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Spying for Hire: US Using Civilian Contractor Planes to Monitor Seas Off Chinese Coast- Think Tank

By [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Where it was previously known to be flying spy planes near China disguised as civilian aircraft, now the US military has been revealed to be contracting civilian firms to fly spy missions for them in the region. The US has dispatched three such planes to the western Pacific in recent months, according to a new think tank report.

Beginning in March of this year, the US has used several civilian aircraft modified for military purposes to monitor the South and East China Seas, the Yellow Sea and the Taiwan Strait, [according to a report by the South China Sea Probing Initiative](#) (SCSPI), a Chinese think tank connected to the University of Peking.

The think tank has [previously catalogued extensive US spy plane flights](#) in the region, including the questionable use of alternative International Civil Aviation Organization hex codes [that make them seem to be civilian aircraft](#) as they fly close to Chinese airspace. However, the academics believe that rather than raise tensions further, using actual civilian contractors could instead lower the risk of a major incident.

“Compared with the air reconnaissance capabilities of the US Navy and Air Force, the reconnaissance aircraft of private defense companies have greater flexibility in dealing with ‘gray area’ issues, reducing the diplomatic pressure caused by direct military confrontation,” SCSPI wrote.

That said, they also evaluate the use of civilian reconnaissance planes as showing a shortage of aircraft to fill the Pentagon’s intelligence needs in the region. Sputnik has previously reported how the P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft flown daily across the South China Sea have begun experiencing [engine problems that likely derive from overuse](#).

Three Modified Civilian Jets

One aircraft is a Bombardier Challenger (CL-604) maritime surveillance aircraft operated by Tenax Aerospace Corporation. SCSPI describes the CL-604 as “a simplified version” of the Poseidon, which is adapted from a Boeing 737 airliner. According to SCSPI, the CL-604 arrived at Kadena Air Base on Okinawa, Japan, on March 31.

However, unlike the larger Poseidon, the CL-604 has no ability to refuel in mid-flight, which limits its ability to loiter over an area for a long period of time. While the aircraft has flown 139 sorties over the East China Sea and Yellow Sea since March, it has ventured into the further South China Sea just 17 times in that time, stopping over at Clark Air Base on Luzon, the Philippines, to refuel, SCSPI noted.

The plane has its advantages, too: the think tank notes its ability to easily dip below 1,000 feet in altitude enables it to engage in “high-intensity reconnaissance” close to the Chinese

coastline. The plane's routine flights up the East China Sea into the Yellow Sea take it just a few dozen miles from Chinese waters outside Shanghai, for example.

Another type of aircraft to appear on Okinawa has been the Bombardier Challenger 650 (CL-650), two of which arrived at Kadena on July 29 and are also operated by Tenax.

[According to The Aviationist](#), the two modified small passenger jets are the US Army's first-ever manned aerial intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) aircraft - a job typically left to drones. These modified planes are called Airborne Reconnaissance and Targeting Multi-Mission Intelligence System (ARTEMIS), not to be confused with [the NASA manned moon mission of the same name](#).

ARTEMIS carries the High-Accuracy Detection and Exploitation System (HADES), which [according to Forbes](#), uses powerful "deep sensing" radars to track individual targets on the ground from hundreds of miles away, which can be used by the Army for long-range targeting with missiles or artillery.

However, after a short stay in the Indo-Pacific, one of the ARTEMIS planes was sent instead to Constanta, Romania, where it began [flying spy missions across the Black Sea and over Georgia](#) in September.

The third aircraft noted by SCSPi is a Beechcraft 350 low-altitude reconnaissance aircraft owned by Mater Special Aerospace Corporation, a civilian contractor that provides signals intelligence and reconnaissance for US Special Operations Command.

Flying spy planes operated by civilian defense contractors isn't new for the Pentagon: [in the skies over Somalia](#), L3Harris Technologies and AEVEX Aerospace have flown a De Havilland Canada Dash 8 aircraft and Gulfstream business jet, both [modified to spot al-Shabaab targets for US Africa Command](#).

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'Inoffensive, Not Too Bitter': Wisconsin Brewery Releases Beer Based on US 'President-Elect' Biden
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

A Wisconsin brewery has released a new beer said to be modeled after projected US President-elect Joe Biden. The beer is a kölsch the brewmaster describes as "inoffensive and not too bitter."

Fans of the projected Democratic president-to-be will now be able to raise their glasses to Joe with a beer inspired by him, thanks to Kirk Bangstad, owner of Wisconsin's Minocqua Brewing Company.

According to the beermaker, the light, lager-like beer is just his latest bit of publicity for supporting the former US vice president and Delaware senator.

[Bangstad told the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel](#) that he faced a potential fine from the county zoning director in September for [a huge "Biden for President" sign adorning the side](#) of his brewpub. However, he managed to escape a fine for the ordinance-exceeding campaign ad and

seems to have rolled the pro-Biden hubbub it generated into a new line of consumable merchandise.

Bangstad told the Sentinel the Biden Beer was just like the candidate: "inoffensive and not too bitter." Visitors can find the beer at the brewpub from 3 to 6 p.m. local time Thursday through Saturday and either grab a three-pack for \$15 or top off a 32-ounce growler for \$6.

Really? No "46" pun in there anywhere?

Wisconsin is just one of several states where US President [Donald Trump is contesting the official vote count](#), which came down in favor of Biden in the November 3 election. In 2016, Trump narrowly won the state by just a few thousand votes.

However, given the reputation Biden's home state of Delaware has for craft breweries, it's a wonder a more local brewer hasn't whipped up a custom brew for one of its former senators. Sadly, it doesn't seem like Biden will be tasting his namesake nectar, since he doesn't drink alcohol, [according to the New York Times](#).

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US Judge Tosses Out Trump Campaign's Libel Suit Against CNN Over 'Russian Interference'
Op-Ed

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

A US federal judge has dismissed a libel suit brought by US President Donald Trump's reelection campaign against CNN for running an opinion piece in 2019 suggesting he might solicit Russian help in winning the 2020 election.

The ruling on the lawsuit, filed in the US District Court for the Northern District of Georgia, Atlanta Division, [found that the campaign failed to sufficiently plead malice](#) on the part of the news agency for running the story. However, the campaign can still file an amended complaint by November 30, provided it believes it can still prove malice.

The article, titled ["Soliciting dirt on your opponents from a foreign government is a crime. Mueller should have charged Trump campaign officials with it."](#) was written by Larry Noble, a campaign finance advocate and former Federal Election Commission official, and published as an opinion piece on CNN's website on June 13, 2019. In it, Noble argues that Trump could solicit help from Moscow to win the 2020 US presidential election, claiming he did so in 2016 as well.

However, since Trump is a public figure, there are very strict standards that must be met before he can seek to punish someone for attacking him in a public venue.

"As a matter of constitutional law, a public figure plaintiff must prove actual malice, meaning the allegedly libelous statement was 'made with knowledge that it was false or with reckless disregard of whether it was false or not,'" Judge Michael Brown noted.

The Trump reelection campaign filed similar suits against the Washington Post and New York Times as well. [For the Post, the suit focused on two opinion pieces](#) from 2019 that similarly alleged a connection between the president and Russian election interference, and [Trump claimed the Times falsely suggested a "quid pro quo"](#) between his campaign and Moscow in 2016. The judges have not yet ruled on those cases.

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Trump Issues Order Barring Americans From Investing in Firms Tied to Chinese Military
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

US President Donald Trump has signed an executive order prohibiting Americans from investing in nearly three dozen firms that do business with China's People's Liberation Army (PLA). The Thursday executive order bars Americans from putting money into firms helping the PLA to modernize. The order bars the purchase or investment in emerging markets funds that include the firms starting on January 11, 2021, and gives firms until November 2021 to divest fully from them.

[According to the Wall Street Journal](#), there are 31 firms on the list. [Bloomberg published a partial list including 20 firms](#) in June, which includes aerospace design firms, shipbuilding companies, and construction companies, as well as technology firms like China Mobile Ltd. and China Telecom Corporation.

[In the order, Trump claims that the People's Republic of China](#) "is increasingly exploiting United States capital to resource and to enable the development and modernization of its military, intelligence, and other security apparatuses, which continues to allow the PRC to directly threaten the United States homeland and United States forces overseas, including by developing and deploying weapons of mass destruction, advanced conventional weapons, and malicious cyber-enabled actions against the United States and its people."

Trump claims Beijing "compels" ostensibly private firms to support its military-industrial complex, including by raising capital by selling securities on foreign markets. "In that way, the PRC exploits United States investors to finance the development and modernization of its military," he wrote.

The move is just Washington's latest attack on Chinese companies. The Trump administration has already [barred Americans from doing business with dozens](#) of Chinese tech firms it [claims are compelled by Beijing to supply Chinese intelligence](#) with access to user data, enabling it to spy on users around the globe. Beijing and the companies accused, such as Huawei and TikTok, have sternly denied that such political compulsion or technical capability exists and said their products are safe.

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Israel Takes Delivery of Specialized F-35I 'Adir' Test Plane, First Outside US
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

The Israeli Air Force (IAF) has received a specialized test version of its F-35I "Adir," the first F-35 test plane outside the United States.

The IAF announced on Wednesday the arrival of the F-35I test version at the Flight Test Center (FTC) at Tel-Nof Air Force Base. The aircraft will be used to test out new weapons, sensors and other configurations for Israel's specialized version of the F-35A Joint Strike Fighter.

Tel-Nof commander [Brig. Gen. Oded Cohen said in an IAF news release](#) the "historic event" was "a meaningful corner stone in the IAF's inauguration and development of the F-35 division."

"To the FTC Squadron personnel - the absorption of the 'Adir' poses new challenges. I have no doubt that by virtue of your skill and professional spirit you will know, as you have proven in the past, how to challenge the limits of the 'Adir's' capabilities, and lead the IAF through toward new horizons," he added.

FTC squadron commander Lt. Col. Y noted in the release that unlike other aircraft, the IAF has never been allowed to totally modify the F-35 at will, meaning the ability to test out what works best on the aircraft [will be of paramount importance](#).

"The experimental F-35I will act as the main building block for acquiring new flight capabilities, and allow for independent installation of munitions," he said.

In August, [the IAF announced its second squadron](#) of F-35I fighters was combat-ready. The force will eventually receive 50 aircraft from Lockheed Martin. In May, [the IAF said it was dropping an older F-16I Sufa squadron](#) in order to focus on modernizing the force with more F-35Is.

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MAGA Network - Political Cartoon

Reports have emerged, suggesting that US President Donald Trump has reached a new level of distaste for the Fox News network and is now allegedly considering launching his own media company to undermine the conservative outlet he once favored.

Citing sources with "knowledge of Trump's intentions," Axios, which [first reported the scoop early Thursday](#), indicated that the president reportedly aims to launch a digital channel that would wipe out the cable network and its Fox Nation livestreaming service.

"He plans to wreck Fox. No doubt about it," one source told Axios, which also noted Trump's increased distancing from and anger toward Fox News hit a new level after the station quickly called the state of Arizona for President-elect Joe Biden, as vote counting was in its earlier stages.

However, Trump's disdain for Fox News hasn't exactly been a well-kept secret. In fact, the president spent [much of Thursday morning tweeting](#) and [retweeting critiques of the station](#). From the Oval Office and into the media, it's anyone's guess whether ratings-focused Trump will continue on with his so-called "winning" streak.

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Belgian Malinois Hits Snag, Can't Get Stick Past Door - Video Club

Bearen, a Belgian Malinois living life to the fullest in North Highlands, California, recently hit quite the roadblock when he found himself unable to get back outdoors while carrying a massive stick in his mouth.

Video footage of the Wednesday setback was obtained by licensor ViralHog and shows Bearen spending a full 30 seconds masterminding how to get past the sliding door with his stick, as his human laughs it up in the background.

However, despite the delay, Bearen eventually managed to successfully come out on top. Revenge is sweet, human. Let's see who really gets the last laugh, or howl.

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US COVID-19 Model Projects Nearly 400,000 Deaths by February as Cases Surge

A forecasting model is now predicting that the US will exceed 399,000 COVID-19-related deaths by February 1.

The [model](#), which was created by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington, further forecasts that if social distancing and mask-wearing guidelines are eased, the US death toll could exceed 513,000 by February 1.

However, the projections also suggest that deaths may rise to around 337,000 if there is universal mask-wearing.

The latest update comes as COVID-19 cases in the US continue to soar. Data compiled by the [New York Times](#) reveals that at least 1,431 new coronavirus deaths and 142,860 cases were reported in the US on Wednesday. Over the last week, there has been an average of 128,096 cases per day, which is a 69% increase from the average two weeks earlier.

As of Thursday afternoon, almost 11 million people in the US have been infected with the virus, and more than 242,100 Americans have died due to COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic.

On Thursday, California also reported its millionth case, according to the Times tracker, becoming the second state to record more than 1 million cases, with Texas being the first.

On the ABC network's ["Good Morning America"](#) Thursday, Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, urged Americans to continue to practice social distancing and other infection-preventing measures like wearing masks and washing hands.

"The best opposite strategy to locking down is to intensify the public health measures short of locking down," he said.

Fauci also warned Thursday that a vaccine may not be enough to eradicate COVID-19.

While speaking at a webinar hosted by think tank Chatham House, Fauci warned people not to become complacent due to news that a vaccine may be close to arriving.

"The cavalry is coming, but don't put your weapons down, you better keep fighting because they are not here yet. Help is on the way, but it isn't here yet," Fauci said, [CNBC reported](#).

“So to me, that is more of an incentive of, ‘Please don’t give up. Don’t despair, the end is in sight,’ as opposed to: ‘Hey, we are good to go, don’t worry about anything.’ We are not good to go. We have got to continue to double down on public health measures,” he added.

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US Commerce Department Issues Stay on TikTok Order, Averting Platform's Shutdown - Report

The US Commerce Department announced Thursday that it will not be enforcing the order that would have forced Chinese video-sharing app TikTok to shut down in the US.

The US Commerce Department's actions delay implementation of the regulation, supposed to take effect Thursday, which would have prevented companies like Apple Inc. from offering TikTok as a mobile app and companies like Amazon and Alphabet from offering web-hosting services for TikTok, [the Wall Street Journal reported](#).

The Commerce Department said the shutdown order won't go into effect “pending further legal developments.”

When making its decision, the Commerce Department also referred to a preliminary injunction against the shutdown filed in a suit last month by three TikTok stars: Douglas Marland, Cosette Rinab and Alex Chambers.

In their lawsuit, the creators said they would lose their followers and "professional opportunities afforded by TikTok" if the app was blocked from operating in the US, [TechCrunch reported](#). The latest development comes after US President Donald Trump [issued an August order](#) stating TikTok be banned in the US unless its US-based operations are purchased by an American company.

TikTok recently filed a petition in the US Court of Appeals urging for a review of the Trump administration's actions, stating that it hasn't heard from the administration's Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS) in several weeks about a deadline for parent company ByteDance to sell its US operations, [The Verge reported](#).

“For a year, TikTok has actively engaged with CFIUS in good faith to address its national security concerns, even as we disagree with its assessment,” TikTok said in a statement to The Verge.

“In the nearly two months since the President gave his preliminary approval to our proposal to satisfy those concerns, we have offered detailed solutions to finalize that agreement – but have received no substantive feedback on our extensive data privacy and security framework,” the company added.

The CFIUS set a November 12 deadline for TikTok to divest itself of "any tangible or intangible assets or property, wherever located, used to enable or support ByteDance's operation of the TikTok application in the United States.” Although the company has applied for a 30-day extension permitted in the CFIU order, TikTok has yet to receive communication.

In response to the Commerce Department's Thursday call, a TikTok spokesperson told the Wall Street Journal that the company is “focused on continuing to engage CFIUS and look forward to reaching a resolution that addresses their security concerns, even as we disagree with them.”

The social media platform came under fire by the Trump administration after US officials began to argue that it was seeking to block its work in the US in order to prevent data on American users being shared with the Chinese military.

The US claim has repeatedly been rejected by TikTok and [was slammed by Hua Chunying](#), spokesperson for the Chinese Foreign Ministry, in early June at the height of the dispute. At the time, Hua called the allegations "shameless lies" and stated that the US is the "true global headquarters of hackers."

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'Titanic Hit the Iceberg': Climate Threat Unavoidable Despite Biden's Plan to Rejoin Paris Accord

An ecologist told Sputnik on Thursday that despite US President-elect Joe Biden's pledge to rejoin the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement and "listen to the scientists," damaging changes to Earth's climate as a result of human activities are at this point unavoidable.

Guy McPherson, scientist and professor emeritus of natural resources and ecology at the University of Arizona, [joined Radio Sputnik's Political Misfits on Thursday](#) to discuss energy and the climate as US President-elect Joe Biden plans for the US to rejoin the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement.

McPherson told show hosts Michelle Witte and Bob Schlehuder that rejoining the lukewarm international agreement will be too little, too late, since "there is no known way, including technology and social change, to restabilize or reduce the global average temperature."

"We want to hold the global average temperature at below 2 degrees Celsius above the 1750 baseline, and the real goal is to make an effort to keep it below 1.5 degrees Celsius above the 1750 baseline - and both of those goals pose a significant challenge," he said. "That's problematic, and of course, we continue to move in the wrong direction."

The Paris Agreement is an international deal that was created within the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2015. Countries that are part of the deal set limits on their greenhouse gas emissions, the primary cause of man-made climate change.

Despite the fact Biden has announced his intent to have the US rejoin the agreement, that will still not be enough to revert the effects of climate change, McPherson said.

"There's nothing to be done, because there's nothing that can be done at the societal level or at the level of the country to turn this ship around. The Titanic hit the iceberg, and it's going down," McPherson pointed out.

"What I suspect is that Biden will be in office when we have the first ice-free Arctic Ocean, and that alone will drive climate change enough in the really wrong direction - and drive our species and probably all life on Earth to extinction. And so now is the worst time to be an incoming president, because history - to the extent there is any - is about to hit you with the cause of the loss of all life on Earth. Who wants to be in that position?" he added.

"There is no mention of an ice-free Arctic in the last five years [in the corporate media]. There's a wonderful [paper](#) written for and published by the Annual Review of Earth and Planetary

Science. It was published in 2012. It indicated that we would have an ice-free Arctic in 2016, plus or minus three years, indicating that 2019 was the last year it might have happened. It didn't happen in 2019, and it didn't happen in 2020."

"However the refreeze this year, 2020, has been stunningly slow. We are stuck at almost the exact same level of ice as we had at the end of the melt season toward the end of September, and so here we are, nearly two months later, and we have almost the exact same level of ice in the Arctic as we did two months ago. The refreeze is just not progressing at all," McPherson added.

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Militia Tied to Michigan Terror Plot Planned to Kill Governor, Other State 'Tyrants' on Live TV - by [Evan Craighead](#)

The Michigan Attorney General's Office says the ringleader of the "militia" that plotted to kidnap Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer also intended to storm the State Capitol building with hundreds of armed men and execute all "tyrants" in a weeklong, televised effort that would leave no survivors.

Adam Fox, the 37-year-old facing federal charges for allegedly spearheading a domestic terror plot against Whitmer, devised a plan to murder Whitmer and other members of Michigan legislature, according to a brief filed by the state AG's office in the Jackson County's 12th District Court and [obtained by the Detroit Free Press](#).

[A total of 14 men](#) have been charged in relation to the alleged plot that was thwarted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation back in October. [Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel](#) has argued that the individuals intended to ignite a civil war over the governor's response to the COVID-19 novel coronavirus.

Thirteen of the fourteen men charged for their roles in the alleged plot to kidnap Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer.

The AG filing referenced came in protest of the October 23 pretrial release of 42-year-old Pete Musico, who has been hit with a slew of charges, including threat of terrorism and providing material support for terrorist acts.

"Plan A consisted of recruiting 200 men and then storm the Capitol building in Lansing while Congress was in session," the AG's office noted in the brief. "They were to take hostages, execute tyrants and have it televised. It would take about one week and that no one is coming out alive."

"The secondary plan was to storm the Capitol building in Lansing when Congress was in session. They would then lock the entrances/exits to the structure. They would then set the building on fire," the office said.

The brief detailed that Fox headed the so-called militia group "The Wolverine Watchmen." The group's private Facebook page described the militia as "a group of Patriots to network and assemble and recruit like-minded individuals."

Court documents highlighted the militia was described as "boojahidden only."

"'Boojahidden' is a term derived from the term 'mujahedeen' and is a reference to fighters with weapons, gear, and training who are willing to die for their cause," the brief read.

"Boojahideen fighters are often rogue military members or rogue law enforcement officers who are prepared for the 'boogaloo', which is a term used for the upcoming civil war, which will result from an uprising against the government."

All 14 men are scheduled to appear in court over the next two months. Eight have been charged in Michigan, and six face federal charges.

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US Dow Falls 317 Points as Spiking COVID-19 Cases Raise Economic Concerns
by [Evan Craighead](#)

US stocks took a hit at closing time on Thursday, shortly after Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell expressed uncertainty in the country's economy rebounding from the COVID-19 novel coronavirus pandemic without further assistance from Congress.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 317.6 points (1.1%) on November 12, while the S&P 500 dropped 35.65 points (1.0%) and the Nasdaq Composite slumped 76.84 points (0.7%).

Losses were reported in the crude oil and gas, utilities and basic materials sectors.

The decline comes amid a continued [surge in new novel coronavirus cases](#) across the country. According to a [CNBC analysis](#) of Johns Hopkins University data, 47 of the 50 US states have experienced at least a 5% uptick in average daily new cases.

Some 143,231 new cases of the novel coronavirus were reported nationwide on Wednesday, according to Johns Hopkins University figures.

Speaking to attendees of a virtual panel hosted by the European Central Bank, Powell revealed Thursday that the Federal Reserve views the spike in COVID-19 cases as the "main risk" to the US economy.

"The main takeaway from all of this is that even after the unemployment rate goes down ... and there's a vaccine, there's going to be a probably a substantial group of workers who are going to need support as they find their way in the post-pandemic economy because it's going to be different in some fundamental ways," Powell said, [as reported by The Hill](#).

"We've got new cases at a record level. We've seen a number of states begin to reimpose limited activity restrictions, and people may lose confidence that it's safe to go out," he added. Powell argued that even if COVID-19 vaccine distribution begins before the end of the year, the fact remains that the US economy is in dire need of further fiscal support from Congress, which has repeatedly failed to agree on a bipartisan relief deal for the American people.

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'F**king Sickening': US Army to Discipline Staff Sergeant Over TikTok Bashing Trainees - Video by [Evan Craighead](#)

An Oklahoma-based drill sergeant for the US Army is facing possible discipline by the armed forces after his profanity-ridden TikTok post was reposted on Twitter and caught the attention of hundreds of Twitter users, including an Army lieutenant general.

Fort Sill spokesperson Jessica Tackaberry [revealed to the Army Times](#) that Staff Sgt. Treyon Wallace, of the 434th Field Artillery Brigade, violated US Army command policy pertaining to online conduct by posting a nearly 50-second TikTok showing him berating his fellow service members last week.

"This is what the Army is turning into now: a bunch of soft a**, f**king - 'I get to use my cellphone every f**king Sunday for 30 minutes,'" said Wallace, TikTok user @dstomcat92, as the camera panned over the seated trainees on their phones.

"It's f**king sickening. You're crying and you just got here. You ain't done s**t," he added.

"What's the point of doing mail every day? What's the point of even - it don't make no sense."

"Hey if you're a Drill Sergeant, don't film your trainees, call them 'f**king sickening', and then post it to social media. Jesus, dude," Twitter user @LethalityJane expressed while reposting Wallace's TikTok.

It did not take long for netizens to identify Wallace, as his full name was tied to the account.

US Army Training and Doctrine Command's deputy commanding general Lt. Gen. Ted Martin also commented on the tweet and made it clear the service would address the issue.

"Trainees in BCT [Basic Combat Training] here on Fort Sill are allowed to have their phones at prescribed times that does not interfere with their training," Tackaberry told the Army Times.

"Phone privileges have increased due to the global pandemic to ensure that families and loved ones know that their trainee is safe and doing well."

"When engaging in electronic communication, members of the Army team should apply [Think, Type, Post](#)," Tackaberry emphasized.

"[W]e strive to ensure that all Service Members adhere to the Army Values and utilize social media appropriately."

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DHS' Cybersecurity Agency Finds 'No Evidence' Machines Changed or Lost Votes in Election by [Aleksandra Serebriakova](#), [Evan Craighead](#)

The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) has issued an apparent response to US President Donald Trump's claims of voter fraud, stating the 2020 election was the most secure to date.

"There is no evidence that any voting system deleted or lost votes, changed votes, or was in any way compromised," [according to a joint statement issued by the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency \(CISA\)](#), an operational body under the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and other government structures.

The above sentence was bolded for emphasis in the Thursday release, jointly issued by members of the Election Infrastructure Sector Coordinating Council and Election Infrastructure Government Coordinating Council Executive Committee. CISA Assistant Director Bob Kolasky sits on the latter.

The statement emphasised that the November 3rd election "was the most secure in American history".

"Right now, across the country, election officials are reviewing and double checking the entire election process prior to finalising the result," the election officials argued. "When states have close elections, many will recount ballots."

The agencies added that states with "close results" in a presidential election have a "paper record of each vote", which creates an "added benefit for security and resilience".

"This process allows for the identification and correction of any mistakes or errors," the statement asserted.

According to government officials, despite "many unfounded claims and opportunities for misinformation about the process of our elections", they want to assure the American people that they have "the utmost confidence in the security and integrity of our elections".

"...and you should too," the statement maintained.

The CISA-published statement comes hours after Bryan Ware, assistant director for cybersecurity at the CISA, [confirmed his resignation from the agency to Reuters](#). The White House requested his exit earlier in the week, according to a US official cited by the outlet.

Claims of Elections Fraud Continue to Circulate

This comes alongside the US president's campaign [to investigate alleged wrongdoings](#) and incidents of fraud in the election. Donald Trump has repeatedly claimed that the election is "rigged", with his campaign filing dozens of lawsuits across the country, citing a lack of transparency, the blockage of Republican observers from overseeing the process of vote counting and ballot back-dating. Most of these claims relate to the election-vote-rich states of Michigan, Georgia, Arizona and Pennsylvania.

The Trump campaign scored a small victory in Pennsylvania after Commonwealth Court President Judge Mary Hannah Leavitt moved to disqualify an inconsequential number of mail-in ballots sent in by first-time voters after it was unable to confirm their identities by 9 November. Despite the legal win, Joe Biden, as projected by major media outlets, continues to hold the Electoral College votes he won in Pennsylvania on Saturday.

On Wednesday, US President Trump [tweeted that he "easily" won](#) the states of Pennsylvania and Michigan, as "hundreds of thousands of votes" should have "not be allowed to count".

Trump later added that Dominion Voting Systems, a company that makes voting machines, should be blamed for a loss of millions of votes said to be cast in his favour, citing a report from One America News Network.

"Dominion deleted 2.7 million Trump votes nationwide. Data analysis finds 221,000 Pennsylvania votes switched from President Trump to Biden. 941,000 Trump votes deleted," POTUS tweeted.

To add to the scrutiny, Fox News host Tucker Carlson [unleashed a list](#) on Wednesday night, which he said contained the names of dozens of deceased American citizens who have voted in US presidential election despite passing away. Some of them had died as long ago as 2003.

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Just Another Day in Florida: Gargantuan Gator Spotted Strolling Around Golf Course - Videos Pixabay
by [Victoria Teets](#)

A massive alligator has been caught on camera comfortably strolling around a posh Florida golf course.

Even Tropical Storm Eta could not stop this reptile from hitting up the Valencia Golf & Country Club in Naples, Florida, on Wednesday.

Video captured by Tyle Stolting, a golf professional at the club, and shared by local outlet NBC2 shows the behemoth alligator wandering around and enjoying the tropical conditions at the course.

Although alligators are far from uncommon in Florida, this monster sure turned some heads with its prehistoric appearance, seeming to be without a care in the world.

It appears to have made its presence known due to Tropical Storm Eta, which had previously been a Category 1 hurricane, causing gale-force winds to sweep through its habitat.

What a high-end monstrosity!

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US Weekly Jobless Claims Fall By 6% to 709,000 for Week to Nov 7 - Labor Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 12 (Sputnik) - Some 709,000 Americans filed for jobless benefits last week, about 6 percent lower from the previous week, Labor Department data showed on Thursday, as the US job market continued to struggle seven months into the coronavirus pandemic.

“In the week ending November 7, the advance figure for seasonally adjusted initial claims was 709,000,” the department said in a news release. It revised upward claims in the previous week to October 31 to 757,000. That dropped the latest week’s claims by 48,000, or about 6 percent.

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UPDATE - US Weekly Jobless Claims Fall By 6% to 709,000 for Week to Nov 7 - Labor Dept. (Adds unemployment rate, continuing weekly jobless claims, background in paras 3-5)

WASHINGTON, November 12 (Sputnik) - Some 709,000 Americans filed for jobless benefits last week, about 6 percent lower from the previous week, Labor Department data showed on Thursday, as the US job market continued to struggle seven months into the coronavirus pandemic.

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Continuous claims for the latest week showed filings from 6.79 million Americans, lower than the previous week’s number of 7.22 million. The unemployment rate, meanwhile, stood at 4.6 percent, down 0.3 percent from the previous week.

The United States lost more than 21 million jobs between March and April, at the height of lockdowns forced by the COVID-19 pandemic. A rebound of 2.5 million jobs was logged in May and 4.8 million in June, before the recovery began slowing. For all of September, there were just 661,000 jobs added.

The US economy grew by a record 33.1 percent in the third quarter, after shrinking by 31.4 percent in the previous three months and 5 percent in the first quarter. In 2019, the economy grew by 4.1 percent.

Despite the rebound, the economic outlook for the United States remains dire with a rash of new coronavirus infections reported across a nation with 10.4 million COVID-19 cases and more than 241,000 fatalities to date. New York, the original US hotspot for the coronavirus during the height of the pandemic’s outbreak in March, moved this week to limit the number of people allowed to gather in private homes and placed a curfew on bars, restaurants and gyms after US daily cases hit record highs.

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Helicopter Crash in Egypt's Sinai Kills 6 US Peacekeepers, 1 Czech - Multinational Force

WASHINGTON, November 12 (Sputnik) - Eight peacekeepers from the United States, France and the Czech Republic have been killed in a helicopter crash in the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt, the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) said in a statement on Thursday.

"We are deeply saddened to report that eight uniformed MFO members were killed; six US citizens, one French, and one Czech," the statement said.

Another MFO member survived and was medically evacuated, the statement also said.

The MFO will conduct an investigation of the accident, which took place during a routine mission in Egypt's area of Sharm el-Sheikh, the statement added.

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US Appeals Court Rejects Lawsuit Challenging Harvard Use of Race in Admissions Policy

WASHINGTON, November 12 (Sputnik) - A US appellate court upheld a lower court decision allowing Harvard University to consider using an applicant's race as a factor in the university's admissions policy to promote diversity in its student population, according to a ruling issued on Thursday.

"The issue before us is whether Harvard's limited use of race in its admissions process in order to achieve diversity in the period in question is consistent with the requirement, the Supreme Court precedent. There was no error," the decision by a two-judge panel from the US Court of Appeals in Boston read.

The lawsuit by the advocacy group Students for Fair Admissions alleged that Harvard University's race conscious undergraduate admissions process violated US civil rights laws by discriminating against Asian-American applicants in favor of white applicants.

Last fall, US District Court Judge Allison Burroughs ruled that Harvard University's admission policies do not discriminate on the basis of race, do not engage in racial balancing or use quotas, and do not place undue emphasis on race in considering applicants' admissions files, Harvard University explained in an earlier press release.

Burroughs suggested that Harvard University could not offer students the benefits of a diverse campus if it stopped considering race in admissions, the release said.

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Trump Team to File More Pennsylvania Election Lawsuits Today - White House Press Sec

WASHINGTON, November 12 (Sputnik) - President Donald Trump's campaign will file new lawsuits in Pennsylvania on Thursday to challenge the validity of the November 3 US election in the state that his challenger Joe Biden is projected to win, White House Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnany said.

"There will be a number of affidavits filed today," McEnany told Fox News when asked what the Trump campaign would do next in Pennsylvania, the state that is projected to grant Biden 20 electoral votes that are enough for him to reach the 270 needed to beat Trump.

Lawyers as well as loyalists of the incumbent president have filed at least 15 legal challenges alleging voter fraud and irregularities in Pennsylvania. Multiple lawsuits of such kind are also pending in Georgia, Arizona, Nevada and Michigan. There have been few legal victories so far for Trump from those actions, and most legal experts do not expect the lawsuits to change the outcome of the vote.

Trump has refused to concede to Biden, with White House insiders telling US media that everyone in the administration has been warned not to cooperate with Biden and his transition team.

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Helicopter Crash in Egypt's Sinai Kills 6 US Peacekeepers - Multinational Force

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"We are deeply saddened to report that eight uniformed MFO members were killed; six US citizens, one French, and one Czech," the statement said.

Another MFO member survived and was evacuated, the statement also said.

The MFO said it will conduct an investigation of the accident, which took place during a routine mission in Egypt's area of Sharm el-Sheikh, and there is no reason to suggest the crash was not an accident.

"At this point, there is no information to indicate the crash was anything except an accident," the statement said.

The Egyptian authorities are cooperating with Israeli counterparts in the recovery efforts, the statement added.

The peacekeeping force, consisting of over 1,000 personnel from 13 countries, oversees the peace agreement between Egypt and Israel reached in 1978.

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US Terror Suspect Pleads Guilty to Supporting Islamic State - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 12 (Sputnik) - A 23-year-old man in the US state of Utah faces up to 20 years in prison after admitting that he posed as a leader of the Islamic State terror group

(banned in Russia) to help two individuals plan attacks, the Justice Department said in a press release on Thursday.

"[Murat] Suljovic admitted that in his correspondence with Person A, he pretended to be an ISIS [Islamic State] leader through an online persona, and he believed Person A and Person B believed he was an ISIS leader," the release said. "Suljovic provided advice about potential targets for a terrorist attack and advice about how to plan an attack."

Suljovic also admitted that he provided a bomb-making tutorial video to Person A in the correspondence to share with Person B for the purposes of "training and assisting Person B in carrying out an attack, according to the plea agreement," the release said.

The Justice Department said that by distributing the bomb-making tutorial video, Suljovic attempted to provide material support to Islamic State.

Suljovic faces a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison and a fine of \$250,000. A sentencing date for Suljovic, who remains in custody, will be scheduled later, the release said.

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Trump Extends National Emergency Order Against Iran - White House

WASHINGTON, November 12 (Sputnik) - President Donald Trump has extended the United States' national emergency against Iran, the White House said in a press release on Thursday.

"Our relations with Iran have not yet normalized, and the process of implementing the agreements with Iran, dated January 19, 1981, is ongoing. For this reason, the national emergency declared on November 14, 1979, and the measures adopted on that date to deal with that emergency, must continue in effect beyond November 14, 2020," the release said.

The national emergency will be extended for another year, the release added.

In 1979, President Jimmy Carter declared a national emergency in Executive Order 12170, which ordered the freezing of all Iranian government assets in the United States. The Carter administration made this decision after 52 Americans were taken hostage in Iran during the Iranian Revolution.

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Pentagon Embeds 10 Officers With US Health Agency to Plan COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution

* US * PENTAGON * COVID-19 * CDC *

WASHINGTON, November 12 (Sputnik) - Officers from the US Army, Navy and Air Force dispatched to the US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) are assisting with plans to allocate and distribute up to 300 million doses of a coronavirus vaccine, the Defense Department said in a press release on Thursday.

"Each of the Army, Navy and Air Force officers in Atlanta are teamed with a CDC regional coordinator responsible for a specific area of the country and its territories," the release said. Operation Warp Speed, led by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Defense Department, is funding production of multiple vaccine candidates with the goal of producing an initial batch of 300 million doses, the release added.

Among the leading candidates, the pharmaceutical firm Pfizer announced this week that its vaccine has proved 90 percent effective in advanced trials, with plans to apply for Food and Drug Administration for emergency use authorization within weeks.

Operation Warp Speed is using the Defense Department's Tiberius software platform to collect and analyze data from multiple sources including the US Census, HHS, state health offices and the CDC, the release said.

The platform allows planners to integrate data from vaccine makers, clinical trials, supply chains and local health officials to develop plans to distribute both vaccine products and kits containing syringes and other supplies needed to administer the vaccine, the release added.

The United States already has a proven vaccine distribution network in place that provides millions of seasonal flu shots each year, according to the release.

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US Scientist Admits Lying on Grant Applications for China Research - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 12 (Sputnik) - An immunology professor affiliated with two US universities pleaded guilty of fraudulently obtaining more than \$4 million in grants to conduct biomedical research on behalf of China, the Justice Department said in a press release on Thursday.

"As part of his plea, [Song Guo] Zheng admitted he lied on applications in order to use approximately \$4.1 million in grants from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to develop China's expertise in the areas of rheumatology and immunology," the release said.

Zheng, a professor of internal medicine, led a team conducting autoimmune research at Ohio State and Pennsylvania State universities. He sought to hide his affiliation with a unnamed Chinese university that is controlled by the Chinese government, the release said.

When arrested while preparing to board a flight to China, Zheng's luggage contained two laptops, three cell phones, several USB drives, several silver bars, expired Chinese passports for his family and deeds for property in China, the release added.

He was attempting to flee to China after an employer began investigating whether he was complying with American taxpayer-funded grant rules, according to the release.

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US House Speaker Calls on Republicans to Accept Trump Loss, Focus on COVID-19

WASHINGTON, November 12 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump and his supporters need to work with Joe Biden in fighting the COVID-19 instead of denying reality and trying to fight the projected president-elect with countless lawsuits, Congress Speaker Nancy Pelosi said Thursday.

"I have a very simple message for Senate Republicans," Pelosi told a news conference, referring to the rival lawmakers who form the legislative base for Trump. "The election is over. It wasn't even close. President Trump lost to Joe Biden, who will be the next president of the United States. Senate Republicans, stop denying reality. Stop deliberately and recklessly sowing doubt about our democratic process and start focusing on COVID-19. The Republican refusal to deal with reality is hurting our country in many ways."

Pelosi's comments came as US coronavirus cases hit another daily record high on Wednesday, with 140,543 reported, marking the ninth straight day where they stood at above 100,000.

According to Johns Hopkins University, some 10.4 million Americans have contracted the COVID-19 so far and nearly 242,000 have died from complications caused by the virus.

Trump has refused to concede his November 3 election loss to Biden, with his lawyers and Republican party members filing lawsuits in at least five US states - Pennsylvania, Georgia, Arizona, Nevada and Michigan - to challenge the outcome of the vote which he claims was rife with fraud and irregularities.

There have been few wins so far for Trump from those legal actions. Unless the incumbent president succeeds in outlawing ballots cast in multiple states, Biden is set to take office on January 20 after the inauguration of the president-elect.

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Trump Campaign Adviser Corey Lewandowski Tests Positive for COVID-19 - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 12 (Sputnik) - Trump campaign adviser Corey Lewandowski has tested positive for the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) disease, NBC News reported on Thursday citing a source familiar with the situation.

The report said, citing the source, that Lewandowski is feeling fine.

Lewandowski was recently in the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, with the campaign's legal team to contest the statewide results for the US presidential election.

Lewandowski had also attended Trump's election night watch party at the White house. He is the latest in a string of recent infections that have hit Trump's team, including White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows, US Housing and Urban Development Secretary Ben Carson, and other staffers.

President Donald Trump, his wife Melania and 14-year-old son Barron contracted COVID-19 in early October.

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Biden in Phone Call With Pope Discusses Climate Change, Immigration - Transition Team

WASHINGTON, November 12 (Sputnik) - Projected president-elect Joe Biden in a recent telephone call with Pope Francis discussed climate change and welcoming immigrants, his transition team said in a press release on Thursday.

"The president-elect expressed his desire to work together on the basis of a shared belief in the dignity and equality of all humankind on issues such as caring for the marginalized and the poor, addressing the crisis of climate change, and welcoming and integrating immigrants and refugees into our communities," the release said.

Major US media outlets have declared Biden the winner of the November 3 presidential election. However, incumbent President Donald Trump has refused to concede, with his lawyers filing lawsuits demanding suspension of the vote count, and a probe into alleged violations.

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Trump Renews Declaration of Nuclear Proliferation National Emergency - White House

WASHINGTON, November 12 (Sputnik) - President Donald Trump has issued a renewal of the 26-year-old national emergency caused by the proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction (WMD), the White House announced in a notice on Thursday.

"[The] national emergency declared in Executive Order 12938 with respect to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the means of delivering such weapons must continue beyond November 14, 2020," Trump stated. "Therefore ... I am continuing for 1 year the national emergency declared in Executive Order 12938."

On November 14, 1994, then-President Bill Clinton issued Executive Order 12938 declared a national emergency with respect to the unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States posed by the proliferation of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, the notice recalled.

Trump explained his decision by saying that the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the means of delivering them continues to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy and economy of the United States.

The threat posed by such weapons has been global in nature, the notice added.

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At Least 74 Migrants Killed in Shipwreck Off Libya - International Migration Center

WASHINGTON, November 12 (Sputnik) - At least 74 people in a ship carrying at least 120 migrants trying to enter Europe died on Thursday when their vessel sank off the coast of Libya, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) announced in a press release.

"Staff from the IOM reported that a devastating shipwreck has claimed the lives of at least 74 migrants [on Thursday] off the coast of Khums, Libya, the latest in a series of tragedies involving at least eight other shipwrecks in the Central Mediterranean since October 1," the release stated.

The ship was reported to be carrying over 120 people, including women and children, the IOM reported. Some 47 survivors were rescued by the coast guard and fishermen, while 31 bodies have been recovered, it said.

"So far this year, at least 900 people have drowned in the Mediterranean trying to reach European shores, some due to delays in rescue. More than 11,000 others have been returned to Libya, putting them at risk of facing human rights violations, detention, abuse, trafficking and exploitation, as documented by the United Nations," the release said.

IOM has recorded a recent wave of refugees fleeing Libya with 1,900 being intercepted and returned and more than 780 reaching Italy since the beginning of October, the release noted.

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US Sentences Man to 3 Years for COVID-19 Mask Fraud Scheme - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 12 (Sputnik) - A man who admitted to defrauding purchasers of coronavirus facemasks received a three-year prison sentence, the Justice Department said in a press release on Thursday.

"A Washington, D.C., man was sentenced... to 36 months of incarceration for his convictions on charges of mail fraud and wire fraud in relation to the sale of COVID-19 personal protective equipment ("PPE") and the filing of fraudulent tax refund request and class action settlement claims," the release said.

Craven Randall Casper, 38, who pleaded guilty to both charges, sold personal protective equipment for COVID-19 via a fake internet site - including N-95 masks and hand sanitizers - equipment that was never provided to paying customers, the release added.

He also used personally identifiable information to pose as individual taxpayers to obtain 47 state income tax refunds in 2018 and 2019 totaling \$197,518.82, the release said.

Casper was also ordered to pay \$235,807.11 in restitution to victims, according to the release.

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US Delivers Fifth Ground Surveillance Aircraft to NATO - Northrop Grumman

WASHINGTON, November 12 (Sputnik) - The United States has completed delivery of the last of five special ground surveillance aircraft to the NATO Alliance, Northrop Grumman announced in a press release on Thursday.

"Northrop Grumman Corporation successfully ferried the fifth NATO Alliance Ground Surveillance (AGS) aircraft, via a non-stop transatlantic flight," the release said. "The aircraft departed on Wednesday, November 11 from Palmdale, California and landed nearly 20 hours later on Nov. 12 at Sigonella Air Base, Sigonella, Italy."

The plane was the last of five NATO RQ-4D aircraft and its delivery completed the task of ferrying them to the Main Operating Base (MOB) of the NATO AGS system of systems, which includes aircraft, ground and support segments, Northrop Grumman said.

The high-altitude, long-endurance unmanned NATO AGS RQ-4D is based on the US Air Force wide area surveillance Global Hawk and includes multi-platform radar technology, provides leading-edge intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capability able to deliver near real-time situational awareness 24 hours a day, the release explained.

Led by Northrop Grumman, the NATO industry team is comprised of companies from across NATO's member nations, including Leonardo, Airbus, and Kongsberg and other defense companies from all AGS Procuring Nations, it added.

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US Urges Belarus to Release Political Prisoners, Engage in Dialogue - Pompeo

WASHINGTON, November 12 (Sputnik) - The United States is calling on Minsk to free all political prisoners and start talks with the Coordination Council, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement on Thursday.

"We once again call on the Belarusian authorities to immediately cease the escalating use of violence against peaceful demonstrators, release all political prisoners and other peaceful protestors who have been detained, and engage in meaningful dialogue with the Coordination Council and Belarusian civil society," Pompeo said.

Pompeo said Washington condemns the continued detention of political prisoners in Belarus, noting that more than 100 of them are presently currently being detained over the protests. Protests in Belarus, triggered by incumbent Alexander Lukashenko's victory in a presidential election that the opposition considers to have been rigged, have been ongoing since mid-August. The opposition and its supporters believe that Svetlana Tikhanovskaya was the

true victor. The police forces have used tear gas, rubber bullets and other violent measures to disperse the crowds of protesters.

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One in 5 US Households Report Being Victims of Crime, Lowest Rate in History - Poll

WASHINGTON, November 12 (Sputnik) - A fifth of all US households and 12.5 percent of American adults, report having been victims of at least one crime in the past year, the lowest rate recorded in at least two decades, a new Gallup poll revealed on Thursday.

"One in five households, one in eight adults [were] crime victims in the past year. Both figures are lowest in Gallup's 20-year trend," Gallup said.

Reports of theft, vandalism and burglary have also trended down, Gallup also said.

"Twenty percent of US adults say they have been the victim of a crime in the past 12 months, a new low in Gallup's trend. Crime victimization has been lower over the past four years after peaking at 29 percent in 2016. Thirteen percent say they personally were the victim of a crime, also the lowest. The high was 19 percent in 2014," Gallup added.

The previous lowest year in the 21st century in US reports of household crime victimization was 22 percent and came in 2001, shortly after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, and again in 2017. The highest figure was 29 percent in 2016, according to Gallup.

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Trump Plans to Start New Digital Media Company - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 12 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump plans to create a new digital media company to weaken Fox News for early calling Joseph Biden to be President-elect, Axios said on Thursday citing sources familiar with the situation.

Trump considers creating a new digital media instead of more expensive cable channel that will start streaming online and poach supporters from Fox News.

Neither Trump nor his close advisers nor family members have not spoken about establishing a media organization and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said earlier this week that there will be smooth transition to a second Trump presidency.

However, Numerous Republicans have voiced discontent over what they have characterized to be Fox News' biased reporting to effect the outcome of the 2020 presidential election and said they would no longer watch the network.

On Saturday, US corporate media outlets projected Biden to be the winner of the 2020 presidential election. However, Trump said he won the election but his victory was stolen via a

massive electoral fraud. Trump has demanded recounts in several US states and had filed lawsuits in state and federal courts to compel counting only legal votes and discarding illegal ones.

The General Services Administration, the government body tasked with managing the transition of power, has not approved a transition to a Biden administration given that the election victor has not yet been declared and the matter is being adjudicated.

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REVIEW - Trump Keeps Fighting Claiming Election Fraud, But Proof May Be Lacking

WASHINGTON, November 12 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump in an attempt to block his Democratic rival Joe Biden's path to the White House files lawsuits in key battleground states and mounts voting fraud allegations, which are downplayed by his opponents as too insufficient and inconclusive to question the election outcome.

Biden's team dismissed attacks as "just noise" and has announced the launch of the transition of power, despite the Republican incumbent's reluctance to concede defeat, projected by major US media outlets, but not yet finalized in the official count.

"The blatant voter fraud throughout corrupt Democrat-run cities is unprecedented. The Left has proven that there is nothing they will not do to rip power away from the American People. When they come after ME, they're really coming after YOU and everything YOU stand for," the Trump campaign says in numerous letters it sends out to solicit donations for the Election Defense Fund.

LAWSUITS AND RECOUNTS

The Trump campaign has filed lawsuits in Arizona, Michigan and Pennsylvania essentially seeking courts to stop state certifications of the vote. Three battleground states, which carry combined 47 electoral votes, flipped blue by narrow margins and gave Biden a majority to claim victory in the presidential race.

In Pennsylvania the complaint focuses on the mail-in voting, which, according to the plaintiff, funneled nearly 2.65 million ballots, despite lacking "all of the hallmarks of transparency and verifiability that were present for in-person voters." That included "not adequately verifying the voter's identity, permitting ballots received up to three days after the election to be counted without any evidence of timely mailings, such as a postmark, and denying sufficient monitoring over the reviewing and counting of mail-in ballots," the Trump campaign alleged.

The lawsuit in Arizona contends that the city of Phoenix incorrectly rejected votes cast in-person on Election Day and asks for the manual inspection of ballots in question. The campaign said in a statement that it has collected declarations from voters who witnessed the problem and allege that it occurred on a large scale.

The suit in Michigan relies on affidavits from witnesses, who, according to the Trump campaign, say that they saw election officials "counting ineligible ballots, counting batches of the same ballots multiple times, counting illegal late ballots and pre-dating them, accepting ballots deposited in drop boxes after the deadline, and duplicating ballots illegally." The complaint alleges "illegal and official intimidation and interference with lawful election challengers, harassment of Republican challengers tolerated or perpetrated by election officials, and arbitrary and unequal treatment of Republican challengers."

"We must DEFEND Michigan. President Trump was up BIG on Election night and then - almost as if it was magic - THOUSANDS of Biden votes were dumped late at night in Michigan, with absolutely NO overview. Insanity!" the incumbent's campaign said in a letter.

The White House spokeswoman and Trump's campaign senior adviser Kayleigh McEnany appeared recently on Fox News brandishing a pile of papers, which she claimed to be a 234-page affidavit collection from Michigan. "We keep hearing the drumbeat 'Where is the evidence?' Right here... 234 pages of sworn affidavit. Real people, real allegations, signed with notary," McEnany said.

She alleged that witnesses among other contentions testified that in Michigan's Wayne County they saw a batch of ballots with 60 percent having the same signature. "They are saying that 35 ballots had no voting record, but were counted anyway, that 50 ballots were run multiple times through a tabulation machine," McEnany said. "One woman said her son was deceased, but never less somehow voted."

There are also testimonies of Democrats handing out instructions how "to distract GOP [Republican] challengers," according to McEnany. "Anyone who cares about the transparency and the integrity of the system should want this to pursue to the discovery phase," she said. The Wall Street Journal said that in Arizona and Pennsylvania the Trump campaign has offered no evidence of fraud and anticipates the dismissal of lawsuits in these states. "Few courts have considered these types of requests in the past, leaving few precedents. Legal experts said it is unlikely that judges would block finalizing votes in a state unless there was evidence of widespread fraud," the newspaper wrote.

Kate Bedingfield, Biden deputy campaign manager, claimed that Trump "simply has no evidence." "And to succeed in a lawsuit that will stop certification there must be evidence of a problem with the process. They have to come forward with evidence of fraud and problems, which despite multiple opportunities to do so they have not been able to do so," she said during a briefing earlier this week.

Georgia, another battleground state where Biden is winning, has ordered a manual recount of all its 5 million votes due to a close margin between the contestants who are separated by less than 0.3 percentage points. Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger expressed certainty that results will be proven accurate. In an interview with CNN he denied allegations of widespread irregularities and expected the recount to be completed by November 20, which is the state certification deadline. Trump is also anticipated to request a recount in Wisconsin, one more key state where he closely trails Biden.

EVIDENCE?

In an attempt to sway public opinion the Trump campaign started publishing on its website lists of deceased Americans whose identities were allegedly used to cast a vote. So far it has produced seven names from Pennsylvania and Georgia.

"Linda Kesler of Nicholson, Georgia, died in 2003, but someone cast a ballot under her identity in last week's election. Nicholson's death notice ran in the Journal-Constitution when she passed away," one of the statements said with an obituary copy attached to it.

The Washington Post analyzed and seemingly debunked four videos which went viral over social networks and are often represented as an evidence of election irregularities.

One of them appears to show an election official destroying a ballot for Trump in El Paso, Texas. The author, Dale Harrison, several days later admitted in a Facebook post that his video was a prank and local authorities provided "a laundry list of reasons" corroborating that, the newspaper wrote.

"No senior staffers who are tasked with hiring election workers recognized him, and the office had no paperwork for the required background check. Moreover, anyone who was associated with vote counting was issued a specialized lanyard, according to the office. In the video, Harrison is not wearing one," according to publication.

"The office also said judges who work in vote processing do not wear yellow vests and the location where the video was filmed does not match the El Paso County Clerk and Record's office or any of their facilities. The signage does, however, resemble a space where Harrison has filmed other videos posted to his social media accounts," the newspaper added.

Another fact-checked video from Election Day shows a woman who was caught on camera casting at least three ballots in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The footage has gained over 300,000 views and was, according to the Washington Post, retweeted by Trump campaigners as an evidence of ballot stuffing.

"It is lawful for people to act as agents on behalf of voters who cannot engage in the process of voting for themselves — due to illness, infirmity, etc. It is also lawful to drop mail in a mailbox on behalf of other people," the publication quotes Philadelphia District Attorney's Office spokeswoman Jane Roh. She said that her office reviewed the video on Election Day and found nothing "conclusive of wrongdoing." No accusations related to the footage were ever reported to authorities, Ron added.

The Wall Street Journal cites "many of the advisers and lawyers" to the incumbent who doubt their effort will succeed and say it is "aimed largely at appeasing Mr. Trump, who has made clear that he believes the election was stolen from him and expects his legal team to keep fighting." Moreover, according to an unnamed insider, quoted by the newspaper, Trump himself understands that "the fight isn't winnable but characterized his feelings as: 'Let me have the fight.'"

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Pompeo to Visit Golan Heights, Israeli Settlements in West Bank Next Week - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 12 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo intends to visit the Golan Heights and Israeli settlements in West Bank during his trip to the Middle East, Axios reported on Thursday.

In November 2019, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced that Washington no longer considered the construction of civilian settlements by Israel in the West Bank "inconsistent with international law," a reversal of the position held by the previous administration under President Barack Obama.

The report said Pompeo may visit the winery in the Psagot settlement, whose owner named a new series of wine after Pompeo after the announcement.

The media outlet stressed however that the State Department spokesperson has not confirmed. Pompeo, the report added, will be accompanied by his wife during the trip and that they are expected to privately visit Qasr Al-Yahud which is a Christian baptism sight in the Jordan River near Jericho in the West Bank.

In May 2019, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that The Israeli government has chosen in the Golan Heights as a place where it will build a village and name it after US President Donald Trump.

This is meant to express Israel's gratitude for Trump, who signed an executive order formally recognizing the Golan Heights as an Israeli territory, in circumvention of the UN Security Council resolution that nullified Israel's annexation of the Syrian territory. The move has sparked global criticism.

According to the report, Pompeo is also planning to visit the Golan Heights, adding that it was unclear whether Pompeo will go to the site of the new village.

The Golan Heights has been mostly under Israel's control since the country seized the area during the 1967 Six-Day War with neighboring Arab states. While Israel adopted a law that de facto annexed the territory in 1981, the United Nations declared that the move was void and without any legal effect. In 2018, after Israel organized local elections in the area on October 30, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution urging Israel to immediately withdraw its forces from the territory.

On Friday, Pompeo will leave for seven countries, including Turkey, Israel, Saudi Arabia and France, to discuss various issues but certainly the efforts to promote peace in the Middle East. While in Israel, the Secretary will meet with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to address the Abraham Accords and Iran, according to the State Department.

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Delaying Biden Transition to White House Potential National Security Risk - Letter

WASHINGTON, November 12 (Sputnik) - More than 150 former US national security officials that have served under Republican and Democratic administrations on Thursday sent a letter to

the General Services Administration urging it to grant the Biden transition team access to government resources in order to avoid any national security risks caused by a delay. "In this moment of uncertainty, we must put politics aside. Further delaying the Biden team's ability to access the President's Daily Brief and other national security information and resources compromises the continuity and readiness of our national leadership, with potentially immense consequences for our national security," the letter said.

Major US media outlets have projected Joe Biden to be the winner of the November 3 presidential election. However, incumbent President Donald Trump said he won the election and his victory was stolen via a massive election fraud. Trump said he is trying to rectify the election theft by demanding recounts and taking the matter to state and federal courts seeking to count every legal vote and discard every illegal one.

The letter said Biden and his running mate Kamala Harris should be granted access to critical government information under the Presidential Transition Act.

However, the Administrator of General Services have said a winner in the election has not been certified and refused to grant a transition team while counting of votes continues in some US states and the disputes about election results are adjudicated in court.

The letter said although counting is ongoing, Biden and Harris appear to be the election winners and starting from that position, the ongoing lawsuits regarding the election results will not be impacted.

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US Airport COVID-19 Screening Ineffective, Finds 1 Case Per 85,000 People - Health Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 12 (Sputnik) - Airport screening measures for COVID-19 proved ineffective, with just one case detected for every 85,000 passengers arriving in the United States, a report by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) said on Thursday.

"Temperature and symptom screening at airports detected few COVID-19 cases and required considerable resources. The observed yield was approximately one identified case per 85,000 travelers screened," the report said.

The report was based on 766,044 passengers arriving in the US from other nations from January 17 through September 13, 2020.

Of 278 persons with observable COVID-19 symptoms such as cough or fever, nine tested positive representing 0.001% (one per 85,000) of all travelers screened, the report said.

Fourteen additional travelers with laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 were identified through mechanisms other than airport screening protocols, six flagged by airlines and eight who received positive results from tests taken prior to travel.

The US discontinued the resource-intensive, low-yield screening on September 14 based on CDC recommendations, according to the report.

The report noted that passengers tested within 72 hours of travel would likely reduce the risk of transmission during flights and that post arrival testing could reduce the required quarantine time for some travelers.

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US Budget Deficit Up \$248Bln in October, \$3.1 Trillion for 2020 - Treasury Data

WASHINGTON, November 12 (Sputnik) - The US federal budget ran a \$248.1 billion deficit in October while the cumulative shortfall for the year remained at a record high of \$3.13 trillion, the Treasury's monthly balance sheet showed.

Outlays for October amounted to \$521.8 billion while receipts totaled \$237.7 billion, resulting in the \$248.1 billion deficit, according to the balance sheet.

For the year, expenditure totaled \$6.55 trillion versus income of \$3.42 trillion, leaving a net deficit of \$3.13 trillion, after accounting for the massive government spending in trying to contain the COVID-19 pandemic

The 2020 budget shortfall aligns almost perfectly with the roughly \$3 trillion passed by Congress since March under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act to provide grants and loans to US businesses and paycheck protection to qualifying citizens and permanent residents.

Democrats in Congress have been locked in a stalemate since with Senate Republicans on a successive package to the CARES, arguing over the size of the next relief, as thousands of Americans, particularly those in the airlines sector, risk losing their jobs without further aid.

The US economy shrank 5 percent in the first quarter and 31.4 percent in the subsequent three months to hand the United States its worst recession ever as most of the 50 states in the country went into lockdown to stem the outbreak of the COVID-19. While the economy rebounded 33.1 percent in the third quarter after most businesses reopened from May, new daily record high coronavirus cases now are threatening the recovery.

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US Offers Condolences to Bahrain Over Death of Prime Minister - Pompeo

WASHINGTON, November 12 (Sputnik) - The United States has offered condolences to Bahrain over the death of Prime Minister Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, who passed away at the age of 84 on Wednesday morning at the US-based Mayo Clinic Hospital.

"We are deeply saddened to learn of the death of His Royal Highness, Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa of Bahrain," Pompeo said Thursday. "We extend our sincere condolences to his family and to the people of the Kingdom of Bahrain."

Pompeo said Khalifa was "a statesman of the highest order and will always be known as a close friend and partner of the United States."

The 84-year-old was the world's longest-serving head of government. Bahraini King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa declared a week-long period of mourning in the country, with flags being flown at half-mast.

Government ministries and departments will be closed for three days starting Thursday.

US State of Georgia Vote Tally Expected to Differ Slightly After Hand Recount - Official

WASHINGTON, November 12 (Sputnik) - The US state of Georgia expects that its presidential election vote tally will differ slightly after a hand recount, Voting System Implementation Manager Gabriel Sterling told reporters on Thursday.

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 votes over the incumbent President Donald Trump.

"I guarantee you, the numbers will be slightly different," Sterling said during press briefing.

He expressed confidence that the state's election officials will be able to complete recounting ahead of the deadline on November 20.

"We feel very confident we can get it in for the 20th, but we're aiming for the 18th," he said.

The process will start as early as Friday morning, Sterling 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 has filed several legal challenges.

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Biden, Dem Congressional Leaders Discuss Need to Pass COVID-19 Relief Bill - Statement

WASHINGTON, November 12 (Sputnik) - Projected president-elect Joe Biden in a telephone call with Democratic leadership in Congress discussed the urgent need to pass legislation to grant the US public help during the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, his transition team said in a press release on Thursday.

"President-elect Joe Biden spoke with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer," the release said. "They discussed the urgent need for the Congress to come together in the lame duck session on a bipartisan basis to pass a bill that provides resources to fight the COVID-19 pandemic."

Biden, Pelosi and Schumer highlighted the need to help small businesses, provide support to state and local governments, among other needs.

The release added they also discussed opportunities for a bipartisan effort to spur job growth in the United States.

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Trump Bans Securities Transactions Linked to China's Military

WASHINGTON, November 12 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump on Thursday issued an executive order prohibiting purchases or sales of securities tied to China's military beginning January 11.

"Accordingly, I hereby order: Section 1. (a) The following actions are prohibited: (i) beginning 9:30 a.m. eastern standard time on January 11, 2021, any transaction in publicly traded securities, or any securities that are derivative of, or are designed to provide investment exposure to such securities, of any Communist Chinese military company as defined in section 4(a)(i) of this order, by any United States person," the order stated.

Pennsylvania Court Rejects Some Mailed Ballots, Yet Election Outcome Unlikely to Change

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WASHINGTON, November 12 (Sputnik) - A Pennsylvania court on Thursday barred the US state from counting mail-in ballots received after election day that involved ID fixes or missing information, but the subset is expected to fall below the threshold that would impact the final result.

The move supports US President Donald Trump's campaign request, but does not change the immediate tally in the key battleground state, which is giving the Democratic nominee Joe Biden the electoral college majority for the projected overall win. However, even if Biden loses the state's electoral votes, he would be left with 270 electoral votes, the minimum necessary to win, based on projections from AP and Fox News.

"The Court hereby orders that Respondents County Boards of Elections are enjoined from counting any ballots that have been segregated pursuant to paragraph 1 of this Court's order dated November 5, 2020, granting a special injunction," according to the ruling of one of two statewide intermediate appellate courts.

The Supreme Court earlier mandated counties to segregate any ballots received three days after Election Day, within the period permitted for mail-in voting. Pennsylvania officials estimate that there are about 10,000 votes at stake. And only a subset deal with ID corrections or missing information.

Biden currently leads Trump in the state by over 50,000 votes.

The incumbent campaign's lawsuits seek to disqualify the state's mail-in voting, which churned nearly 2.65 million ballots, for allegedly lacking "all of the hallmarks of transparency and

verifiability that were present for in-person voters." Pennsylvania's officials deny any systemic irregularities.

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PREVIEW - Pompeo Starts Travel to France, Turkey, Israel to Discuss Mideast Peace Efforts

WASHINGTON, November 13 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is leaving on Friday for seven countries, including Turkey, Israel, Saudi Arabia and France, to discuss various issues but certainly the efforts to promote peace in the Middle East.

Pompeo will also visit Georgia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates, during his trip which will last from November 13 - 23.

"The conversations will differ obviously in each country, many different things to cover, but I am sure many of them will focus on this administration's historic efforts to forge peace and cooperation throughout the Middle East," Pompeo told reporters earlier in the week.

State Department spokesperson Cale Brown revealed on Tuesday that Pompeo will kick off his travel with France where he will meet with President Emmanuel Macron, Foreign Minister Le Drian, and other senior officials to talk about economic matters, security, as well as counterterrorism and global threats.

"Following Paris, Secretary Pompeo will travel to Istanbul, Turkey to meet with His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I, to discuss religious issues in Turkey and the region and to promote our strong stance on religious freedom around the world," Brown said.

Then, Pompeo will head to The Tbilisi for meetings with President Salome Zourabichvili, Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia, Foreign Minister David Zalkaliani, and the Patriarch of the Georgian Orthodox Church, His Holiness Ilia II, Brown noted.

The Georgia visit will be followed by his trip to Israel. While in Israel, the Secretary will meet with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to address the Abraham Accords and Iran, according to Brown.

"Next, he will travel to the United Arab Emirates and meet with Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayd to discuss security cooperation and regional issues," the spokesperson said. "He will also travel to Qatar to meet with Amir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani to discuss bilateral and regional issues, including the importance of Gulf unity."

Pompeo is also supposed to visit the Golan Heights and Israeli settlements in West Bank, Axios reported on Thursday. The visit to the Golan Heights would be a first for a US top diplomat.

Pompeo will conclude his travel with visiting Saudi Arabia, where he will meet with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Brown said.

In August, the United States announced it had brokered a peace deal between the UAE and Israel to normalize relations and establish diplomatic ties between the two sides. Later, Bahrain

and Sudan followed suit. Nevertheless, the Palestinian issue remains central for all Arab states, according to the ambassador.

The Israel-Palestine peace process has long been stalled as both sides refused to compromise on issues important to them. One of the main goals of the Palestinian side is to restore the border between Israel and Palestine to where it was before the 1967 Six-Day War, with a possible territorial exchange. Palestinians hope to create their state on the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Israel, on its part, is hostile to the idea of restoring previous borders and is even more hostile to the idea of sharing Jerusalem, which they consider their historical and undivided capital.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, November 13 (Sputnik)

NAGORNO-KARABAKH CEASEFIRE

* Armenian Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan discussed the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh and the fate of the Armenian cultural heritage in the region with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian and US Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun, the Armenian Foreign Ministry said on Thursday.

* Russian peacekeeping battalion entered the city of Stepanakert, Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov said.

* The ceasefire is observed along the entire line of contact in Nagorno-Karabakh, Russian Defense Konashenkov said.

* Azerbaijan believes that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict can be considered settled, the country's ambassador to Russia, Polad Bulbuloglu, said.

* The Russian-Turkish joint center for monitoring the Nagorno-Karabakh ceasefire will be operating remotely, and no Turkish peacekeepers will be deployed there, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said.

ARMENIA PROTESTS

* Opposition protesters in Yerevan, who demand the resignation of Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan due to the signing of a trilateral ceasefire agreement on Nagorno-Karabakh,

are heading to the headquarters of the National Security Service, a Sputnik correspondent reported from the scene.

* Armenian police are dispersing the crowd of protesters in the center of Yerevan, who are demanding that Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan resign, a Sputnik correspondent reported.

SYRIA DEVELOPMENTS

* An explosive device detonated on the route of a convoy of the Russian military police in Syria, an armored car received minor damage, deputy head of the Russian Defense Ministry's Center for Syrian Reconciliation said at a daily briefing on Thursday.

* Participants of the International Conference on Facilitating the Return of Refugees to Syria signed a final statement expressing their determination to resist attempts to undermine the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria.

UK ARRESTS RUSSIAN CITIZEN FEDOTKIN

* Russian citizen Dmitry Fedotkin, who was earlier arrested on suspicion of treason, is charged with work for UK intelligence, an informed source told Sputnik on Thursday.

* Russian citizen Dmitry Fedotkin, who was earlier arrested on suspicion of treason, is charged with work for UK intelligence, an informed source told Sputnik.

RUSSIAN COURT RELEASES US INVESTOR CALVEY

* The Russian Supreme Court on Thursday released Michael Calvey, a US investor and founder of Baring Vostok fund, from home arrest.

* Calvey wants to return to work at the Baring Vostok fund now that the Russian Supreme Court has released him from house arrest.

* Release of investor Michael Calvey from house arrest is an important signal to investors, CEO of Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) Kirill Dmitriev said.

OPEN SKIES TREATY TALKS

* If the Open Skies Treaty is preserved, Russia will urge partners to confirm that they will not prohibit flights over their territories and that they will not provide information on flights over the Russian territories to the United States, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on Thursday.

* The United Kingdom remains committed to the Open Skies Treaty and believes that it serves the interests of Euro-Atlantic security, a UK Foreign Office spokesperson said.

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US Federal Judge Dismisses Trump Campaign Libel Lawsuit Against CNN - Ruling

WASHINGTON, November 13 (Sputnik) - A US federal judge in the state of Georgia has dismissed an attempt by President Donald Trump's reelection campaign to bring a lawsuit against the Cable News Network (CNN), a court ruling said.

"The court grants defendants' motion and dismisses plaintiff's complaint for failing sufficiently to plead malice," the ruling said on Thursday. "The court, however, allows plaintiff the opportunity to file an amended complaint."

The Trump campaign's complaint centered on an article published on June 13, 2019 in which CNN contributor Larry Noble claimed that the Trump campaign had assessed the potential risks and benefits of again seeking Russia's help in 2020 and had decided to leave that option on the table.

The Trump campaign sued CNN for libel, claiming the article was false as well as defamatory. However, CNN argued that text was a political opinion-editorial piece and therefore was not actionable because statements of opinion were absolutely protected under state and federal law, according to the court.

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US State of Wisconsin Preparing for Potential Ballot Recount - Election Official

WASHINGTON, November 13 (Sputnik) - The US state of Wisconsin is preparing for a recount of the contested presidential election results, Wisconsin's chief election official, Meagan Wolfe, said during a briefing.

Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden is ahead of President Donald Trump by 20,427 votes in the state, according to an unofficial tally by the Wisconsin Elections Commission. Wisconsin carries ten electoral votes.

"We're preparing for the potential of a recount," Wolfe said on Thursday.

In Wisconsin, a recount can be initiated by the runner-up in a race in which the difference between two candidates is 1 percent or less. Trump currently trails by 0.62 percent.

Should the Trump campaign go forth with a recount as it has promised, it will have to cover the costs.

Wolfe said the recount costs in 2020 are expected to be similar to the \$2 million price tag of the 2016 presidential election recount.

Wolfe said Wisconsin counties are in the process of certifying the unofficial tally and expect to complete authentication by November 17 and state certification will be conducted on December 1.

The Trump campaign would have until November 18 at 5:00 p.m. local time to file an application for a recount.

If the Trump campaign is not satisfied with the recount, it can bring the matter to court for adjudication.

Incumbent President Donald Trump has asserted that he won the 2020 election but victory has been stolen from him via a massive fraud and is seeking redress via recounts and lawsuits in state and federal courts.

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Trump Bans Securities Transactions Linked to China's Military

WASHINGTON, November 13 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump issued an executive order prohibiting purchases or sales of securities tied to China's military beginning January 11. "The Executive Order prohibits certain purchases involving publicly traded securities, or any securities that are derivative of, or are designed to provide investment exposure to such securities, of any Communist Chinese military company," Trump said in a letter on Thursday. Trump also announced in the letter that the Executive Order also bans transactions that evade or avoid, or have the purpose of evading or avoiding, its prohibitions.

"I have delegated to the Secretary of the Treasury the authority to, in consultation with the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, the Director of National Intelligence, and the heads of other executive departments and agencies as appropriate, take such actions, including promulgating appropriate rules and regulations, and employing all other powers granted to the President by IEEPA, as may be necessary to implement the Executive Order," Trump added. "All agencies of the United States Government are directed to take all appropriate measures within their authority to carry out the provisions of the Executive Order."

Tensions between the two countries have also soared over China's activity in the South China Sea. China has accused the US of trying to increase its presence in the South China Sea by sending navy ships to conduct freedom of navigation operations in the area. The US is also undermining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait after a US warship crossed the waterway, China said. But despite Beijing's accusations, the US insists the strait is part of international waters and its "freedom of navigation" operations are in line with international law. Recently, the US blacklisted 24 Chinese companies, saying that they are helping the ruling Chinese Communist Party construct artificial islands in the South China Sea, which the US sees as a military provocation.

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US Commerce Dept. Backs Off From Shutting Down TikTok - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 13 (Sputnik) - The US Commerce Department is backing off from enforcing a shutdown of Chinese-owned TikTok video-sharing app after a federal court ruling prevented the move, the Wall Street Journal reported.

The shutdown of TikTok will not go into effect "pending further legal developments", the Journal reported Thursday, citing a decision by US District Judge Wendy Beetlestone in Philadelphia in October to block the Commerce Department order.

Judge Beetlestone made the decision after a suit brought against the Trump administration by three TikTok stars: comedian Douglas Marland, fashion guru Cosette Rinab and musician Alex Chambers.

TikTok has been in the news since August after the Trump administration threatened to ban the app in the United States, citing wider concerns about alleged Chinese government spying on data of Americans using China-originated social media.

The ban on TikTok was originally to take effect on September 20, but was later deferred to November 12 after the administration offered the company a way out by selling itself to a US entity.

However, none of those actions against TikTok appear likely to take place now, after President Donald Trump's defeat to his challenger Joe Biden in the November 3 US election.

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UPDATE 2 - Helicopter Crash in Egypt's Sinai Kills 5 US Peacekeepers - Multinational Force

WASHINGTON, November 13 (Sputnik) - Seven peacekeepers from the United States, France and the Czech Republic have been killed in a helicopter crash in the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt, the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) said in a statement on Thursday.

"We are deeply saddened by the loss on November 12, 2020, of seven of our uniformed military colleagues from three countries who died in a helicopter crash during a routine mission. This included one Czech, one French, and five US MFO members," the statement said.

Another MFO member survived and was evacuated, the statement also said.

The MFO said it will conduct an investigation of the incident, which took place during a routine mission in Egypt's area of Sharm el-Sheikh, and there is no reason to suggest the crash was not an accident.

"A full investigation of the cause of the crash, which appears to be mechanical in nature, has been launched," the statement said.

The Egyptian authorities and Israeli counterparts cooperating in the recovery efforts, the statement added.

The peacekeeping force, consisting of over 1,000 personnel from 13 countries, oversees the peace agreement between Egypt and Israel reached in 1978.

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Some Republican Senators Urge Trump to Give Biden Access to Classified Briefings - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 13 (Sputnik) - An unspecified number of Republican senators are calling on President Donald Trump to give Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden, who has declared victory in the November 3 election, access to classified briefings, the corporate media reported.

The number of senators who have made the calls to Trump was not specified, but CNN said in a report on Thursday that their number is growing.

Senate Chuck Grassley, the most senior Republican in the upper chamber of Congress, and Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina have also made such calls, CNN said.

Republican Senate Majority Whip John Thune of South Dakota and Senators Rob Portman of Ohio and James Lankford of Oklahoma said they too believed Biden should be given access to classified briefings, the report said.

The State Department has blocked Biden from access to messages from foreign leaders, the report said.

Corporate US media outlets have projected Biden to have won the 2020 presidential election. However, Trump has said he won the election but victory was stolen from him via a massive election fraud that he is determined to redress via recounts and legal action in state and federal courts.

Meanwhile, the General Services Administration has declined to allow Biden to assume a transition of power process because the vote counting still goes on and the election result has been disputed in court.

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Pennsylvania Officials Ask Judge to Dismiss Trump Lawsuit Challenging Election Results

WASHINGTON, November 13 (Sputnik) - Pennsylvania Secretary of State Kathy Boockvar and representatives of seven counties in the state are asking a US federal judge to dismiss the Trump campaign's lawsuit challenging the results of the 2020 presidential election, a court filing revealed.

The Trump campaign seeks to disqualify the state's mail-in voting, which churned nearly 2.65 million ballots, for allegedly lacking all of the hallmarks of transparency and verifiability that were present for in-person voters.

"[T]he requested relief would also violate the constitutional rights of Pennsylvania voters. Even if Plaintiffs' allegations were true (they are not) and there were isolated and sporadic incidents in which the election laws were violated, not by voters but by election workers, this occurrence could not possibly justify wide-scale disenfranchisement of hundreds of thousands - if not millions - of Pennsylvanians," the court document said on Thursday.

The court document further added that "Such a remedy - unlike the election irregularities Plaintiffs allege - would place an undue burden on the right to vote... This unconstitutional prayer for relief must be rejected."

The US Supreme Court earlier mandated counties to segregate any ballots received three days after Election Day, within the period permitted for mail-in voting. Pennsylvania officials estimate that there are about 10,000 votes at stake and only a subset deal with identification corrections or missing information.

Biden currently leads Trump in Pennsylvania by more than 50,000 votes.

Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden won in the seven Pennsylvania counties being contested in the Trump campaign lawsuit.

Major US corporate media outlets have projected Biden is the winner of the November 3 presidential election. However, incumbent President Donald Trump has said he won but victory was stolen from him via massive fraud. Trump said he seeks that all legal votes are counted and all illegal ones discarded, and would seek redress through recounting and legal action in state and federal court.

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US Federal, State Election Officials Find 'No Evidence' of Lost, Changed Votes - Statement

WASHINGTON, November 13 (Sputnik) - Nearly a dozen US federal and state election officials in a joint statement said that so far there is no evidence of lost or changed votes in the 2020 presidential election results.

"All of the states with close results in the 2020 presidential race have paper records of each vote, allowing the ability to go back and count each ballot if necessary. This is an added benefit for security and resilience. This process allows for the identification and correction of any mistakes or errors," the statement said on Thursday. "There is no evidence that any voting system deleted or lost votes, changed votes, or was in any way compromised... The November 3rd election was the most secure in American history."

The joint statement was issued by officials from the US Election Infrastructure Government Coordinating Council, Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), Election Assistance Commission, National Association of Secretaries of State, National Association of State Election Directors, among other groups and agencies. The statement comes after

President Donald Trump tweeted a report claiming that millions of votes were deleted and changed by Dominion voting systems.

Biden Understands Need to Extend New START - Russia's Envoy to UN

NEW YORK, November 13 (Sputnik) - Although the possible change of the US administration does not mean that the issues Moscow and Washington have in the disarmament area will be completely resolved, Joe Biden understands it is necessary to extend the New START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty), Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said in an interview with Sputnik.

Biden, who is projected to become the next US president, said in mid-October he would extend the Russian-US arms control deal if elected. At the same time, the official results of the November 3 election have not been declared yet. Incumbent US President Donald Trump refuses to concede defeat, he keeps accusing the opponents of stealing votes and has already filed legal challenges.

"This does not mean that everything will be really smooth in our arms and disarmament relations with the Americans if the democratic administration rises to power. But Biden understands the need to extend the New START, that is a fact. By the way, Vladimir Vladimirovich [Russian President Putin] has said this recently," Nebenzia said, when asked if Biden's victory could bring some progress.

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US House Panels Demand Trump Admin. Halt Deportations of Detained Whistleblowers

WASHINGTON, November 13 (Sputnik) - Lawmakers from two US House committees demanded in a letter to acting Immigration Customs and Enforcement (ICE) Director Tony Pham that ICE confirm in writing it will not deport potential witnesses in a probe of medical abuses at a detention center in the state of Georgia,.

At issue is an investigation of the Irwin County Detention Center following a whistleblower complaint alleging medical mistreatment of prisoners, "including hysterectomies performed without 'proper informed consent,'" the letter released on Thursday said.

"ICE reportedly has taken steps to deport individuals relevant to these investigations - including victims of these alleged abuses - thereby preventing them from giving testimony. Shortly after the publication of the whistleblower report, ICE moved to deport Pauline Binam, a former ICDC detainee and witness," the letter said.

Binam avoided deportation only because of direct intervention by US Congresswomen Pramila Jayapal and Sheila Jackson Lee, the letter added.

The letter cited a number of investigations of ICE and its contractors by the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, the Department of Homeland Security Inspector General and multiple congressional committees.

The letter sought written confirmation no later than Friday, November 13 that ICE will immediately halt deportations.

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US Federal, State Election Officials Find 'No Evidence' of Lost, Changed Votes - Statement

WASHINGTON, November 13 (Sputnik) - Nearly a dozen US federal and state election officials in a joint statement said that so far there is no evidence of lost or changed votes in the 2020 presidential election results.

"All of the states with close results in the 2020 presidential race have paper records of each vote, allowing the ability to go back and count each ballot if necessary. This is an added benefit for security and resilience. This process allows for the identification and correction of any mistakes or errors," the statement said on Thursday. "There is no evidence that any voting system deleted or lost votes, changed votes, or was in any way compromised... The November 3rd election was the most secure in American history."

The joint statement was issued by officials from the US Election Infrastructure Government Coordinating Council, Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), Election Assistance Commission, National Association of Secretaries of State, National Association of State Election Directors, among other groups and agencies. The statement comes after President Donald Trump tweeted a report claiming that millions of votes were deleted and changed by Dominion voting systems.

The coalition of officials emphasized the US public should have the utmost confidence in the security and integrity of the elections, adding that any questions should be directed to trusted sources such as election officials that administer elections.

The statement said there are many unfounded claims and opportunities for misinformation regarding the process of the US elections.

The Trump campaign has filed multiple unsuccessful lawsuits in key swing states, such as Pennsylvania, Nevada, Georgia, and Michigan, claiming voting irregularities. Trump lawyers have so far been unable to claim voting fraud in US courts due to a lack of credible evidence. A Pennsylvania court earlier in the day dismissed some ballots that arrived after election day with ID issues and missing information. However, it only applied to a subset of the 10,000 ballots that arrived after election day, not enough to erase Biden's lead in the state of over 50,000.

All major US media outlets have projected Joe Biden as the winner of the 2020 election. Biden is projected to win at least 290 of the 538 electoral votes, according to Fox News and AP, 20 above the 270 required. In terms of the national popular tally, Biden has secured 77.3 million votes (50.8%) and Trump has won 72.2 million (47.5%).

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Threat to Burn African-American Church Results in 2-Year Jail Term - US Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 13 (Sputnik) - A 63-year-old man received a two-year prison sentence for threatening to burn down a predominantly Black church in response to vigil protesting the death of an African-American suspect in police custody, the US Justice Department said in a press release.

"John Malcolm Bareswill, 63, called a Virginia Beach church with a predominantly African American congregation, made racially derogatory remarks, and threatened to set the church on fire. The threatening call was placed on June 7, several days after one of the church's leaders took part in a public prayer vigil and peaceful demonstration for George Floyd," the release said on Thursday.

Bareswill's threat terrified the adult Sunday school teachers who heard it and affected the entire church community, US Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia Zachary Terwilliger said in the release.

"Answering the exercise of constitutional freedoms with threats of violence - especially threats that tap into a long and shameful history of racially motivated violence against houses of worship - requires swift and certain justice," Terwilliger added.

The May 25 death of George Floyd while in police custody sparked nationwide demonstrations against police brutality. Many of the demonstrations turned into riots complete with violence against police and civilians as well as acts looting and vandalism.

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UN Human Rights Expert Urges 4 Gulf Countries to Drop Sanctions Against Qatar - Statement UNITED NATIONS, November 13 (Sputnik) - UN Special Rapporteur on unilateral coercive measures and human rights Alena Douhan said in a statement that she urges Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to lift sanctions imposed against Qatar, saying that these unilateral measures prevent people in Qatar and beyond from enjoying their fundamental rights.

Douhan visited Qatar from November 1 to 12 to assess the impact of the unilateral sanctions imposed by these countries in 2017 for Doha's alleged support for terrorism and close relations with Iran.

"During my visit, I met a large number of victims of human rights violations caused by the sanctions, including couples in mixed marriages and their children, migrant workers who lost their jobs and benefits, Qatari nationals with jobs or businesses in the four countries that imposed the sanctions, and many others," Douhan said on Thursday.

According to the statement summarizing the preliminary findings of Douhan's visit to Qatar, the four countries did not meet the basic requirements for the imposition of the unilateral measures and harmed the rights of people affected.

"The Special Rapporteur is concerned about a lack of evidence for legitimizing the imposition of unilateral sanctions as countermeasures in response to Qatar's alleged conduct; in particular, Qatar's purported financing and support for terrorism," the statement said.

The measures severely impacted foreigners working in Qatar, journalists, students abroad, couples in mixed marriages, and Muslims intending to make an annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia, among many others, Douhan explained.

In June 2017, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt had cut diplomatic ties with Doha, insisting that Qatar embraced various groups aimed at destabilizing the Persian Gulf region.

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UNGA, UNSC Elect 5 Judges to International Court of Justice for 9-Year Terms - President

UNITED NATIONS, November 12 (Sputnik) - The United Nations General Assembly and the Security Council on Thursday elected five judges to serve at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for nine-year terms, UN General Assembly President Volkan Bozkir announced after the completion of the vote count on Thursday.

"The following five candidates have obtained an absolute majority in both bodies [UN General Assembly, Security Council]: It was Yuji Iwasawa (Japan), Georg Nolte (Germany), Julia Sebutinde (Uganda), Peter Tomka (Slovakia) and Xue Hanqin (China). They are therefore duly elected members of the International Court of Justice to serve for a nine-year term commencing February 6, 2021," Bozkir said.

The ICJ, tasked with settling legal disputes between UN member states, is composed of 15 judges elected to nine-year terms by a vote held independently at the UN Security Council and the UN General Assembly.

Election at the ICJ, one of the UN's six principal organs, is held every three years for five seats with no bar on consecutive terms.

During this year's election, eight candidates, four of which are current ICJ members, were contesting the five positions.

German jurist Nolte will serve his first term at the ICJ. The other candidates who run for the election were Taoheed Olufemi Elias from Nigeria, Emmanuel Ugirashebuja from Rwanda and Maja Sersic from Croatia.

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UN Will Offer All Support to Libya in Holding Election Within 18 Months - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, November 12 (Sputnik) - The United Nations will provide all necessary support to Libya in holding a future presidential and parliamentary election, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Thursday.

On Wednesday, the UN Acting Special Envoy and Head of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) Stephanie Williams announced that the participants of the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum in Tunis had agreed on holding the general election within 18 months.

"We will offer whatever support the Libyans are needed," Dujarric said. "The discussions are obviously still continuing, but we will be there to accompany the Libyans and assess exactly what the needs are for the election."

The UNSMIL also announced that the forum participants had agreed to a road map for a transition period during which an interim government and presidential council would be created. The forum began on Monday and will run until November 20. It is an inclusive political dialogue held under the auspices of the UNSMIL that brought together 75 delegates representing various sections of the Libyan society seeking to find a solution to a long-time civil conflict.

Libya has been divided between two opposing governments since the overthrow and assassination of the country's long-time leader Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. The administrations known as the Government of National Accord (GNA) and the Libyan National Army (LNA) control the country's west and east, respectively. The eastern-based House of Representatives is aligned with the LNA.

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UN Spokesman on Trump's Refusal to Concede: UN Has Full Faith in US Institutions

UNITED NATIONS, November 12 (Sputnik) - The United Nations has full faith in the democratic institutions in the United States to resolve the matter in case incumbent President Donald Trump refuses to concede defeat in the presidential election, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Thursday.

"We have full faith in the US institutions," Dujarric said when asked whether the United Nations is concerned that Trump has not conceded defeat.

On Saturday, US corporate media outlets projected Biden to be the winner of the 2020 presidential election. However, Trump said he won the election but his victory was stolen via a massive electoral fraud. Trump has demanded recounts in several states and had filed lawsuits in state and federal courts to compel counting only legal votes and discarding illegal votes. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo did not recognize Biden's declared victory, saying there would be a "smooth transition" to a second Trump administration.

The General Services Administration, the state body that is tasked with managing the transition of power, has not approved a transition to Biden given that the election victor has not been declared.

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UN Security Council Adopts 3 Resolutions Extending Missions in Sudan, CAR

UNITED NATIONS, November 12 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council on Thursday adopted three resolutions renewing the mandates of the United Nations peacekeeping missions in the Abyei and the Central African Republic as well as extending the sanctions regime against Somalia.

The members of the UN Security Council unanimously agreed to adopt the US-sponsored draft resolution on renewing the mandate of the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) monitoring mission the area along the border of Sudan and South Sudan until May 15, 2021.

The resolution will also extend for the same period of time the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism that has been conducting monitoring activities along the border since 2011.

The resolution, renewing the mandate of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), also received the support of the 15-member UN Security Council.

The document, drafted by France, renews the mandate of MINUSCA, tasked with supporting the transitional period in the Central African Republic and protecting civilians, for another year. Additionally, the resolution allows French forces to use all means to support the UN mission at the request of the Secretary-General.

The UN Security Council resolution will renew the partial lifting of the arms ban on Somali security forces and extend the mandate of the country's Panel of Experts until December 15, 2021 was supported by 13 member states.

Russia and China, after abstaining from voting on the UK-sponsored draft, stated that the sanctions regime in Somalia should be lifted in order to help the government build greater security capacity and reduce the threat of the al-Shabab terrorist group.

"The draft did not take on board our proposal... for assessing the appropriateness of lifting the current arms embargo [that] has been a serious impediment to enhanced security capacity of the Somali government. We have no choice but to abstain from voting," Chinese Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Dai Bing told the Security Council.