VOA NEWS

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This is VOA news. I'm David Byrd in Washington.

U.S. President Donald Trump's former personal lawyer, Michael Cohen, pleaded guilty Thursday to a new charge of lying to Congress about a Russian real estate venture Trump sought to develop during his presidential campaign.

AP's Warren Levinson has details.

Michael Cohen told Manhattan federal judge he lied to Senate and House committees last year about Donald Trump's business interests in Russia.

He testified negotiations over building Trump Tower in Russia ended before the 2016 presidential primaries began when in fact they continued throughout the primary season. He also said he lied about the extent of his contacts in Russia and with the Trump organization about the project.

He said he lied to be loyal to Trump's political messaging though the boss's name was absent from the proceeding where Trump was called "individual one."

Warren Levinson, New York.

What does Michael Cohen's guilty plea mean in the bigger picture of Robert Mueller's probe of Russian interference in the 2016 election?

AP correspondent Sagar Meghani reports.

GOP Senator Lindsey Graham, a Trump supporter, has no idea. "I don't know what it means in terms of the president and his campaign," saying the ball's in special counsel bob Mueller's court.

"Eventually Mr. Mueller is going to have to show the public there was collusion or there was not."

Fellow Republican John Kennedy agrees. "We do need to wrap it up."

Democrat Tim Kain says the Cohen plea could mean Republicans get their wish in a sense. "It definitely feels like there is an accelerating pace down."

And though former federal prosecutor David Weinstein says it's unlike President Trump to admit being nervous, "He should be getting a lot more nervous because the circle around him is tightening."

Sagar Meghani, Washington.

These developments come as President Trump continues almost daily attacks on Robert Mueller's investigation of his campaign links to Russia and whether Trump as president obstructed justice in an effort to thwart the probe.

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U.S. President Donald Trump on Thursday abruptly canceled a planned two-hour meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in response to Moscow's seizure of Ukrainian ships in the Black Sea region.

The White House said that Trump made the decision on board Air Force One on his way to the G-20 summit in Buenos Aires, Argentina, after conferring with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, National Security Adviser John Bolton and White House Chief of Staff John Kelly.

Russia seized three Ukrainian vessels and their crews in the Kerch Strait as they tried to make their way to the Ukrainian port of Mariupol in the Sea of Azov.

Senior U.N. adviser of the special envoy for Syria Jan Egeland has issued a scathing report about the international community's role in disregarding the suffering of the Syrian people.

As Lisa Schlein reports from Geneva, Egeland said the community had failed to protect civilians in the name of waging a war against terror.

Jan Egeland has led the U.N.'s humanitarian effort in war-torn Syria for many years. As he steps down from his post as senior adviser, he delivers a particularly blunt assessment of the international community's role in abetting the worst instincts of all the warring parties - to the detriment of the civilian population.

"We allowed all hell to be let loose in the most populated civilian places of a heavily populated country."

While most of the country has been forcibly pacified, Egeland warns the humanitarian situation throughout Syria remains critical. He says he is particularly worried by a recent escalation of violence in the northern cities of Aleppo and Idlib.

Lisa Schlein, for VOA news, Geneva.

The U.N.'s head of emergency relief efforts on Thursday urged both side in Yemen's conflict to cease fighting around aid infrastructure and to attend planned peace talks in Sweden.

Mark Lowcock is the under-secretary general for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief. He said both sides should make every effort to attend the talks.

"It's essential that everybody cooperates strongly with my colleague Martin Griffiths, and goes to the talks that he hopes to convene in Sweden very soon."

U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres said, meanwhile, his organization is working hard to ensure peace talks on Yemen before the end of the year.

Talks are tentatively set to open next week in Stockholm between Yemeni officials and representatives of the Iranian-backed Houthi rebels.

And the World Health Organization is warning a spike in the number of measles cases globally is putting hard won progress toward the elimination of the highly contagious deadly disease at risk.

A new report finds the Americas, the Eastern Mediterranean and Europe have experienced the greatest number of surge in cases.

I'm David Byrd, VOA news.