

Wednesday 11/11/20

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Photo: US Army Tests New Low-Cost Anti-Air Missile as Alternative to Costly Patriots
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

The US Army has tested a new surface-to-air missile (SAM) designed to fill the gap between shoulder-fired weapons and large truck-mounted air defense batteries in both range and cost. On Tuesday, the Aviation and Missile Center under the US Army's Combat Capabilities Development Command (CCDC) posted a photo on Twitter of a Low-Cost Extended Range Air Defense (Lower-AD) missile taking flight.

The post described the Lower-AD as “an affordable interceptor intended to fill [the] capability gap between short range man-portable air defense systems and Patriot high performance interceptors.” However, it gave no information about the date or location of the test.

[According to Army documents from 2019](#), Lower-AD will have a range of more than 25 kilometers and will primarily be used against drones and subsonic cruise missiles, leaving the Patriot interceptor to focus on larger threats while also reaching far beyond what a man-portable system like the FIM-92 Stinger is capable of.

The Patriot system is technically capable of shooting down drones if they wander into its scope of fire, but there are several mitigating factors that make a specific anti-drone system desirable, such as cost and targeting ability.

In September 2019, US Patriot systems in eastern Saudi Arabia were unable to engage a swarm of suicide drones that attacked two Saudi oil facilities because [they approached so low to the horizon](#) that the sky-scanning Patriot batteries, which were looking for ballistic missiles and high-flying threats, literally couldn't spot them.

As a result, the facilities were heavily damaged and oil production in the world's most productive country was dented for several days. Cruise missiles typically skim the surface, approaching their targets in a similar manner.

However, even if a drone did wander into a part of the sky a Patriot battery's radar could see, it's not very cost-effective to waste a \$3 million missile on a “quadcopter that cost 200 bucks from Amazon.com,” as US Army Gen. David Perkins, then commander of the US Army Training and Doctrine Command, [described one incident during a 2017 symposium](#).

[According to The Drive's The War Zone](#), the Army hopes the Lower-AD missiles will cost as little as \$150,000 each.

While little mention has been made of what system will be firing the Lower-AD missiles, it seems likely, given the illustrations in extant Army materials, [that the Multi-Mission Launcher being developed](#) by the Army will carry them. The system has three rows of five missile tubes each, meaning not only would the missiles be more cost-effective for smaller threats, but also a single truck could carry almost four times as many missiles as the four-shot Patriot launchers do.

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Saudi-Led Coalition Intercepts Two Explosive-Laden Boats, Drone Deployed by Houthis - Report
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Saudi state television reported Wednesday evening that two explosives-laden boats deployed by the Yemeni Houthi movement had been intercepted in the southern Red Sea.

According to the report, the boats were launched from the port of Hudaydah.

Later on Wednesday, the Saudis also announced they had shot down an explosives-laden drone launched by the Houthis toward Saudi territory. [Earlier this week, they announced another drone](#) had been shot down, and [another explosives-laden boat](#) was intercepted last month.

Since 2015, Saudi Arabia and several allies, including the United Arab Emirates, have been waging a war in Yemen against the Houthi movement after they threw out Yemeni President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, an ally of Riyadh, claiming his government's rule was unfair toward poorer areas of the country, such as the northern border region from which the Houthis hail. The Houthis have established control over much of the country, but their war with the Saudi-led coalition and Saudi-allied militias in the country continues, even as the Houthis have become able to mount deep strikes into Saudi territory, such as one claimed attack [in September 2019 that temporarily disabled](#) two petroleum facilities in Eastern Province.

The war has devastated Yemen, killing close to a quarter-million Yemenis by the end of 2019, [according to estimates by Amnesty International](#), and brought widespread disease and famine to millions more.

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Boris Johnson's Director of Communications Resigns From Post Amid Ongoing Disputes
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Downing Street Director of Communications Lee Cain announced Wednesday he would leave his post at the end of the year. The news comes amid reports Cain was in talks to become UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson's chief of staff.

[According to the BBC](#), the former Mirror journalist will be replaced by James Slack, Downing Street's current spokesperson.

"After careful consideration I have this evening resigned as No10 director of communications and will leave the post at the end of the year," [Cain said in a statement](#). "I would like to thank the prime minister for his loyalty and leadership. I have no doubt that under his premiership the country will deliver on the promises made in the 2019 election campaign and build back better from the coronavirus pandemic."

Johnson thanked Cain for his "extraordinary service," noting his longtime aide "has been a true ally and friend and I am very glad that he will remain director of communications until the new year and to help restructure the operation. He will be much missed."

Johnson reportedly wanted Cain to head the prime minister's office, but the British press has [extensively covered both opposition](#) within the government to Cain's potential appointment as chief of staff, as well as [Cain's own wavering commitment](#) to remaining on Downing Street at all. Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer told LBC Radio: "This is pathetic. I think millions of people will be waking up this morning, scratching their heads, saying what on earth is going on? We're in the middle of a pandemic, we're all worried about our health and our families, we're all worried about our jobs, and this lot are squabbling behind the door of No 10. Pull yourselves together, focus on the job in hand."

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'Inaccurate': Pentagon Rejects Taipei's Claims That US Marines Are Training Taiwanese Counterparts
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

After Taiwanese defense leaders publicly revealed US troops were training Taiwanese soldiers on the island, the Pentagon claimed the reports were "inaccurate." However, the US has a long history of concealing its deploying of troops to the territory, which it formally recognizes as belonging to China.

On Monday, [Taiwan News reported that the Taiwanese Naval Command had confirmed](#) that a contingent of US Marines had arrived on the autonomous island at the invitation of Taipei to train Taiwanese troops.

[Taiwan's United Daily News also independently](#) confirmed the reports.

The reports claimed the special operations "Marine Raiders" would be there for four weeks, and the Taiwanese Naval Command told the outlet it was "routine Taiwan-US military exchange and cooperation training," despite this being the first public admission of US training of Taiwanese troops since Washington stopped recognizing the Taiwanese government in 1979.

In response, Pentagon spokesperson John Supple [told US military publication Stars and Stripes](#) on Wednesday that the reports were "inaccurate."

"The United States remains committed to our One-China Policy," Supple told the outlet.

Washington agreed to the principle when it normalized relations with the People's Republic of China in 1979, which sees Taiwan as a province in rebellion. The Taiwanese government were the losers of the 1949 civil war that saw communist control established across all of mainland China.

However, Taiwan News pointed out the US "sends small units of elite troops of other branches of the armed forces for joint training missions to Taiwan on an annual basis, but they are rarely acknowledged by the Taiwan government," noting US Army Special Forces hold annual exercises called Balance Tamper on the island in conjunction with Taiwan's Army Aviation and Special Forces Command, [among other training exercises](#).

[The Drive pointed out in June that ultra-rare footage](#) of the Balance Tamper drills had been released by a special forces unit. Even though the drills were not acknowledged as Balance Tamper, they include shots of equipment such as helicopters and rifles that are only used by the Taiwanese military.

Washington also concealed the presence of US troops at the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) for 14 years. The institution serves as the de facto US embassy in Taipei, and in April 2019, as it prepared to move to a new facility, [AIT spokesperson Amanda Mansour revealed](#), "Since 2005, US government personnel detailed to AIT have included active duty military, including service members from the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines." Marines typically perform security roles at formal US embassies around the globe.

Under US President Donald Trump, the US has vastly expanded its military support for Taiwan, signing deals to [deliver billions of dollars in weapons](#), including F-16V "Viper" fighters, torpedoes and other equipment. [Several more deals remain in various stages](#) of approval in Washington and would supply Taiwanese forces with cruise missiles, rocket artillery, [MQ-9B Reaper drones and more](#).

Last week, after the latest prospective deal was announced, [Chinese Foreign Affairs Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin](#) denounced it, saying it "brutally interferes in China's internal affairs and seriously undermines China's sovereignty and security interests." He vowed a "proper and necessary response" to the deal if it goes through.

[Earlier this year, the foreign ministry announced](#) sanctions against US defense contractors Lockheed Martin, Raytheon and Boeing, for their part in supplying Taiwan with weapons.

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New Pentagon Chief Poised to Rush Troop Withdrawals Ahead of Trump's January Exit - Report
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

A senior adviser brought on by acting US Defense Secretary Christopher Miller could mean the administration wants to accelerate its planned troop withdrawals before US President Donald Trump's tenure ends on January 20, 2021.

The news was [reported to Axios on Wednesday](#) by "three people familiar with" Miller's bringing along of Ret. Army Col. Douglas Macgregor, [whom Trump once considered for the posts](#) of US ambassador to Germany [and White House national security adviser](#).

Axios noted that [Macgregor told Fox News' Tucker Carlson last year](#) the US should withdraw from Afghanistan "as soon as possible," regardless of whether or not a peace deal was concluded with the Taliban. He has also advocated an immediate pullout from Syria and South Korea, the latter of which hosts almost 30,000 US troops, and attempting to reach an accord with Iran.

Ret. US Army Col. Douglas MacGregor speaks at the Pritzker Military Museum and Library in August 2017

The insiders said senior White House officials want Pentagon leaders "more publicly to talk about getting out of Afghanistan by the end of the year."

The Pentagon seemed to confirm the anonymous insider reports, telling Axios that Macgregor's "decades of military experience will be used to assist in the continued implementation of the President's national security priorities."

Washington began pulling troops out of Afghanistan slowly this past spring, following the conclusion of a ceasefire with the Taliban militant group, which has fought a 19-year insurgency against the US and the government it installed in Kabul after overthrowing the Taliban in a 2001 invasion. However, a separate ceasefire between the Taliban and the Kabul government has so far remained elusive.

In early October, when more than half of US troops had already withdrawn from Afghanistan and less than 5,000 remained, [Trump pledged to bring all US soldiers home](#) from the country "by Christmas." His statement contradicted one by national security adviser Robert O'Brien earlier in the day [that the US would still have 2,500 troops](#) in the Central Asian nation as of early 2021.

[Days later, Bloomberg reported, citing insider reports](#), that the Pentagon was preparing to bring the hundreds of troops deployed to Somalia home as well.

In this Sept. 24, 2020, file photo, National Counterterrorism Center Director Christopher Miller testifies during a Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee hearing on Capitol Hill in Washington. President Donald Trump says he has fired Defense Secretary Mark Esper and has replaced him with Miller.

However, Macgregor has also been a war hawk, [expressing in 2004 his unqualified support](#) for the US invasion of Iraq the previous year, although he subsequently criticized the Bush administration's handling of the war and the ensuing occupation as disastrous for US foreign policy. Macgregor has also [made clear his unremitting hatred for Muslims](#) and Central American refugees.

Miller was dropped into the Pentagon's top office [on Monday when Trump fired Mark Esper](#), a former Army secretary and Raytheon executive who had run the Defense Department since July 2019. The move came after [conflicting reports Esper might be preparing to resign](#), thanks to a falling-out earlier in the year between him and the commander in chief.

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Nearly 20% of COVID-19 Survivors Develop Mental Illness, Study Finds

New research suggests that almost 1 in 5 patients who contract COVID-19 are later diagnosed with psychiatric disorders such as anxiety, depression or insomnia.

The [study](#), published in [The Lancet Psychiatry](#), was based on a study of electronic health records from 62,254 individuals who contracted the novel coronavirus.

Researchers tracked the patients three months after their COVID-19 diagnosis and compared their mental health diagnoses to those of thousands of other patients with differing conditions, such as the flu and broken bones.

The findings revealed that 18% of the sampled COVID-19 patients were diagnosed with a psychiatric illness, while only 13% of those with the flu and 12.7% of those with a fracture were diagnosed with mental illness.

The researchers also found that 5.8% of the COVID-19 patients were diagnosed with a mental disorder for the first time, compared to 2.8% and 2.5% of patients with the flu and a fracture, respectively.

The most common psychiatric illness diagnosis among COVID-19 patients was anxiety, including adjustment disorder, generalized anxiety disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder. Mood disorders, such as depression, and insomnia were the next most-common diagnoses. In addition, researchers identified significantly higher risks of dementia in COVID-19 patients. Dementia is associated with loss of memory, language, problem-solving and other thinking abilities.

"We urgently need research to investigate the causes and identify new treatments," said University of Oxford psychiatry professor Paul Harrison, the lead study author, [the BBC reported](#).

The study also found that people with a pre-existing mental illness were 65% more likely to be diagnosed with COVID-19 than those without one.

Dr. Michael Bloomfield at University College London, who was not involved in the study, told the BBC that the link between COVID-19 and mental illness was probably due to "a combination of the psychological stressors associated with this particular pandemic and the physical effects of the illness."

However, Jo Daniels at the University of Bath said that additional research must be completed before drawing any concrete conclusions.

"We should be aware that poorer psychological outcomes are common in those who experience physical health problems of any nature," she told the BBC.

"Being acutely or chronically unwell is simply a difficult experience," Daniels added.

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South Korea Raises Alarm After Confirming H5N8 Avian Influenza in Wild Birds

South Korea's Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs on Tuesday issued a warning after it identified a highly pathogenic strain of bird flu in samples from wild birds in the central west of the country.

The H5N8 virus strain was discovered in samples collected from wild birds in Cheonan, a city in South Korea, [Reuters reported](#).

The ministry has boosted prevention measures to ensure that the bird flu is contained and does not spread to a larger population. In its efforts, officials have called for the disinfection of farmyards and for quarantine measures to be implemented at farms.

"This is a serious situation where the pollutant can flow from the migratory bird land to the farm through various routes," Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs Minister Kim Hyeon Soo said in a statement obtained by Reuters.

Last week, Dutch health officials ordered the culling of 200,000 chickens after the H5N8 virus was found in wild fowl at a farm in the eastern town of Puiflijk, [the Straits Times reported](#). According to the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#), avian influenzas do not easily infect humans, and it's unusual for them to spread from person to person.

Most avian flu infections occur in people who have had close contact with infected live or dead birds. In fact, most infections are linked to home slaughter and handling of the diseased birds. The WHO also notes, "Meat products and eggs can be safely consumed, provided they are properly prepared, because influenza viruses are inactivated by thorough cooking."

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'No Reason Under the Sun' to Punish Remote Workers With Tax, as Deutsche Bank Proposes - Expert

Deutsche Bank on Tuesday said that people who choose to work remotely should pay a 5% tax on their salaries - a notion that doesn't make sense, according to Steve Grumbine, founder and CEO of Real Progressives and Real Progress in Action and host of the podcast Macro n Cheese.

"We like to think of taxing bads not goods. And working remotely is good. It's helping the environment. It's doing all kinds of things. It's making [the] community stronger, families stronger. It provides more self-realization time, which actually helps with mental health and all kinds of other things," Grumbine told [Radio Sputnik's Political Misfits on Wednesday](#).

According to the [German bank](#), tax money made from people working at home could be used to support people with low incomes who cannot do their work remotely.

The bank's calculations found that taxing those who work remotely could raise \$49 billion per year in the US and \$23.6 billion per year in Germany. Employers would pay the tax if they didn't provide employees with permanent workspace, but staff who choose to work from home would pay it themselves.

Furthermore, in countries where the government has advised people to work from home, the tax should not be levied, the bank advised.

"Working from home will be part of the 'new normal' well after the pandemic has passed. We argue that remote workers should pay a tax for the privilege," Jim Reid, research strategist at Deutsche Bank, said in the report, [the Business Insider reported](#).

The bank also argues that "remote workers are contributing less to the infrastructure of the economy whilst still receiving the benefits," thus justifying the tax.

However, Grumbine does not agree.

"There are a slew of benefits from this, and the idea of not funding infrastructure is a political decision," Grumbine explained to hosts Michelle Witte and Bob Schlehuder.

"States and local governments are tax-driven governments. They require receipts. They require revenue to spend on things. However, the federal government has none of that. The federal government requires a tax to make the money matter, to make it hold its value, to drive the need for the currency, but it doesn't require revenue to spend," Grumbine added.

“So, the idea that somehow or another, we’ve got to tax the goods of remote work so that we can support the infrastructure [doesn’t make sense]. At a state and local level, maybe I buy that to some degree. I don’t. But maybe I do, but I know for a fact that the federal government could say not only is this a health imperative we do this remote stuff, but it’s also an environmental imperative that we remain remote as much as we can,” he said.

“I think there is no reason under the sun that you would tax people for working from home, when in reality what you’re doing is you’re punishing a good as opposed to punishing a bad. And the federal government is the one that can handle this without any kind of help whatsoever,” Grumbine concluded.

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'Clean And Disinfect Frequently': CDC Issues New Thanksgiving Guide Amid Spike in US COVID-19 Cases

As the holiday season approaches and many states re-enter COVID-19 novel coronavirus-related lockdowns, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has introduced a national guide for Americans to have a safer Thanksgiving holiday.

“The safest way to celebrate Thanksgiving this year is to celebrate with people in your household,” the CDC advised in a [Thanksgiving guide](#) most recently updated on November 10. “If you do plan to spend Thanksgiving with people outside your household, take steps to make your celebration safer.”

When not eating or drinking, individuals are advised to wear a face mask “with two or more layers” to impede the spread of COVID-19. Additionally, when donning a face mask, one should make sure the mask covers the nose and mouth. It should also be secured under the chin and fit snugly on both sides of one’s face.

The CDC noted that it is also important to “clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and items between uses.”

“If celebrating indoors, make sure to open windows,” the public health institute advised. Anyone hosting a gathering at their home should also consider having “a small outdoor meal with family and friends who live in your community.”

Event hosts are also recommended to limit the number of guests in attendance and phone expected attendees to advise them to bring their “own food, drinks, plates, cups, and utensils.”

“Travel increases your chance of getting and spreading COVID-19,” the CDC warned. “Staying home is the best way to protect yourself and others.”

However, those who must travel a considerable distance for the holiday are advised to first check travel restrictions and get their flu shot prior to making the trip. While traveling, individuals should “always wear a mask in public settings and on public transportation” and maintain a 6-foot distance from those not in their household.

The guide also advises travelers to carry extra face masks and hand sanitizer. Overall, individuals should continue to wash their hands regularly and avoid touching their face mask, eyes, nose and mouth.

Those who choose to stay home could schedule a virtual Thanksgiving meal with their loved ones via online video conferencing applications.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and member of the White House coronavirus task force, revealed in early October he plans on having a “very, very closed family type of thing” for Thanksgiving that will not even involve his adult daughters.

“We would love for them to come home for Thanksgiving,” Fauci expressed during an [October 6 webinar](#) with the Kennedy Political Union. “They have said themselves, ‘Dad, you know you’re a young, vigorous guy, but you’re 79 years old.’”

Older adults and those with [underlying medical conditions](#) are at greater risk of developing and dying from a COVID-19-related illness.

This holiday season comes amid a nationwide spike in COVID-19 cases that has been linked to American fatigue regarding disease-related restrictions.

“There’s growth in every area of this country,” Dr. John Voss, vice chairman for quality and safety at the University of Virginia Health System, [told the Washington Post this week](#).

As of Tuesday, some 61,964 individuals were hospitalized with COVID-19-related illnesses in the US, [according to the Associated Press](#), citing the [COVID Tracking Project](#). New infections of the contagious disease have topped 100,000 per day.

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‘Golden Age of Space Exploration’: Thousands of Original NASA Images Go to Auction
by [Evan Craighead](#)

Around 2,400 vintage NASA photographs, including the only original photograph of astronaut Neil Armstrong on the moon, are now available for bidding at British auction house Christie’s. [A recent news release](#) from Christie’s announced that, from November 6 to November 20, the London-based auction house would be featuring “700 lots, comprising approximately 2,400 vintage original photographs showcasing the artistic heritage of the golden age of space exploration when NASA, and its astronaut-photographers, captured the first forays into space and onto the surface of another world.”

[The auction event](#), dubbed “Voyage to Another World: The Victor Martin-Malburet Photograph Collection,” was touted as the “most comprehensive private collection of NASA photographs ever presented at auction,” including images from the US space agency’s early Mercury missions, the “technical advances” of the Gemini and Lunar Orbiter and the “triumphs” of Apollo. “The astronauts are often portrayed as great scientists and heroes, but rarely are they hailed as some of the most significant photographers of all time. The early pioneers of Mercury and Gemini were given as a canvas space and the Earth; the Apollo astronauts an alien world,” noted Victor Martin-Malburet, the collection’s curator.

According to the release, astronauts were instructed on how to use the analog cameras by NASA, Hasselblad, Kodak and Zeiss photography specialists, as well as Life and National Geographic photographers.

“From the thin protections of their space capsules and EMUs (Extravehicular Mobility Units), they captured, with skill and daring, photographs which immediately embraced the iconography of the sublime, inspiring awe and wonder,” Martin-Malburet added.

Lot estimates range from \$1,060 (£800) to \$40,000 (£30,000).

Lot 345 in particular features the only original photograph of Armstrong on the moon. The image, taken by astronaut Buzz Aldrin sometime between July 16 and July 24 in 1969, is expected to be worth at least \$40,000 (£30,000) alone.

Christie’s noted Martin-Malburet’s collection “includes a corresponding catalogue which, thanks to the mission transcripts made available by NASA, retraces mankind’s first journey to another world step by step.”

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New Yorker Fires CNN Analyst Who Exposed Himself During Company Zoom Meeting
by [Evan Craighead](#)

The New Yorker has terminated its more than 25-year relationship with staff writer Jeffrey Toobin following the conclusion of a company probe into his alleged sexual misconduct during a Zoom video conference with coworkers and other professionals.

“I am writing to share with you that our investigation regarding Jeffrey Toobin is complete, and as a result, he is no longer affiliated with our company,” Condé Nast Chief People Officer Stan Duncan said in a memo to staffers, [as reported by the Daily Beast](#).

Condé Nast is the mass media company that owns The New Yorker, as well as Vogue, GQ, Vanity Fair and several other brands.

“I want to assure everyone that we take workplace matters seriously. We are committed to fostering an environment where everyone feels respected and upholds our standards of conduct,” Duncan added in the Wednesday memo.

Toobin, who had been at The New Yorker for [more than 25 years](#), confirmed his firing from the publication in a Wednesday tweet.

“I will always love the magazine, will miss my colleagues, and will look forward to reading their work,” he wrote.

[Toobin issued an apology](#) to his “wife, family, friends and co-workers” on October 19 after it was reported he allegedly masturbated in front of New Yorker and WNYC radio employees during a Zoom video conference call.

“I believed I was not visible on Zoom. I thought no one on the Zoom call could see me. I thought I had muted the Zoom video,” the 60-year-old claimed at the time.

Two sources from said conference call [told VICE](#) that The New Yorker was running an election simulation and, after a brief break, they both returned to see Toobin touching himself while appearing to be on a second video call.

Toobin also serves as [chief legal analyst for CNN Worldwide](#), but has not appeared on the network since October 17. A CNN spokesperson revealed in mid-October that Toobin had “asked for some time off while he deals with a personal issue.”

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Scientists Found Nearly 200 Queen ‘Murder Hornets’ in First Nest Destroyed by Washington State
by [Evan Craighead](#)

Washington state scientists have revealed that almost 200 female Asian giant hornets (*Vespa mandarinia*), popularly known as queen "murder hornets," were found among some 500 live specimens discovered during their first nest destruction.

Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) entomologist Sven-Erik Spichiger announced in a [virtual new conference](#) on Tuesday that the agency found around 500 live specimens in various development stages, including 200 queens, [according to CBS News](#). "We got there just in the nick of time," Spichiger said, highlighting the queens could later start their own nests.

[Sputnik reported late last month](#) that state officials had decided to simply kill the murder hornets found in the Blaine, Washington, nest.

A close-up shot of two queens retrieved from the tree where the nest was located was posted by the WSDA on Facebook days later.

At the time of the nest destruction, state officials were [racing against time](#), as colonies of the species tend to show more development in the months of August and September.

Officials hoped to be able to track down and destroy the colonies before they could spread and enter the "[slaughter phase](#)," in which a colony of Asian giant hornets can usurp a honeybee hive and make quick work of some 30,000 of the hive's previous occupants via decapitation, [according to the WSDA](#) and [National Geographic](#).

Spichiger also warned of the hornets' possible "[catastrophic](#)" impact on the US agricultural system, as honeybees' role in "pollination is a huge part of agriculture and the agricultural systems we have here in the United States."

"WSDA will continue trapping through at least Thanksgiving and possibly beyond, but will likely only track worker hornets," the [WSDA announced in a blog post](#).

"Our entomologists will not, for example, track new queens if any are captured as they are unlikely to return to a nest, but instead will attempt to locate a mate. Even if no other hornets were to be found, WSDA will continue to trap for at least three more years to demonstrate the area is free from Asian giant hornets."

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US Census Bureau Reports Record Low Marriage Rate, Fewest Divorces in 50 Years in 2019
by [Victoria Teets](#)

Recently published data from the US Census Bureau reveals that the American divorce rate hit its lowest mark in the past 50 years in 2019.

According to the new data, the divorce rate in America has been falling rapidly in recent years, before hitting a half-century low in 2019. "For every 1,000 marriages in the last year, only 14.9 ended in divorce, according to the newly released American Community Survey data from the Census Bureau," reports Wendy Wang of the [Institute for Family Studies](#) (IFS).

The average marriage duration in the US has increased almost one year in the last decade, from 19 years in 2010 to 19.8 years in 2019. The lower divorce rate is a reflection of this trend. The IFS report suggests that despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the drop in the divorce rate is likely to continue in 2020. When the novel coronavirus hit the US in March, [early signs suggested that stress from lockdowns](#) related to the pandemic may have caused extra divorces. However, the latest data indicates that the crisis has actually brought some couples closer together.

"According to data from the American Family Survey, a majority of married Americans (58%) say that the pandemic has made them appreciate their spouse more and half agree that their commitment to marriage has deepened," Wang reports.

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Upset Beagle Demands Return of Blanket - Video Club

Harley, a beagle living it up in Dublin, Ireland, recently made it known that she's no fan of her favorite blanket being tossed into the washer - even if it does need a bit of a cleaning.

Video posted on Instagram by Sarah Esler, the upset pup's mom, shows the furball repeatedly scratching at the front window of the washing machine in an attempt to rescue it from the evil spinning cycle.

"Give me back my blanket," reads the video's caption.

The washing machine may have won this round, but Harley isn't likely to let this horror slide.

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Israel-Lebanon Talks Productive, to Continue in Early December - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 11 (Sputnik) - Israel and Lebanon held productive talks on Wednesday and are committed to continuing negotiations on maritime borders in early December, the US Department of State said in a joint statement with the Office of the UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon.

"Today, representatives from the governments of Israel and Lebanon held productive talks mediated by the United States and hosted by the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon," the statement said Wednesday. "We remain hopeful that these

negotiations will lead to a long-awaited resolution. The parties committed to continuing negotiations in early December."

The parties met for the fourth time. The talks seek to resolve an overlap between the two rival nations' territorial waters and exclusive economic zones over an area of roughly 330 square miles that is situated over large oil and gas deposits beneath the Mediterranean seabed. Since Hezbollah-dominated Lebanon does not recognize the state of Israel, talks are held indirectly with US and UNIFIL mediation.

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US Condemns Expulsion of UK Diplomats From Belarus – State Department

WASHINGTON, November 11 (Sputnik) – The United States has condemned the decision of the Belarusian government to expel UK diplomats from the country, State Department spokesperson Cale Brown said in a statement on Wednesday.

"The United States expresses solidarity with the United Kingdom and condemns the harassment and expulsion of two UK diplomats from Belarus on November 9," Brown said.

Belarusian Foreign Ministry spokesman Anatoly Glaz said on Monday that Minsk declared two UK diplomats personae non grata because of activities incompatible with the diplomatic status. The State Dept. described the diplomats expulsion as an "attempt to hide the daily harassment and repression" of Belarusians and called on Minsk to hold "free and fair elections under independent observation."

On Tuesday, UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said that London expelled two Belarusian diplomats as a mirror response to Minsk's actions.

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Pompeo Offers Austria Additional US Support to Probe Recent Terror Attacks - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 11 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo spoke over the telephone with Austrian Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg and offered further support in the investigation of the recent terror attacks in Vienna, the Department of State said in a statement on Wednesday.

"[Pompeo] condemned the heinous attack in the strongest possible terms and offered further US support for the investigation," the statement said.

On November 2, multiple shootings took place in Vienna, resulting in the death of four people and 22 injured. The gunman was later identified to be an Albanian and a supporter of the Islamic State terror organization (banned in Russia).

Pompeo expressed condolences for the tragic loss of life in the terror attack and emphasized the United States remains committed to maintaining close cooperation with Austria in the fight against terrorism, the statement said.

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NASA Extends Contract to Supply Cargo to Space Station Through 2023 - Northrop Grumman

WASHINGTON, November 11 (Sputnik) - NASA awarded contracts for two resupply missions to the International Space Station (ISS) in 2023, Northrop Grumman said in a press release on Wednesday.

"Northrop Grumman will deliver a combined total of approximately 16,500 lbs. of cargo to the International Space Station during these missions," the release said.

For the additional missions, Northrop Grumman's Cygnus spacecraft will be carried into orbit by the company's Antares rocket launched from the Mid-Atlantic Regional Spaceport at NASA's Wallops Flight Facility in the state of Virginia, the release added.

The company is currently providing resupply services to the station through the CRS-2 contract which began in 2016. Under this contract and the earlier CRS-1 contract, Northrop Grumman has provided more than 150,000 pounds of cargo logistics for the station, according to the release.

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One-Third of Americans Unwilling to Comply With Next COVID-19 Stay-at-Home Order - Poll

WASHINGTON, November 11 (Sputnik) - Americans' willingness to comply with the next COVID-19 lockdown dropped sharply in recent months, despite a surge in infections, with just 49 percent "very likely" to stay at home for a month if recommended by public health officials, a new Gallup poll revealed on Wednesday.

"Another 18 percent of Americans say they would be somewhat likely to follow public health officials' advice to stay home for a month, bringing the total inclined to comply to the majority level. But a full third say they would be very or somewhat unlikely to comply, about double the rate seen in the spring," a press release explaining the poll said.

The percentage of "very likely" to comply rose to 67 percent in April before beginning a steady decline to 49 percent in October, the release said.

Most of the decline in Americans' willingness to follow shelter-in-place advice is due to a sharp drop among Republicans - falling to 40 percent in Gallup's latest polling, from 74 percent in the spring. Democrats' willingness to stay at home has remained high, at 87 percent today versus 91 percent in March and April, the release added.

Gallup speculated that a growing acceptance of facemasks as an effective tool to protect themselves may be enough to make some Americans feel safe going about their lives in some fashion, even if they are not using masks all the time or in all situations.

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Alaska Senator Wins Re-Election Giving Republicans 50 Seats in US Senate - Projection

WASHINGTON, November 11 (Sputnik) - Incumbent Senator Dan Sullivan is winning a landslide victory in the US state of Alaska, with three quarters of the votes counted, giving Republicans the 50th seat in the US Senate, NBC News projected on Wednesday.

With 75 percent of the results tallied, Sullivan was leading with 57.5 percent of the total vote, or 149,669. His Democratic challenger Dan Gross trailed far behind with only 37.5 percent, or 97,608 votes. The network projected Sullivan as the winner.

Sullivan's victory brings the Republicans to 50 seats, or half the total membership of the Senate. Two Senate seats in the state of Georgia have still to be decided in runoff races.

A victory in either of them would allow the Republicans to retain full control of the Senate without the projected new Democratic Vice President Kamala Harris having the chance to cast any tie breaking votes.

The mainstream media has projected Democratic nominee Joe Biden and his running mate Harris to be the winners of the 2020 presidential election. However, President Donald Trump has proclaimed himself a winner but has said his victory was stolen via a massive election fraud and is contesting the results in court.

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US State of Georgia to Manually Recount All Presidential Election Votes - Official

WASHINGTON, November 11 (Sputnik) - All counties in the US state of Georgia will perform a full manual recount of ballots cast in the presidential election due to the closeness of the results, Georgia's Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger announced on Wednesday.

With 99 percent of ballots counted in the state that carries 16 electoral votes, the projected President-Elect Joe Biden maintains a lead of 0.29 percentage points or 14,111 popular votes over the incumbent President Donald Trump.

"With the margin being so close it will require a full by-hand recount in each county. This will help build confidence. It will be an audit, a recount and a recanvass all at once. It will be a heavy lift, but we will work with the counties to get this done in time for our state certification," Raffensperger said during a press conference.

According to the state law, the secretary of state has until 5 p.m. on November 20 to certify the election results.

Raffensperger promised that the recount will be closely scrutinized.

"There will be plenty of eyeballs on them to verify that every vote is accurately counted. That's the way the process works. Because of the large number of votes and the closeness of the vote it's the only way to do that," he said.

On Saturday, major US media outlets declared Biden the winner of the presidential race. Trump refuses to concede his defeat, accuses the opponents of "stealing votes" and promises to take legal action, including the address to the Supreme Court, to prove his victory.

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UN Rights Experts Call for Immediate Withdrawal of Mercenaries in Karabakh - Statement

UNITED NATIONS, November 11 (Sputnik) - UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) experts on Wednesday called on all sides and countries involved in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict to urgently withdraw all mercenaries and halt further recruitment. "We call strongly on the sides, and the states supporting them, to immediately withdraw any mercenaries and related actors and not to engage in further recruitment, funding and deployment," the experts said in a statement.

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Trump Files Federal Lawsuit Alleging Unlawful Vote Counting in Michigan - Campaign

WASHINGTON, November 11 (Sputnik) - President Donald Trump's election campaign announced on Wednesday that it has launched a lawsuit in US federal court alleging irregularities, incompetence and unlawful vote counting in the November 3 presidential election. "Trump campaign has filed a federal lawsuit in Michigan citing multiple witness accounts of irregularities, incompetence, and unlawful vote counting," the campaign said via Twitter. Michigan was one of several major states where Trump enjoyed double-digit leads in early ballot returns only to see them erased and replaced with narrow margins for Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden.

The mainstream media has projected Biden to be the winner of the election. However, Trump said he was the winner but the election has been stolen from him via massive election fraud and he is contesting the results in court.

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UN Rights Experts Call for Immediate Withdrawal of Mercenaries in Karabakh - Statement
(Updates with more details in paras 3-6)

UNITED NATIONS, November 11 (Sputnik) - UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) experts on Wednesday called on all sides and countries involved in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict to urgently withdraw all mercenaries and halt further recruitment. "We call strongly on the sides, and the states supporting them, to immediately withdraw any mercenaries and related actors and not to engage in further recruitment, funding and deployment," the experts said in a statement.

According to the UN Working Group on the use of mercenaries, Turkey is engaged in large-scale recruitment and transfer of Syrian fighters to Azerbaijan through armed factions, some of which are affiliated with the Syrian National Army.

The fighters appear to be driven by the dire economic situation in Syria, and in case of death, their relatives were reportedly promised financial compensation and Turkish nationality, the UN experts said.

The group also received and is currently looking into reports indicating that Armenia has been involved in deploying foreign nationals to fight in the conflict.

The experts said they have conveyed concerns about the use of mercenaries to the governments of Azerbaijan, Turkey, and informed Syria about the issue.

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World Food Program Chief Urges Donors to Provide \$1.9Bln to Avert Famine in Yemen

UNITED NATIONS, November 11 (Sputnik) - World Food Program (WFP) Executive Director David Beasley on Wednesday urged international donors to step up and reach the 1.9 billion target necessary to prevent famine in Yemen in 2021.

"I'm calling on all major donors to step up with additional funds to avoid the looming famine," Beasley said in a UN Security Council meeting. "To avert famine, for 2021, we will need \$1.9 billion."

Beasley said in order to resume all WFP activities and restore food assistance across Yemen, the agency will need \$2.6 billion for the entire 2021.

The WFP halved its food aid in parts of the country in April due to funding cuts by international donors caused by concerns that the Houthi rebel movement was hindering humanitarian deliveries.

Beasley warned that if additional funds are not received, the agency will have to further reduce rations for 6 million Yemenis, and by March, it will entirely run out of rations that will lead to a catastrophe.

Yemen remains the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with 80 percent of more than 24 million people in the country requiring protection and assistance.

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COVID-19 Death Toll in US Surpasses 240,000 - Johns Hopkins University

WASHINGTON, November 11 (Sputnik) - The death toll from the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in the United States has surpassed 240,000, accounting for nearly a fifth of virus-related fatalities worldwide, the latest data compiled by the Johns Hopkins University Coronavirus Resource Center showed on Wednesday.

The exact death toll now stands at 240,044, while the number of confirmed cases has reached 10,272,929 according to the data.

Trump Projected to Win Alaska - CNN

WASHINGTON, November 11 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump won the state of Alaska and added its three votes to his Electoral College tally, CNN projected on Wednesday.

Trump won 56.9% to 39.1% over Democratic rival Joe Biden, with 70 percent of votes counted, according to official results posted by CNN, bringing the president's electoral college tally to 217.

Biden was projected the winner of the race by all major media outlets this weekend when he crossed the 270-electoral vote threshold. AP and Fox have him at 290 but most other networks, including CNN, have Arizona, with its 11 electoral votes, still in the too close to category.

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UN Chief Concerned by Attacks on Journalists, Urges Action to Tackle Impunity - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, November 11 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres expressed his concern over attacks on journalists in conflict zones worldwide and called for coordinated efforts to address the impunity for such crimes, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Wednesday.

"The Secretary-General remains deeply concerned about attacks against journalists and media workers around the world, including in conflict zones," Dujarric said. "He condemns all attacks and killings of journalists and calls for concerted efforts to tackle widespread impunity for such crimes."

Dujarric said that in 2018-2019, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization documented 67 killings of journalists in countries with an ongoing armed conflict, among which 23 were directly involved in covering the war.

The UN chief stated that journalists engaged in professional missions in conflict areas must be protected and called on all parties to conflict to protect media workers and enable conditions to exercise their duties.

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New US Defense Policy Bill to Include Sanctions Against Nord Stream 2 Pipeline - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 11 (Sputnik) - US lawmakers will include sanctions against the Nord Stream 2 natural gas pipeline in the new National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) that will target insurance companies and ship vessels facilitating the construction of the project, Reuters reported on Wednesday citing two congressional aides.

The sanctions will target ships laying pipelines or moving rock formations on the sea bed and insurance companies backing the construction and certification of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline in Denmark, the report said.

About 120 companies from more than 12 European countries would be affected by the US sanctions, the report said citing Nord Stream 2 spokesperson Jens Mueller.

The intent of the sanctions is to prevent Russian energy giant Gazprom from completing the last 99-mile stretch of pipeline in Danish waters.

US Congress is expected to pass the bipartisan legislation before the end of the year and have the US president immediately sign the bill into law.

In October, the US State Department broadened the scope of sanctions against the Nord Stream 2, enabling Washington to target companies that provide services or funding to vessels working on the project.

Russia has criticized the United States for imposing yet another set of sanctions against Nord Stream 2, saying the sanctions exemplify Washington's desire for unfair competition.

The US sanctions resulted in Swiss constructor Allseas, which participated in laying the pipeline in the Baltic Sea, to suspend its work in late December.

In January, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said the Nord Stream 2 pipeline should be completed as expected.

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UN Special Envoy Says Saudis May Soon Announce Progress on Implementing Yemen Agreement

UNITED NATIONS, November 11 (Sputnik) - UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths said on Wednesday that Saudi Arabia could soon announce progress regarding the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement in Yemen.

"In recent weeks in Riyadh, there has been a great increase in focus of attention by the Kingdom [of Saudi Arabia], and by the parties to resolve the differences, to clarify the particular agreement they need to make it go forward. And I was certainly reassured just an hour or two ago by a call with Riyadh, saying that they believe that they can soon announce a very real progress," Griffiths told the UN Security Council.

On November 5, 2019, the Yemen government led by President Abdrabbuh President Hadi and the separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC) operating in southern Yemen signed a peace agreement in Riyadh to put an end to military confrontation.

Under the terms of the agreement, the STC should return military facilities and state institutions seized in southern Yemen to the legitimate authorities. The agreement also stipulates that the parties should reorganize the military and security forces and unite efforts under the Saudi-led coalition's leadership to restore Yemen's security.

At the end of July, Riyadh said the Yemen government and the STC agreed on Saudi Arabia's initiative to accelerate the implementation of the accord and form a new Yemen government with candidates from the south and north of the country.

However, the STC announced in August that it had suspended its participation in consultations on implementing the Riyadh peace agreement.

UN May Close Year With Greater Arrears Than in 2019 Amid Cash Crisis - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, November 11 (Sputnik) - The United Nations continues to experience severe shortage of funds and may be left with greater outstanding state contributions by the end of 2020 as compared to last year, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Wednesday.

"The liquidity crisis continues. We will probably end up with greater arrears at the end of this year than we had last year and forcing to borrow from other funds, including close peacekeeping missions," Dujarric said.

In October, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres announced that the world organization was facing a severe budget crisis. Following the announcement, the UN Secretariat put in place a set of measures, such as restricting the travel of staff, limiting heating and air-conditioning services and adjusting hiring practices to curtail spending.

Dujarric said to cope with the current crisis, the organizations have frozen hiring of new professionals across all departments and asked its managers to push back some investments. The United Nations has found itself in a "strange place," where it will not have enough money to fulfill the budgetary obligations and may end up having to return some resources it was not able to spend, he also said.

The United Nations' liquidity crisis is caused by delayed payment or non-payment of assessed contributions by its member states.

As of November 4, 133 out of 193 member states have paid their regular budget assessments in full.

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Russia Informs UN Security Council About Content of Karabakh Ceasefire Deal - Source

UNITED NATIONS, November 11 (Sputnik) - Russia in closed UN Security Council consultations on Wednesday briefed the member states about the content of the ceasefire agreement reached in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, a diplomatic source at the United Nations told Sputnik on Wednesday.

"Russia discussed the content of the recent ceasefire agreement reached by Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan under UN Security Council's 'Any Other Business' agenda," the source said.

The leaders of Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan adopted on Monday a joint statement on cessation of hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh, which had been ongoing since late September.

The ceasefire came into force at 21:00 GMT on the same day.

Under the deal, Azerbaijan and Armenia stop at their current positions, exchange prisoners and agree to the deployment of Russian peacekeepers to the disputed region.

Russia will deploy 1,960 peacekeepers there. Within the past day, as many as 414 peacekeepers entered Karabakh.

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Facebook to Continue Temporary Ban on Election-Related Ads - Company Statement

WASHINGTON, November 11 (Sputnik) - Social media giant Facebook will continue to temporarily ban election-related advertisements at least for another month, the company said in a statement on Wednesday.

"The temporary pause for ads about politics and social issues in the US continues to be in place as part of our ongoing efforts to protect the election," the statement said. "Advertisers can expect this to last another month, though there may be an opportunity to resume these ads sooner."

Google also extended its temporary ban on election-related advertisements for the coming weeks.

The companies have extended the bans to prevent any confusion about the US election as official results have yet to be announced.

The mainstream media has projected Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden to be the winner of the US presidential election. However, President Donald Trump claims he is the winner but that the election has been stolen from him through a massive election fraud scheme. Trump has filed several legal challenges over allegations of voter fraud and refuses to concede.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORY OF THE DAY
WASHINGTON, November 11 (Sputnik)

NAGORNO-KARABAKH DEVELOPMENTS

- * Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and his Turkish counterpart, Hulusi Akar, signed a memorandum on the establishment of a joint center to control the ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Wednesday.
- * UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) experts called on all sides and countries involved in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict to urgently withdraw all mercenaries and halt further recruitment.
- * Baku will use the help of international experts to evaluate the damage that Karabakh sustained during the Azeri-Armenian conflict, President Ilham Aliyev said.
- * Russia will set up 16 observation points with peacekeepers along the contact line in Nagorno-Karabakh, the chief of the Russian General Staff's Main Operational Directorate Sergey Rudskoy said.

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CORONAVIRUS TREATMENTS

- * Russian State Research Center of Virology and Biotechnology Vector has discovered more than 15 compounds with pronounced antiviral activity, which are promising for the creation of drugs for treatment of the coronavirus infection, Russian public health watchdog Rospotrebnadzor told Sputnik.
- * Germany expects to get 100 million doses of the coronavirus vaccine as part of the 300 million dose deal that the European Union is signing with US pharmaceutical giant Pfizer and German biotechnology company BioNTech, the spokesman for the German Health Ministry said.

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RUSSIA-KAZAKHSTAN TALKS

- * Russian President Vladimir Putin and Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev discussed by phone the intensification of cooperation in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic, including plans for the joint production of vaccines in Kazakhstan, the Kremlin said on Wednesday.
- * Putin held a phone conversation with Tokayev, during which the Kazakh leader noted the effectiveness of the Russia's efforts to cease fire in Karabakh, the Kremlin said.

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NEW OPEC REPORT ON OIL MARKETS

* The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) on Wednesday revised down forecast for a dip in global oil demand in 2020 by 0.3 million barrels a day (mbd) to 9.8 mbd as the lockdown measures are being reintroduced in Europe, while also adjusting its forecast for global oil demand growth in 2021 to hedge against COVID-19 uncertainties.

* As Russia produced some 9.32 million barrels a day (mb/d) of oil last month, and its compliance with the OPEC+ agreement likely stood at 84 percent, figures from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries' monthly report indicated.

* The compliance of the OPEC member states with the oil cuts agreement last month was 1 percentage point lower, amounting to 105 percent as the cartel's production soared by 320,000 barrels a day, the figures from OPEC's monthly report indicated.

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PROTESTS IN ARMENIA

* Several dozen of people were detained at a rally in Yerevan on Wednesday, which was organized by 17 opposition parties in protest against the prime minister's decision to sign a ceasefire deal with Baku, a Sputnik correspondent reported.

* The police in Yerevan are pushing the protesters back from the opera building in Yerevan, there are clashes, a Sputnik correspondent reports.

* A spokesman for Armenia's opposition party Dashnaktsutyun (Armenian Revolutionary Federation) announced at a rally in Yerevan that a committee of national salvation was being formed in the country.

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ANALYSIS - Biden's Economic, Taxation Policies Likely to Slow US Recovery

WASHINGTON, November 11 (Sputnik) - Projected US President-elect Joe Biden's plans to promote income redistribution and business regulation will slow economic recovery, analysts told Sputnik.

All major US media outlets projected Biden as the winner of the election, although President Donald Trump has yet to concede and has filed legal challenges claiming voter fraud. Biden on the campaign trail said he would have a national pandemic crisis plan, which many expect to be more rigorous than Trump's approach.

SLOW GROWTH

The US economy was booming and saw record low unemployment levels until it crashed because of the COVID-19 crisis. The economic recovery, however, has been swifter than expected with GDP growing by 33% in the third quarter.

Investment banker Goldman Sachs earlier this week said the "V-shaped" economic recovery is well underway. Yet the latest surge in coronavirus cases has forced the bank to lower growth expectations in early 2021 from 7% to 3.5 percent.

"Chances are that the nation will wind up with an Obama administration pace of growth and pattern of income distribution- which was largely responsible for [President] Donald Trump's election as president in the first place," Trade analyst Alan Tonelson told Sputnik.

Trump was successful, he added, because he lifted restrictions on businesses and lowered corporate taxes. Biden's policies would reverse some of these positive steps.

"The negative [policy aspects] include the likelihood of new taxes and regulations on business - depending in turn on how substantial they are - and of the Biden administration lifting many of the Trump tariffs," Tonelson said.

Because of these factors, the US economy was very unlikely to return to its booming pre-pandemic levels, Tonelson warned.

"If anything close to the worst case from a conservative/populist standpoint emerges, the economy will face great difficulties continuing to grow adequately after the pandemic has passed," he said. "Therefore, a pretty sizable output gap - the difference between the economy's actual performance and its potential, based on pre-virus trends - will remain with us."

VACCINE, STIMULUS ONLY HOPE

The US stock market jumped on Monday after Pfizer said it expected to have a coronavirus vaccine available before the end of the year. Pfizer also said it expected to produce up to 50 million doses of its coronavirus vaccine in 2020 and up to 1.3 billion doses in 2021.

Under Biden, the US economy's future will depend on the relative strengths of some big potential headwinds and tailwinds, Tonelson cautioned.

"The former include prospects for an effective virus vaccine - where the news ...clearly looks promising - and the related possibility that the passing or notable easing of the pandemic will enable economic activity to return to pre-virus levels faster than many had expected," he concluded.

Wall Street analyst Gerald Celente warned that Biden was also fated to face an extremely serious economic depression and crisis that would be the most threatening in at least 90 years.

"How dangerous will the economic crisis get? Terribly dangerous. The only thing that is holding the United States - and many economies from around the world - from quickly sinking into depression is massive monetary and fiscal stimulus. The Greatest Depression has begun," he said.

Monetary stimulus from the Federal Reserve would be the same under Trump or Biden, Celente advised.

Biden would provide "possibly more fiscal stimulus for the general economy," he added. Also, Biden's announcement that he would return the United States to the Paris Climate Accords abandoned by Trump would have little direct economic impact, Celente noted.

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Trump Claim of Election Fraud Threatens Republican Party Brand - Bolton

WASHINGTON, November 11 (Sputnik) - President Donald Trump, by claiming he is the victim of massive electoral fraud, tarnishes his own self-image at the expense of the Republican Party's long-term credibility and effectiveness, former National Security Adviser John Bolton wrote in an opinion article on Wednesday.

"Here is the cold political reality: Trump is enhancing his own brand (in his mind) while harming the Republican brand. The party needs a long internal conversation about the post-Trump era, but first it needs to get there honorably," Bolton wrote in the *Washington Post*.

As a result, the Republican Party faces a dilemma on whether to keep "coddling" the US president in an attempt to ease the sting of rejection and thereby persuade Trump to eventually admit defeat and exit the White House gracefully, Bolton said.

"The more Republican leaders kowtow, the more Trump believes he is still in control and the less likely he will do what normal presidents do: make a gracious concession speech; fully cooperate with the president-elect in a smooth transition process; and validate the election process itself by joining his successor at the Jan. 20 inauguration," Bolton added.

With few exceptions, Republicans in Congress have been silent for the past week as Trump and his campaign filed lawsuits challenging results in multiple states while offering little evidence to back up his claims of fraud, Bolton said.

The near-term downside for Republicans is the threat of losing both Senate runoff races in the state of Georgia, which would cost the party control of Congress' upper house - a possibility if the president's behavior eats into voters' confidence in the US electoral system, according to Bolton.

At the moment, the Republican Party has yet to suffer permanent damage to its reputation, but Bolton warned that time is running out for party leaders to openly challenge the president during his final days in office or risk permanent damage to the Republican brand, Bolton said.

Bolton, who served as Trump's National Security Adviser from April 2018 until September 2019, is best remembered for his book, "The Room Where It Happened: A White House Memoir," a tell-all account of his year-and-a-half at the president's side.

Trump has said he won the presidential race but his victory has been stolen via a massive election fraud for which there is much evidence. Consequently, Trump said he is contesting the election results by seeking audits and recounts as well as by suing in court. The Trump team has filed only in the state of Michigan 131 affidavits and 2800 incident reports.

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Hyundai Plans to Offer 10 Electrified, Eco-Friendly Models in 2-Year 'Product Blitz'

WASHINGTON, November 12 (Sputnik) - Motorists in the United States shopping for a new car will have ten electrified models to choose from in the next two years, Hyundai's North American division announced in a press release.

"Hyundai today announced its commitment to offer ten electrified, eco-focused vehicles by the end of 2022, including seven SUVs and three car models," the release said on Wednesday. The "product blitz" to be introduced in a "steady roll out cadence throughout the 2021/2022 timeframe," will include hybrid, plug-in, battery-electric and hydrogen fuel cell vehicles, the release also said.

By offering a full spectrum of new technologies, the company hopes to promote a planet-friendly, zero-emission ecosystem, the release added.

The number of electric vehicles on US roads is projected to reach 18.7 million in the next decade, about 7 percent of the 259 million cars and light trucks, according to the Edison Electric Institute.

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Trump Seeks to Expedite Troop Withdrawals From Middle East - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 12 (Sputnik) - The Trump administration in its final months seeks to expedite American troop withdrawals from the Middle East including a possible pullout of Afghanistan before Christmas, Axios reported.

Citing three people "familiar with the move," the website attributed a string of recent firings and appointments in Pentagon, including the replacement of Defense Secretary Mark Esper with Christopher Miller, in part to President Donald Trump's frustration over a slow pace of the process and his desire to accelerate it.

"A wave of firings at the Pentagon and the hiring of Ret. Army Col. Douglas Macgregor is in part a settling of Trump's personal scores - but senior White House officials also have made clear they want them more publicly to talk about getting out of Afghanistan by the end of the year," Axios quoted an unnamed official Wednesday.

Miller has appointed Macgregor, a vocal advocate of withdrawals from Afghanistan and Syria, as his senior adviser.

Last month, Trump tweeted that American forces will be out of Afghanistan by Christmas only to be disavowed by US National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien who said that thousands of troops are "on path" to remain there into early next year.

After the US reached the deal with the Taliban opposition movement in February, the number of troops in Afghanistan was drawn down to 8,600 in July and another 4,000 troops are expected to leave in the fall. By early next year the contingent may be reduced to 2,500 servicemen.

Pentagon officials used to say that the United States is conducting "prudent planning" to withdraw all its military forces from Afghanistan by May 2021, though no specific orders have been issued so far.

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New York State to Close Bars at Night as Coronavirus Cases Spike Again - Governor

NEW YORK, November 12 (Sputnik) -The US state of New York is introducing a curfew on bars, restaurants and gyms and is limiting indoor gatherings to ten people, Governor Andrew Cuomo said on Wednesday amid an increase in novel coronavirus cases.

"[New York State] is taking action to stop the spread in response to rising COVID numbers," Cuomo said via Twitter on Wednesday. "Any establishment with a state liquor license, including bars and restaurants, must close at 10:00 p.m. Gyms must also close at 10pm. These new statewide rules will take effect Friday, 10:00 p.m."

In another tweet, Cuomo said the situation concerning the novel coronavirus was "getting worse by the day" across the United States.

"We know indoor gatherings and parties are a major source of COVID spread. To slow the spread, [New York State] will limit indoor gatherings at private residences to ten people," Cuomo announced.

On Wednesday, New York State authorities reported nearly 5,000 new coronavirus cases, nearly half the number at the peak of the pandemic, according to media reports.

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio has also threatened to make all school instruction remote if the rate of contracting the disease reaches 3 percent and introduce large-scale closures if the rate increases above that number.

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Pentagon Agency Partners With 5 US Firms to Write AI Algorithms for Aerial Dogfights

WASHINGTON, November 12 (Sputnik) - Boeing and four other organizations have won contracts to develop artificial-intelligence (AI) algorithms allowing mixed teams of manned and unmanned combat aircraft to conduct aerial dogfighting autonomously, the Defense Advanced Research Products Agency (DARPA) announced in a press release.

"Boeing, EpiSci, Georgia Tech Research Institute, Heron Systems, and physicsAI were chosen to develop air combat maneuvering algorithms for individual and team tactical behaviors under Technical Area (TA) 1 of DARPA's Air Combat Evolution (ACE) program," the release said on Wednesday.

Each team is tasked with developing artificial intelligence agents that expand one-on-one engagements to two-on-one and two-on-two within-visual-range aerial battles, the release also said.

Trudeau, Pelosi Discuss Key US-Canada Bilateral Issues - Readout

TORONTO, November 12 (Sputnik) - Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi discussed bilateral relations and global challenges, including the detention of Canadian nationals in China, according to a readout of the conversation.

The two countries have differences that predate the Trump administration, including the softwood lumber dispute, as well as conflicts that arose under the current administration, such as growing US protectionism. The Trudeau government has been trying to get ahead of the projected new US administration on these issues and sell it on energy projects of national significance, most notably the Keystone XL pipeline extension.

"The Prime Minister looked forward to engaging with Speaker Pelosi and President-elect [Joe] Biden's administration on key issues, including trade, Buy America provisions and energy cooperation," the readout said on Wednesday.

The two leaders also discussed global issues, including the coronavirus pandemic and the continued detention of two Canadian nationals - former diplomat Michael Kovrig and businessman Michael Spavor - in China.

Ottawa maintains that the detentions are retaliatory measures for Canada's confinement of Huawei Chief Financial Officer Meng Wanzhou, who was arrested in Vancouver in 2018 at the request of the United States. Canadian officials have expressed concern that Ottawa alone cannot secure the release of their nationals without strong support from the United States and other allies.

Trudeau was among the first of the several world leaders to congratulate Biden, after most mainstream US media outlets projected him to be the winner of the presidential election.

However, President Donald Trump has claimed victory in the presidential race and said that the election has been stolen from him through a massive election fraud, which he is now attempting to redress by seeking recounts and by filing lawsuits in court.

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US Hits New All-Time High in Daily COVID-19 Cases - Johns Hopkins University

WASHINGTON, November 12 (Sputnik) - The United States hit a record setting 136,325 new daily cases of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) disease, the latest data from Johns Hopkins University revealed.

The United States has reported more than 10.3 million cases of COVID-19 and more than 240,800 deaths caused by the disease, data showed on Wednesday.

A third wave of COVID-19 infections is underway in the United States as winter approaches. Numerous US states are facing strained resources at medical facilities, such as shortages of medical personnel and hospital beds, forcing additional lockdowns in the communities considered hotspots.

The Trump administration has vowed to have a vaccine ready to be distributed by the end of the year.

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US, Canada Condemn China's Disqualification of Hong Kong Legislators - Officials

WASHINGTON, November 12 (Sputnik) - The United States and Canada have condemned the disqualification of four Hong Kong parliamentarians, top officials said in separate statements. Earlier in the day, Hong Kong's Legislative Council dismissed four legislators after Beijing enacted a resolution that allows the Hong Kong government to bypass courts to disqualify lawmakers over threats to national security, national sovereignty or facilitating foreign interference.

"Beijing's recent actions disqualifying pro-democracy legislators from Hong Kong's Legislative Council leave no doubt that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has flagrantly violated its international commitments under the Sino-British Joint Declaration and its promises to the people of Hong Kong, including those under the Basic Law," US National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien said in a statement on Tuesday.

Canadian Foreign Minister Francois-Philippe Champagne echoed the sentiment, saying that the Hong Kong government's decision is a "further assault on Hong Kong's high degree of freedoms under the Sino-British Joint Declaration."

The United States, Canada and other so-called Western alliance partners have asserted that China is intent on stripping away Hong Kong's autonomy guaranteed by the Sino-British Joint Declaration following the enactment of China's national security law.

O'Brien added that the United States will employ domestic legislation to identify and sanction those it has deemed responsible.

In June 2019, mass protests erupted in Hong Kong as a reaction to a proposed bill that would allow people to be extradited from the city to mainland China. The demonstrations continued for weeks and turned violent even after the unpopular measure was withdrawn in September 2019. Beijing said that the situation in Hong Kong was a result of foreign interference in China's domestic affairs.

To stabilize the situation in the city, the Chinese government in late June enacted the national security law in Hong Kong. The new legislation banned separatist and terrorist activities, along with any form of foreign interference in Hong Kong. It provoked a wave of criticism in Hong Kong and abroad with US President Donald Trump threatening to sanction both Chinese and Hong Kong officials for allegedly undermining the city's autonomy.

China has condemned and vowed to retaliate against, what it calls foreign interference in the special administrative region.