, Minister of Foreign Affairs Melanie Joly said.
* The Kremlin is aware of reports that Poland allowed Ukraine to use weapons to strike the Russian territory, spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

NATO-UKRAINE RELATIONS
* The joint declaration coming out of the NATO summit in Washington will include new language on Ukraine's membership aspirations that will be different from the wording used last year, US Ambassador to NATO Julianne Smith said on Wednesday.
* NATO is considering whether to appoint a special representative for Ukraine to manage various efforts across the military bloc, Smith said.

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US Assistant Secretary of State Ramin Toloui to Step Down in June - Blinken

WASHINGTON, May 29 (Sputnik) - Assistant Secretary of State for Economic and Business Affairs Ramin Toloui will step down from his position after making significant contributions to various State Department initiatives, including those concerning semiconductor supply chains and sanctions against Russia, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday.
"As Assistant Secretary for Economic and Business Affairs, Ramin championed a guiding principle of our foreign policy that economic security is national security," Blinken said. "Through his leadership, the [State] Department has cultivated resilient semiconductor supply chains under the CHIPS Act, protected critical technologies like artificial intelligence by shaping outbound investment regulations, and imposed costs on Russia."
Toloui coordinated with allies and partners to strengthen global supply chains, align investment policies and counter coercion by hostile actors, Blinken said.
Toloui guided the State Department's engagement in the Group of Twenty (G20) nations and advanced key initiatives to enhance global food security, Blinken also said.
The State Department wishes Toloui much success in his career upon returning to Stanford University later this summer, Blinken added.

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Judge Dismisses Trump Trial Jury After Hours of Deliberation, No Decision - Reports

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The jury will resume deliberations on Thursday at 9:30 a.m. ET, the report said.

Trump is accused of falsifying records related to an alleged hush-money payment to adult film actress Stormy Daniels. Trump denies the accusations and has condemned the case as a form of election interference amid the 2024 US presidential race.

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RFK Jr. Seeks to Block First Biden-Trump Debate, Alleges Election Violations - Statement

WASHINGTON, May 29 (Sputnik) - Independent candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr's campaign said on Wednesday that it filed a complaint with the US Federal Election Commission (FEC) accusing President Joe Biden, former President Donald Trump and CNN of violating US election laws.

"The complaint establishes that because CNN is illegally demanding that Kennedy meet different criteria to participate than Presidents Biden and Trump, its debate is a large prohibited campaign contribution to Biden and Trump," the campaign said in a press release.

The Kennedy team claims CNN unlawfully colluded with the Biden and Trump teams to schedule a debate that would only include their parties and isolate Kennedy.

The Kennedy campaign is asking the FEC to look into its allegation and to block the Biden-Trump presidential debate scheduled for June 27 until the accused parties are in "compliance' with federal election laws, the release said.

Kennedy's campaign said CNN’s qualification criteria requires a US presidential candidate’s name must appear on a sufficient number of state ballots to reach the 270 electoral vote threshold to win the presidency.

As of Wednesday, the Kennedy campaign has submitted the necessary signatures to appear on the ballots in nine US states, adding up to 171 electoral votes, which is expected to grow in the coming weeks, the release said.

The complaint points out that Kennedy is currently eligible for more electoral votes than Biden and Trump combined since they have not yet been officially nominated by their parties and their ballot access is not certified in any state.

"CNN is admitting presidents Biden and Trump to the debate without requiring that they satisfy the electoral vote criteria while insisting Kennedy must satisfy it," the release said. "That violates the requirement that debate criteria be 'pre-established' and 'objective.'"

The release noted that Kennedy has not met the criteria to join the CNN debate, but the deadline is June 20.

Trump and Biden recently agreed to debates on June 27 and September 10, but Biden rejected additional debates proposed by NBC News and Fox News in the coming months. The Trump campaign has been calling on Biden to agree to have a debate each month leading to the

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November 5 vote in the US presidential election.

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Trump Team Believes Chances of Hung Jury Increase With Deliberation Time - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 29 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump's legal team believes that the chances of a hung jury in the so-called "hush money" case against him increase with time spent by jurors deliberating, CNN reported on Wednesday.

"Look, it was possible the jury was going to come back guilty verdict in 45 minutes - every minute after that gives some hope [for a hung jury]," the report quotes one Trump adviser as having said.

Trump's team believes that jurors will ultimately base their decisions on politics, the report said.

There are a couple of jurors in particular that Trump's team believes could deliver a mistrial, the report said, citing a source familiar with internal conversations.

The jurors have been deliberating for more than four hours, as of this writing. The jurors requested to review testimony presented during the trial.

Shortly after the jury sounded the buzzer for a second time, a court officer handed another sheet to each side.

The judge in the case, Juan Merchan, said that they received another note.

"We the jury request to rehear the judge's instructions," the note said.

Trump is accused of falsifying records to cover up an alleged hush-money payment to adult film actress Stormy Daniels. Trump has denied the accusations against him, as well as denied having engaged in an alleged affair with Daniels.

Trump has called the case a form of election interference amid the 2024 US presidential race and claimed that the case never should have been brought to trial.

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US OKs Possible Sale of Black Hawk Helicopters to Sweden, Austria for Nearly $2Bln - DSCA

WASHINGTON, May 29 (Sputnik) - The US State Department approved potential sales of UH-60M Black Hawk helicopters and related equipment to Sweden and Austria for $900 million and $1.05 billion respectively, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) announced on Wednesday.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of Sweden of UH-60M Black Hawk Helicopters and related equipment for an estimated cost of $900 million," the DSCA said in a press release.

The government of Sweden requested to acquire 12 UH-60M Black Hawk helicopters, 30 T700-GE-701D engines, 17 AN/AAR-57 common missile warning systems (CMWS), and other equipment, the release said.

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"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to Austria of UH-60M Blackhawk Helicopters and related elements of logistics and program support for an estimated cost of $1.05 billion," the DSCA said in a separate release.

The Austrian government requested to acquire 12 UH-60M Black Hawk helicopters with 26 T700-GE-701D engines, 15 AN/AAR-57 common missile warning systems (CMWS), 30 H-764U Embedded Global Positioning Systems with Inertial Navigation (EGI), and other equipment, the release said.

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us state department approves possible $900 million sale of blackhawk helicopters to sweden - pentagon

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Canada at Front of Anti-Russia Policy, Unsurprising It Backs Strikes on Russia - Embassy

WASHINGTON, May 29 (Sputnik) - The Trudeau government stating that it has placed no restrictions on Ukraine's use of Canadian-supplied weapons to strike Russia comes as no surprise considering that Canada is a spearhead of the West's anti-Russia policy, the Russian Embassy in Ottawa told Sputnik.

Earlier on Wednesday, Canadian Foreign Minister Melanie Joly said the weapons Canada provides Ukraine come with "no end-user conditions." The minister made the remarks when addressing a question on whether Ottawa would allow Kiev to strike Russian territory with Canadian-supplied weaponry.

"The statement by Trudeau's cabinet that there were no 'end-user conditions' on the weapons Canada supplies to Ukraine did not come as a surprise to us. The Canadian government has been at the front of the anti-Russian policy of the West, particularly in the context of Ukraine," the embassy said.

Allowing the Ukrainian military to strike Russian territory will neither have an impact on the battlefield nor will it provide any advantage to the "Kiev regime," the embassy said. The Russian military possesses all the necessary capabilities to both neutralize and prevent such a threat, the mission stressed.

Moreover, troops or instructors from NATO member states, including Canada, that are servicing and helping Ukrainian servicemen in using the equipment transferred to Kiev are considered by Russia to be legitimate targets, the embassy warned.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has said that Russia is following the statements on strikes inside its territory after several countries currently supplying weapons to Ukraine began endorsing the idea. He warned that NATO countries should be aware of what they are playing with.

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White House Considers Algerian-Prepared UNSC Draft Resolution on Gaza Imbalanced - Kirby

WASHINGTON, May 29 (Sputnik) - The Algeria-prepared UN Security Council draft resolution on a ceasefire in Gaza is not balanced because it fails to note that Hamas is to blame for the conflict in the Palestinian enclave, White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said on Wednesday.

"We believe it is imbalanced and it fails to note a very simple fact and this is the same thing we have objected to previous resolutions, it does not note that Hamas is to blame for this conflict," Kirby said during a press briefing.

Algeria on Tuesday circulated the draft resolution demanding Israel to halt its military offensive in Rafah.

Earlier on Wednesday, US mission to the United Nations spokesperson Robert Wood said that another UN Security Council resolution on Gaza will not change the dynamics on the ground in the Palestinian enclave.

The United States has so far blocked five resolutions on Gaza, despite the catastrophic humanitarian situation in the Palestinian enclave.

Earlier on Wednesday, Russian Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Anna Evstigneeva said it is obvious Israel does not intend to stop its military operations in Gaza any time soon and the catastrophic humanitarian situation is getting worse every day.

On Sunday, Israel struck a refugee camp northeast of Rafah, killing at least 40 Palestinians and injuring dozens more.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the strike a tragic incident and added that an investigation is underway.

More than 35,000 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's military operations in Gaza since October 7, when Hamas attacked Israel and killed 1,200 Israeli military personnel and civilians.

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Republicans Suspect Ex-Iran Envoy Malley May Have Mishandled Classified Info – Reports

WASHINGTON, May 29 (Sputnik) - Republican lawmakers received evidence that former US special envoy for Iran Robert Malley allegedly downloaded a number of classified documents and passed them on to people outside the US government amid the ongoing investigation into his suspension, Semafor reported on Wednesday, citing people familiar with the matter.

Malley was suspended from his position without pay in the summer of 2023, several months after his security clearance was revoked. The FBI is investigating allegations that he mishandled classified documents on Iran while leading the negotiation process to revive the Iranian nuclear deal.

The lawmakers have allegedly found that Malley transferred about a dozen documents to his devices with classifications ranging from sensitive but unclassified to classified, including those

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containing detailed notes of his meetings with Iranian officials in the months preceding his suspension. Additionally, there were documents related to the US response to political protests in Iran following the death of Mahsa Amini, the report said.

Politico reported on Friday that the FBI has initiated an investigation into Malley possibly transferring classified information to his email account and potentially exposing it to foreign actors.

On May 6, the top two Republicans in the Senate and House foreign affairs committees, Jim Risch and Chairman Michael McCaul, sent a letter to Secretary of State Antony Blinken demanding answers to their questions related to Malley's case.

"Did Malley send or attempt to send these documents to anyone who lacked the proper security clearance?" the lawmakers asked in the letter. "Were any of these individuals affiliated with the Iranian government or the Iran Experts Initiative (IEI)?"

Axios previously reported that White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan expressed concerns to Israeli counterparts that Israel has been leaking information to the press about the indirect talks between the United States and Iran.

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Biden Absence at Switzerland Summit Should Not Imply Lack of Support for Ukraine - Kirby

WASHINGTON, May 29 (Sputnik) - One cannot imply a lack of support by the United States for Ukraine regardless of which member of the Biden administration will represent the country at the upcoming peace summit in Switzerland, White House National Security Communications Adviser John Kirby said on Wednesday.

"No matter who represents the United States at the peace summit, it cannot be said that the United States has not been there for Ukraine," Kirby said during a press briefing.

Kirby made the statement in response to a question whether President Joe Biden will skip the summit.

Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelenskyy has urged Biden to attend the peace conference in Switzerland, arguing that his absence would be applauded by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

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UPDATE: White House Says 'Another Proposal' on Gaza Ceasefire Being Discussed Now

(Updates with more details, background in paras 4-7)

WASHINGTON, May 29 (Sputnik) - White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said on Wednesday that a new proposal on a Gaza ceasefire is on the table and the Biden administration is doing everything possible to get it advanced.

"I think, you know, another proposal now is on the table, a fresh one, and we are doing everything we can to see if we can get that advanced," Kirby said during a press briefing.

Kirby also said that Israel is "very supportive" of the new proposal and willing to move on it in

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good faith.
There is no timeline as to when the talks on the deal will resume, but the United States is doing a lot of work to revive these talks following an Israeli strike on Rafah in which dozens of Palestinian refugees were killed and injured on Sunday, Kirby added.
On Monday, the Palestinian movement Hamas said it would not participate in any negotiations after Israel's deadly strike on a Rafah camp housing displaced Palestinians.
The Palestinian Civil Defense Service said that at least 40 people were killed and dozens more were injured as a result of the Israeli strike.
Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the strike on the Rafah camp a "tragic mishap," adding that an investigation is underway.

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No matter who represents us at swiss summit, it cannot be said that us has not been there for Ukraine - Kirby

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White House Says 'Another Proposal' on Gaza Ceasefire Being Discussed Now

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"I think, you know, another proposal now is on the table, a fresh one, and we are doing everything we can to see if we can get that advanced," Kirby said during a press briefing.
Kirby added that Israel is "very supportive" of the new proposal and willing to move on it in good faith.

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US Army Secretary Will Open New Artillery Shell Plant in Texas - White House

WASHINGTON, May 29 (Sputnik) - The US Secretary of the Army is in Texas for the opening of a General Dynamics plant that will manufacture parts for artillery shells that will enable a significant bolstering of national production of shells, White House National Security Communications Adviser John Kirby said on Wednesday.
"Today, the Secretary of the Army is in Mesquite, Texas, for the opening of a new factory that will significantly increase our country's ability to manufacture parts that are used to produce artillery ammunition," Kirby said during a press briefing.
This new plant is part of the US government's effort to boost the number of artillery shells made

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in the United States every month, which will also be important for Ukraine, Kirby added.

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Kirby says another proposal on gaza ceasefire deal now is on the table

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US Aware of Reports MQ-9 Drone Downed Over Yemen But Has Nothing to Share - Official

WASHINGTON, May 29 (Sputnik) - A Defense Department official told Sputnik on Wednesday that the US government is aware of reports that Houthi rebels downed a US MQ-9 Reaper drone over Yemen earlier in the day but have nothing to share on the matter at this time.

"We are aware of reports but do not have anything to share at this time," the official said.

Earlier on Wednesday, the Houthis claimed they downed a MQ-9 Reaper drone in Mareeb, Yemen.

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Pentagon Confirms US Personnel Evacuated From 4 Vessels Beached Near Gaza, Ashkelon

WASHINGTON, May 29 (Sputnik) - Military personnel from four vessels that beached over the weekend near the Gaza Strip and Ashkelon, Israel, due to bad weather have been evacuated, US Defense Department deputy spokesperson Sabrina Singh confirmed on Wednesday.

"To clarify questions about US personnel on beached Army vessels: on May 25, heavy sea states caused four US Army vessels operating in support of the JLOTS pier operations to become beached," Singh said in a statement.

Singh explained that US military personnel on those vessels were evacuated on Saturday after two vessels were beached in Gaza near the base of the pier the United States has been constructing and the other two were beached near Ashkelon.

On Saturday, the US Central Command (CENTCOM) said in a press release that four US Army vessels supporting the maritime humanitarian aid mission in Gaza broke free from their moorings due to stormy weather.

The original CENTCOM statement on the incident did not say anything about evacuation efforts following the beaching of the vessels.

On Tuesday, Singh said that the US military pier attached to the Gaza coastline to facilitate aid deliveries was damaged by bad weather and will have to be temporarily detached for repairs.

The pier has been intact for less than two weeks since its operation began on May 17 to facilitate humanitarian aid deliveries to Gaza to ease the dire situation in the Palestinian enclave

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amid Israeli military operations there.

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UN Will Be Represented at Swiss Peace Conference on Ukraine - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, May 29 (Sputnik) - The United Nations as an observer will send a representative to the upcoming Swiss-hosted peace conference on Ukraine, but its exact representation has yet to be determined, UN Spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Wednesday.

"The UN is an observer, we will be represented, but exactly what that representation will look like I will share with you as soon as I can," Dujarric said in a UN press briefing when asked who would represent the UN at the upcoming peace conference on Ukraine in Switzerland.

Switzerland will host a high-level conference on Ukrainian peace at the Buergenstock resort outside of Lucerne from June 15-16. More than 160 delegations from around the world have been invited to attend the event. Russia did not receive an invitation. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov has said the peace conference is clearly not result-oriented, as it is impossible to hold effective talks on peace process in Ukraine without Russia's participation.

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Trump Discusses Potential White House Advisory Role With Elon Musk - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 29 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump discussed with billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk a potential White House advisory role for him, the Wall Street Journal reported on Wednesday.

Trump and Musk discussed ways to give the latter formal influence over border security and economic policies if Trump is reelected, the report said.

Musk also informed Trump about a plan to invest in a data-driven project to prevent voter fraud in the United States.

Moreover, Musk told Trump about efforts to convince other business leaders not to support the 2024 presidential campaign of current President Joe Biden, the report said.

In March, Musk said that he had a chance encounter with Trump while having breakfast at a friend's house. Musk said that he will not donate money to any presidential candidate in the 2024 election but could endorse a candidate late in the race.

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Another UNSC Resolution on Gaza Will Not Change Dynamics on Ground - Wood

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UNITED NATIONS, May 29 (Sputnik) - Another UN Security Council resolution on Gaza will not change the dynamics on the ground, US mission to the United Nations spokesperson Robert Wood said on Wednesday.

"Another resolution is not necessarily changing anything on the ground. There have been previous resolutions. The problem is that they have not been implemented," Wood said. "We do not think that another resolution is going to change the dynamics on the ground."

Wood made the comment amid attempts by Algeria to prepare another UN Security Council draft resolution on Gaza.

The United States has so far blocked about five resolutions on Gaza, saying that it is not the right time to step into the conflict with a resolution despite the catastrophic humanitarian situation in the Palestinian enclave.

Earlier in the day, Russian Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Anna Evstigneeva said that it is obvious the Israeli war machine does not intend to stop operations in Gaza any time soon and the catastrophic humanitarian situation is getting worse every day.

On Sunday, Israel struck a refugee camp northeast of Rafah, killing at least 40 Palestinians and injuring dozens more.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the strike a tragic incident and added that an investigation is underway.

More than 35,000 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's military operations in Gaza since October 7, when Hamas attacked Israel and killed 1,200 Israeli military personnel and civilians.

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China Suggests Holding Int'l Conference on Two-State Solution - UN Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, May 29 (Sputnik) - China suggests organizing an authoritative international peace conference that would work out a timetable for the implementation of the two-state solution between Israel and Palestine, Chinese Ambassador to the UN Fu Cong said on Wednesday.

"China proposes the convening of a larger scale, more authoritative, and more effective international peace conference with a timetable and a roadmap for the implementation of the two-state solution. We support Palestine for UN membership at an early date," Fu said during a UN Security Council meeting on Palestine.

The 10th Ministerial Conference of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum will be held in Beijing tomorrow and continue "in-depth discussions," the ambassador added.

Since the October 7 Hamas attack, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has doubled down on his opposition to creating a Palestinian state.

In April, Palestine sent a request for a full membership in the United Nations, a bid that was vetoed by the United States. In May, Palestine sent another request for the UN Security Council to admit it to the world body.

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Biden Admin. Convenes Summit on Domestic Nuclear Development - White House

WASHINGTON, May 29 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is convening a meeting on Wednesday to discuss United States' efforts to bolster its supply chain for nuclear fuel, especially after it banned new imports of Russian uranium, the White House said in a press release.

"The Biden-Harris Administration is today hosting a White House Summit on Domestic Nuclear Deployment, highlighting the collective progress being made from across the public and private sectors," the release said.

The release highlighted that the Biden administration is working toward reducing - and eventually eliminating - its reliance on Russian uranium for civilian nuclear power and developing a new supply chain for nuclear fuel.

The Biden administration will establish a working group made up of industry leaders and experts who will help identify any cost overrun risks for future civil nuclear projects in the United States, the release said.

The US Army is expected to announce soon that it will explore the option of using small nuclear reactors to power its sites in the United States, which may serve as a resilient energy source for years against threats such as cyberattacks, extreme weather, physical damage, among others, the release said.

Earlier this month, President Joe Biden signed the Prohibiting Russian Uranium Imports Act, which bans the imports of Russian uranium until 2040.

The bill envisages limiting the import of low-enriched uranium produced in Russia or Russian-based companies, but also authorizes the US energy secretary in coordination with the secretary of state and the commerce secretary to lift the ban if other sources of uranium supplies are unavailable or the import of Russian nuclear fuel is in the national interests of the United States.

The United States announced recently that it is seeking bids on contracts for at least $3.4 billion in domestically produced nuclear reactor fuel following the implementation of the ban.

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US Senator Wicker Calls for Boosting Military Spending by $55Blln to 5% of GDP

WASHINGTON, May 29 (Sputnik) – US Senate Armed Services Committee Ranking Member Roger Wicker said Wednesday that he would publish a plan to boost US military spending to 5% of GDP in order to prepare the US for great power conflict.

"On Wednesday I am publishing a plan that includes a series of detailed proposals to address this reality head-on. We have been living off the Reagan military buildup for too long; it is time for updates and upgrades. My plan outlines why and how the United States should aim to spend an additional $55 billion on the military in the 2025 fiscal year and grow military spending from a

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projected 2.9 percent of our national gross domestic product this year to 5 percent over the next five to seven years," Wicker said in an op-ed for the New York Times.

Wicker argued that "the specter of great power conflict" had risen again with threats posed by China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea, and the US military was "at risk of being underequipped and outgunned."

In order to "prevent another world war," Wicker called for a "short-term generational investment" to fundamentally upgrade the US military.

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Scale of Humanitarian Disaster in Gaza Increasing Every Day - Russian Deputy Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, May 29 (Sputnik) - Negotiations between Israel and Hamas are stalled and the scale of humanitarian disaster in the Gaza Strip is increasing by the day, Russian Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Anna Evstigneeva said on Wednesday.

"[T]he negotiating process between Israel and Hamas through mediators on the issue of exchanging Israeli hostages for Palestinian prisoners is stalled," Evstigneeva said. "In these conditions, the scale of humanitarian disasters is increasing every single day."

Evstigneeva pointed out that it is clear Israel does not intend to stop its military operations in Gaza anytime soon despite being increasingly obvious that it is unable to achieve its declared objectives - destroy Hamas and free the remaining hostages.

Those Palestinians who have managed to escape the shelling in Gaza are facing famine and infectious diseases without being able to obtain any medical assistance, Evstigneeva said.

On Sunday, Israel struck a refugee camp northeast of Rafah, killing at least 40 Palestinians and injuring dozens more.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the strike a tragic incident and added that an investigation is underway.

More than 35,000 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's military operations in Gaza since October 7, when Hamas attacked Israel and killed 1,200 Israeli military personnel and civilians.

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Blinken Says Cannot Verify Israel Used US Small Diameter Bombs in Gaza Tent Camp Attack

WASHINGTON, May 29 (Sputnik) — US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday that the US cannot verify Israeli claims that small-diameter weapons were used in a targeted fashion against specific Hamas leaders.

"We've heard from the Israelis but, again, absent a complete investigation. I can't verify any of this, that small-diameter weapons were used in a targeted fashion to go after specific terrorist leaders of Hamas," Blinken said during a press briefing.

Blinken also said he could not yet say what weapons were used or how they were used in the "horrific" attack.

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Blinken Says US Has Not Encouraged Kiev to Strike Outside of Ukraine

WASHINGTON, May 29 (Sputnik) - The United States has not encouraged Kiev to strike outside of Ukraine amid its ongoing conflict with Russia, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday, adding that Ukraine has to make its own decisions.

"We have not encouraged or enabled strikes outside of Ukraine, but Ukraine, as I have said before, has to make its own decisions about the best way to effectively defend itself," Blinken told reporters in Moldova.

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Ceasefire Appears 'Quite Illusory' Amid Current Escalation of Gaza Conflict - Evstigneeva

UNITED NATIONS, May 29 (Sputnik) - Establishing a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and returning to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process seems "quite illusory" at present, given the current escalation of the conflict there, Russian Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Anna Evstigneeva said on Wednesday.

"We, unfortunately, have to conclude that in the conditions of the current escalation, returning the Palestinian-Israeli peace process toward the diplomatic-political sphere and establishing a ceasefire appears quite illusory," Evstigneeva said during a UN Security Council meeting on the situation in Palestine.

The UN Security Council, therefore, must put pressure on Israel and its ally, the United States, to move things in the right direction, Evstigneeva added.

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UN Urges Israel, Hamas to Return to Negotiating Table After Deadly Rafah Strike

UNITED NATIONS, May 29 (Sputnik) - The United Nations calls on Israel and Hamas to get back to negotiations on a ceasefire deal to "avoid further catastrophe" after the deadly Israeli strike on Rafah, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Tor Wennesland said on Wednesday.

"I urge the parties to return to the negotiating table immediately and in good faith. I reiterate my and the Secretary-General's repeated calls for the immediate release of all hostages held in Gaza and for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire," Wennesland said at a UN Security Council meeting on Palestine.

The envoy said that an Israeli strike on Sunday in which a reported 45 Palestinians were killed

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and 200 injured "does not stand alone amid a shocking number of civilian casualties."
"I remind all parties of their obligations to protect civilians," Wennesland stressed.
The Middle East coordinator also said that the occupied West Bank remains a "pressure-cooker of negative trends."
"The risk of a regional conflagration is constant and is mounting every day this war continues. This trajectory must change if we are to avoid further catastrophe," he warned.
Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the airstrike that started a fire at a camp for displaced Palestinians in Rafah a "tragic mishap," adding that an investigation is underway. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) stated that it used precise munitions in what they say was a "targeted strike in Rafah" to eliminate two senior Hamas fighters.
The IDF said it is looking into the possibility of secondary explosions from an alleged Hamas ammunition warehouse causing the fire that claimed civilian lives.

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Biden Admin. to Work With Congress to Provide Additional $50 Million to Moldova – Blinken

WASHINGTON, May 29 (Sputnik) – The Biden administration will be working with Congress to provide Moldova with an additional $50 million in assistance to fund the country's energy and agricultural sectors, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday.
"Today, I'm announcing that we'll be working with our Congress to provide an additional $50 million to further advance these efforts from reforming the energy and agricultural sectors to pushing back further against disinformation," Blinken said during a joint press conference during his visit to Chisinau, Moldova.
Blinken also announced that Washington will dedicate $85 million, as part of the $300 million assistance package unveiled in 2023, to support Moldova's energy infrastructure by enhancing battery storage and high-voltage transmission lines.

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biden admin to work with congress to provide additional $50 million to advance efforts to reform moldova's energy and agricultural sectors - blinken

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Judge Merchan Instructs Jury in Trump 'Hush Money' Trial - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 29 (Sputnik) - New York Superior Court judge Juan Merchan began jury instructions for the so-called "hush money" case against former President Donald Trump, CNN reported on Wednesday .
Merchan instructed the jury on their responsibilities ahead of deliberations on whether to find

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Trump guilty for allegedly falsifying records to cover up payments to adult film actress Stormy Daniels.

Merchan told the jury that they must find Trump guilty beyond a reasonable doubt and may not hold against him the fact that he did not testify at the trial.

The jury must reach a unanimous decision to find Trump guilty.

Trump has repeatedly denied the allegations against him and characterized the case as a form of election interference amid the 2024 US presidential race.

On Wednesday, Trump called Merchan a "corrupt and conflicted" judge and said that the case should never have been brought to trial.

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US MQ-9 Reaper Drone Purportedly Downed Over Yemen - Images

WASHINGTON, May 29 (Sputnik) - An MQ-9 Reaper drone operated by the US military was downed over Yemen, images and footage released from the crash site appear to show on Wednesday.

The images show a group of men standing by what appears to be a US MQ-9 Reaper drone in the Yemeni desert.

The US Central Command reportedly acknowledged rumors of a drone being downed in Yemen's Marib province, although neither the Yemeni government nor the Ansar Allah movement - whose members and supporters are commonly known as Houthis - have acknowledged the situation.

In February, a MQ-9 Reaper drone was downed off the coast of Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen.

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Trudeau to Attend Italy's G7 Summit, Switzerland's Summit on Peace in Ukraine – Office

WASHINGTON, May 29 (Sputnik) – Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau will travel to Italy and Switzerland to attend the Group of Seven (G7) Summit and the Summit on Peace in Ukraine, his office said on Wednesday.

"The Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, today announced he will travel to Apulia, Italy, from June 13 to 15, 2024, to attend the G7 Summit, before travelling to Lucerne, Switzerland, from June 15 to 16, 2024, to participate in the Summit on Peace in Ukraine," the office said in a statement.

At the G7, Trudeau intends to highlight the importance of defending "democracy and democratic values," notably by countering foreign interference as well as mis- and dis-information, the statement said. The prime minister will also promote dynamic growth based in the global digital and energetic transition, and the responsible development and deployment

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of artificial intelligence, it added.

Trudeau will also discuss G7 efforts to address geopolitical challenges, notably those resulting from the ongoing Israel-Hamas war and Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, the statement said. He will also hold bilateral meetings with his counterparts, it added.

In Switzerland, Trudeau will reaffirm his support for Ukraine and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and his efforts to achieve a "sustainable peace." The premier will highlight Canadian co-chaired initiatives such as the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children.

Switzerland will host a high-level conference on Ukrainian peace at the Buergenstock resort outside of Lucerne from June 15-16. More than 160 delegations from around the world have been invited to attend the event. Russia did not receive an invitation. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov has said the peace conference is clearly not result-oriented, as it is impossible to hold effective talks on peace process in Ukraine without Russia's participation

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Adeyemo, Ukraine Rada Discuss US Efforts to Mobilize $85Bil in Budget Support - Treasury

WASHINGTON, May 29 (Sputnik) - US Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo met with the Ukrainian parliament (Verkhovna Rada) leadership in Kiev and discussed ongoing efforts to mobilize more than $85 billion in budget support from the United States and other allies, among other forms of aid, the Treasury Department said on Wednesday.

"Adeyemo discussed ongoing efforts by the international coalition to provide Ukraine the resources it needs to defend itself, including helping to mobilize over $85 billion in budget support from the United States and international partners in addition to over $24 billion in early recovery and reconstruction assistance," the Treasury Department said in a statement.

The two sides also discussed the Ukrainian parliament's efforts to implement reforms, including measures to fight corruption, the statement said.

Adeyemo expressed support for the collaboration between international partners and the Ukrainian authorities to implement reforms necessary for Ukraine to advance in the process of Euro-Atlantic integration, the statement added.

Earlier on Wednesday, Adeyemo said he arrived in Ukraine to discuss the state of the country's economy, strengthening sanctions against Russia and unlock the value of the more than $300 billion of Russian assets frozen by the collective West.

The Kremlin has said any attempts to confiscate Russian assets amount to theft and a violation of international law.

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US Expects Consensus on Candidate for New NATO Chief by July Summit - Envoy

WASHINGTON, May 29 (Sputnik) – US Permanent Representative to NATO Julianne Smith said Wednesday that the United States expects to have the candidate for NATO's new

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secretary-general finalized by the July summit.

"I fully expect that this will be wrapped up by the summit in July," Smith said at a press briefing ahead of NATO's informal foreign ministers meeting in Prague.

NATO members continue to discuss the two top candidates for secretary-general, outgoing Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte and Romanian President Klaus Iohannis, Smith added, noting that "the momentum is strongly behind Mark Rutte, but not every ally is ready to sign off" on his candidacy.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg is scheduled to step down in October after a 10-year tenure.

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US Looking at Proposals to Boost NATO Air Defense - Envoy to NATO

WASHINGTON, May 29 (Sputnik) – US Permanent Representative to NATO Julianne Smith said Wednesday that the United States is looking at proposals to strengthen air defense across NATO territory.

"We are looking at a series of proposals to strengthen air defense across NATO territory and will likely have more to say about that at the summit," Smith said at a press briefing ahead of the NATO Informal Foreign Ministerial in Prague.

"We are moving heaven and earth right now to identify additional forms of air defense that we can flow into Ukraine and get to places like Kharkiv or Odesa and elsewhere," she added.

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