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Conan O'Brien to Leave Late-Night TV For New HBO Max Show

Conan O'Brien is a host, comedian, podcaster and producer best known for hosting the late-night talk show "Conan," which airs on cable channel TBS. O'Brien, a former writer for "The Simpsons," is most renowned for his absurdist humor.

Late-night television host O'Brien will end his daily show "Conan" in June 2021 after a 10-year run on TBS.

However, that is not the last we will see of the entertainer, who will be hosting a new weekly variety series for HBO Max.

O'Brien's popular "Conan Without Borders" specials will also continue to air on TBS.

"In 1993 Johnny Carson gave me the best advice of my career: 'As soon as possible, get to a streaming platform,'" O'Brien said in a [statement obtained by the New York Times](#), commenting on his new show.

"I'm thrilled that I get to continue doing whatever the hell it is I do on HBO Max, and I look forward to a free subscription," he added.

HBO Programming President and HBO Max Chief Content Officer Casey Bloys also welcomed O'Brien's new show.

"Conan's unique brand of energetic, relatable, and at times, absurdist, comedy has charmed late-night audiences for nearly three decades," Bloys said Tuesday, [The Hill reported](#). "We can't wait to see what he and the rest of Team Coco will dream up for this brand new, variety format each week.

However, no details on the upcoming show have been disclosed yet.

Last year, O'Brien's nightly show was revamped and condensed from an hour to 30 minutes.

O'Brien in 2018 also began releasing a popular podcast titled "Conan O'Brien Needs a Friend."

The end of "Conan" will conclude O'Brien's nearly 30-year run as a late-night host.

O'Brien first rose to stardom in the early '90s when he replaced David Letterman on NBC's "Late Night." In 2009 and 2010, O'Brien hosted "The Tonight Show" on NBC, before beginning his show on TBS.

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'It Will Now Go On': Wreaths Across America Back On After Cancellation Reversed

US President Donald Trump on Tuesday announced that the Wreaths Across America event, which involves placing wreaths at the tombstones of veterans, will take place this year despite the COVID-19 crisis.

The US Army on Tuesday revealed that it has instructed the Arlington National Cemetery to host the Wreaths Across America Day event honoring fallen veterans after the event was canceled Monday evening due to concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The Secretary of the Army has directed Arlington National Cemetery to safely host Wreaths Across America," the Army said in a [statement on Tuesday afternoon, which was obtained by The Hill](#). "We appreciate the families and visitors who take time to honor and remember those who are laid to rest at our nation's most hallowed ground.

Shortly after the Army released its statement, Trump tweeted that he had "reversed the ridiculous decision" to cancel the event.

"It will now go on!" he added.

Wreaths Across America on Monday announced the cancellation of the event, saying in a Tweet that it was "shocked by this unexpected turn of events."

"It has been a trying year for all, and we too, want all our volunteers, donors and their communities to remain safe," [the statement added](#). "This is why over the last six months, the team at Wreaths has been working tirelessly with local, state and national officials to ensure that all of our outdoor wreath-placement events are done so safely, following local rules and mandates."

The initial decision to cancel the event was met with criticism by prominent leaders.

US Sen. Tom Cotton (R-AR) urged Army leaders to "reconsider" the decision to cancel the event.

"Thousands of people have marched in DC streets the past couple weekends for Joe Biden and Donald Trump. Surely volunteers can responsibly place wreaths on the graves of our fallen heroes at Arlington," [Cotton tweeted Monday](#).

In addition, US Rep. Dan Crenshaw (R-TX), a former Navy SEAL officer, said the cancellation "must be reversed immediately."

"Critical thinking must win out over emotion," [he tweeted Monday](#). "Large areas, outside and well spaced, with masks on, is perfectly safe. Our fallen deserve to be remembered."

Wreaths Across America Day takes place in December every year and is dedicated to remembering and honoring US veterans. This year, the event will be commemorated on December 19. Volunteers across the US recognize the day by holding wreath-laying ceremonies at Arlington National Cemetery, as well as at more than 2,100 additional cemetery locations across the US.

"In many homes, there is an empty seat for one who is serving or one who made the ultimate sacrifice for our country. There is no better time to express our appreciation than during the hustle and bustle of the holiday season," Wreaths Across America [writes on its website](#).

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US State Department to Release 'Kennan-Style' Blueprint for Containing China

The position paper builds on shifts in US global strategy in recent years toward what the Pentagon has called “great power competition” with Russia and China, which Washington sees as “revisionists” attempting to rewrite the US-led post-Cold War world order.

On Tuesday, Axios published [an unclassified document from the US State Department's Office of Policy Planning](#) that lays out a series of goals the US must achieve if it wants to forestall the rise of China as a global superpower.

[The document, titled “The Elements of the China Challenge.”](#) bears a number of similarities to the 1947 “long telegram” written by George F. Kennan, a senior US diplomat to the Soviet Union, about how the US should address the rise of that socialist superpower. Kennan advised a policy of “containment” through regional alliances and steady undermining of the Soviet socialist system that became the basis of the Cold War that followed.

Like Kennan, this new document purports to analyze the psychology of the Chinese people and suggests the socialist government of the Communist Party of China (CPC, sometimes rendered CCP) has fundamentally different values from the Chinese people themselves, presenting a hostile threat to both them and the world.

However, the document isn't quite the racialized “clash of civilizations” argument it could have been: Kiron Skinner, the policy planning office's former chief who set in motion the effort to produce the present document, [said in April 2019 that the US conflict with China was](#) “a fight with a really different civilization.” She added, “It's the first time that we will have a great power competitor that is not Caucasian.”

According to the paper, the US has to “return to the fundamentals,” casting aside the petty political squabbles and intrigues of recent years in order to present a more coherent and united vision for tackling China.

Two U.S. Air Force B-1B Lancers assigned to the 37th Expeditionary Bomb Squadron, deployed from Ellsworth Air Force Base, South Dakota, flew from Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, for a 10-hour mission, flying in the vicinity of Kyushu, Japan, the East China Sea, and the Korean peninsula, Aug. 7, 2017.

It lays out 10 ways this can be achieved, which are:

- “preserving constitutional government” at home
- maintaining the US military as the world's strongest fighting force
- fortifying the “rules-based international order” the US created after World War II
- working to “reevaluate its alliance system and the panoply of international organizations in which it participates” to ensure they support this vision
- strengthening existing alliance systems and creating new ones
- cooperating with China when possible
- inculcating in the US populace the reasons why China must be fought
- training a new generation of public servants well-versed in Chinese language and culture, but who also support the vision of constraining China
- reforming the US education system to support that goal
- and championing “the principles of freedom” with rhetoric, sanctions and military force as necessary.

China Won't Accept Number 2 Spot

The document builds heavily on the principles outlined by the White House and Pentagon since US President Donald Trump took office in 2017. The National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy [and Indo-Pacific Strategy Report have solidified the US strategic shift](#) away from the Global War on Terror and toward “inter-state strategic competition,” primarily with China, but also with Russia - which, along with China, [has been labeled by the Pentagon as a “revisionist” power](#) - and several other nations that ardently defy US influence on their affairs, such as Iran and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. However, [elements of that shift can be seen in the prior administration](#) of US President Barack Obama and his “pivot to East Asia.”

According to this argument, US actions are defensive in nature, provoked by attempts by Beijing, Moscow and others to upset the US-led world order in which Washington calls the shots around the globe and has the freedom to punish nations that refuse to follow its lead politically, economically or militarily.

The paper argues that the Communist Party of China “aims not merely at preeminence within the established order - an order that is grounded in free and sovereign nation-states, flows from the universal principles on which America was founded, and advances US national interests - but to fundamentally revise world order, placing the People’s Republic of China (PRC) at the center and serving Beijing’s authoritarian goals and hegemonic ambitions.”

Chinese military vehicles carrying DF-17 roll during a parade to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the founding of Communist China in Beijing, Tuesday, Oct. 1, 2019.

A remarkable passage in the first chapter illustrates the contrast in visions: whereas it quotes Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013 stating he hopes that one day China’s efforts will build a socialism superior to capitalism and that the country “will win the initiative and have the dominant position,” a couple of paragraphs later the documents reveals the problem the US has is that [China will not accept the role Washington has outlined for it](#) as an inferior power.

[“Speculations about ‘the end of history’ - that liberal democracy](#), owing to its reasonableness and universal appeal, was spreading around the globe - nourished the faith” that China would abandon its socialist project in the late 20th century, the paper says. “But the CCP has stuck to its authoritarian convictions. The party consistently affirmed its fidelity to Marxism-Leninism as a paradigm for China’s governance, and socialism - the state control of economy and society - as a model not only for the PRC but also for other nations and as the basis of an alternative world order.”

In other words, China has stubbornly refused to accept the West’s notion that socialism has been defeated and that the US “won” the great battle of history, and Beijing’s continued success at presenting an alternative to that narrative has made it a greater threat than ever.

Beijing Sees Role as Blazing ‘New Trail’ for Developing World

The State Department’s caricature of China contrasts sharply with how Beijing has described its own goals for the next several decades.

At the CPC’s 19th Party Congress in 2017, [Xi set out two “centenary goals” for the country](#) to reach by 2049, the 100-year anniversary of the Chinese socialist revolution and the formation of the People’s Republic of China.

Xi Jinping speaks at the opening ceremony of the second Belt and Road forum in Beijing

In 1949, the Communist Party of China described its victory in the civil war as ending the “Century of Humiliation,” during which China’s political and economic life was controlled by the

Western powers and by Japan, arresting its development as a nation. In contrast, [by 2049, Xi said he hopes China will become](#) a “fully developed nation” and “a global leader in terms of comprehensive national power and international influence.”

Xi described what this global leadership would look like, too: he said that socialism with Chinese characteristics, the post-Mao Zedong era’s blending of socialist planning with state-directed capitalist enterprises and “special economic zones” to attract foreign investment, had “blazed a new trail for other developing countries to achieve modernization” and that it provides “a new option for other countries and nations who want to speed up their development.” Further, it “offers Chinese wisdom and a Chinese approach to solving the problems facing mankind.” An enormous part of this has been the Belt and Road Initiative, a colossal infrastructure effort spanning much of the globe. [The project has led to railroads, highways](#), ports, airports, [hydroelectric dams and other economic projects](#) in dozens of countries in Africa, Asia and even in Europe. Many of the project’s partners are former European colonies, but [China and partnership investment banks provide them](#) with more favorable loan agreements than Western institutions while remaining hands-off about their domestic policies.

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Video: US Warship Shoots Down ICBM Outside Earth’s Atmosphere in Hawaii Defense Test First

The test may provide a new way for the Pentagon to defend Hawaii against potential missile attack instead of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system presently deployed on the islands.

For the first time, a US Navy destroyer has used a Standard Missile-3 (SM-3) Block IIA missile to intercept an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). The demonstration could shift how the US and allies such as Japan conceive of homeland missile defense.

[According to the US Missile Defense Agency \(MDA\)](#), the Monday test saw a Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) System-equipped destroyer near Hawaii successfully intercept an inbound ICBM while the missile was still in outer space.

The MDA released an animated video showing the entire test, which SM-3 maker Raytheon posted on its Twitter page.

During the test, an ICBM-representative target was launched from the test site on Kwajalein Atoll in the Republic of the Marshall Islands, picked up by orbiting ballistic missile early-warning satellites and shot down by an SM-3 Block IIA fired by the USS John Finn, which received targeting information from the satellites.

Of particular note is that the intercept happened outside Earth’s atmosphere, during the so-called “midcourse” of the ICBM’s trajectory, and involved a kinetic interceptor that obliterated the target rather than an explosive warhead that would have detonated near it.

A SM-3 Block IIA is launched from the USS John Finn, an Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense System-equipped destroyer, Nov. 16, 2020, as part of Flight Test Aegis Weapons System-44 (FTM-44). FTM-44 is a developmental test satisfying a Congressional mandate to evaluate the

feasibility of the SM-3 Block IIA missile's capability to defeat an ICBM threat. The SM-3 Block IIA was originally designed and built for the Intermediate-range Ballistic Missile threat set. This was the sixth flight test of an SM-3 Block IIA fired by an Aegis BMD-equipped vessel, but the first to demonstrate midcourse interception ability outside the atmosphere - a capability the new BlockIIA missiles have, thanks to booster upgrades. Previously, the SM-3 had been seen as filling a gap between the Ground-based Midcourse Defense (GMD) system and terminal-phase interceptors like the Patriot and THAAD systems, the latter of which was [recently deployed to Hawaii as a temporary defense](#).

"This was an incredible accomplishment and critical milestone for the Aegis BMD SM-3 Block IIA program," MDA Director Vice Admiral Jon Hill said in the news release. "The Department is investigating the possibility of augmenting the Ground-based Midcourse Defense system by fielding additional sensors and weapon systems to hedge against unexpected developments in the missile threat."

Presently, US GMD missiles are [based in silos on the US mainland](#), but the smaller SM-3, carried by a destroyer or missile cruiser [or fired from an Aegis Ashore system](#), could potentially be used anywhere on the globe.

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Photos Emerge of China's J-15 Fighter Sporting Gear for New Carrier's Catapult Launch System

The electromagnetic launch system (EMALS) on China's Type 002 aircraft carrier presently under construction could give the heavy J-15 fighter a second life in naval aviation.

As China's first aircraft carrier [to be equipped with aircraft catapults nears completion](#), the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has been preparing its staple carrier-based fighter, the Shenyang J-15 "Flying Shark," to operate off the new warship design. Photos recently posted on social media show a prototype J-15 sporting new catapult launch equipment.

The existence of this model of J-15, dubbed the J-15T, is not new information. However, these photos are perhaps the clearest images yet of the new catapult gear.

The J-15T prototype was spotted in a Chinese report earlier this year. [Global Defense Corp noted in April](#) the T on its tail stands for "Tanshe" in Pinyin, meaning "catapult launch." However, the first photos revealed are grainy and don't provide good detail of the most important part of the prototype: the tow bar that attaches the plane's nose gear to the catapult's shuttle.

Whether the catapult is powered by steam, as in present US aircraft carriers, or an electromagnetic linear induction motor, as in [the US' Ford-class carriers that have yet to enter service](#) or China's upcoming Type 002, the shuttle shoots forward toward the front of the ship, rapidly accelerating the aircraft to flight speed and launching it off the front of the flight deck and into the sky. The additional power enables aircraft to take off with much more weight than if they were expected to launch under their own power, as on China's present carriers or the UK's HMS Queen Elizabeth, which have ramps on the bow to help planes take off.

Weight has always been a limiting factor for the J-15, an exceptionally large and heavy aircraft in terms of carrier-based fighters. [As Sputnik has reported, the J-15 is 3 tons heavier](#) than the US' naval aviation staple, the F/A-18 Hornet. It's also a clumsy 24 meters long, roughly the same size as the largest plane to ever fly from a US carrier, the A-5 Vigilante bomber. It's not for nothing that [Chinese media has derided the plane as a "flopping fish."](#)

At present, the J-15 is China's only carrier-based jet aircraft. However, it could one day be joined by [the FC-31, another product of Shenyang Aircraft Corporation](#) rumored for years to be in consideration as a carrier-based fighter. As a fifth-generation aircraft, the stealthy FC-31 would become a rough counterpart to the US Navy's F-35C Joint Strike Fighter, a version of the jet modified for naval aviation.

Reports earlier this year seemed to confirm the rumors: in July, the Chinese Aeronautical Establishment, the research and development branch of the Aviation Industry Corporation of China ([AVIC](#)), [announced it was working with Shenyang](#) to prepare a "new type of aircraft" for naval use. Then, in September, [a photo emerged of an FC-31 with considerable modifications](#) from previous photos of the aircraft and sporting AVIC's logo on its empennage. However, that aircraft had no visible equipment for carrier operations attached, such as a landing tailhook.

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Ghana's Special Prosecutor Resigns, Citing 'Political Interference' in Report on Gold Royalties Deal

The dramatic resignation of Ghanaian Special Prosecutor Martin Amidu, one of West Africa's most well-known anti-corruption crusaders, could spell doom for a controversial deal he opposed that would sell much of Ghana's gold futures on the London stock market. [Amidu told Ghanaian news site Graphic he had quit the post](#) four years before his appointment was over due to "political interference in the independence" of his office.

[In a letter addressed to Ghanaian President Nana Akufo-Addo](#), Amidu said he took the job in January 2019 because Akufo-Addo promised to ensure his "independence and freedom of action" in pursuing corruption in the government.

"The events of 12th November 2020 removed the only protection I had from the threats and plans directed at me for undertaking the Agyapa Royalties Limited Transactions anti-corruption assessment report and dictates that I resign as the Special Prosecutor immediately," Amidu wrote.

[According to Ghanaian news site MyJoyOnline](#), the November 12 event to which Amidu refers is the death of former Ghanaian President J.J. Rawlings, who ruled the West African country for 30 years and who served as a vital go-between for Amidu and Akufo-Addo.

Gold Royalties Deal Challenged

However, Amidu made clear the precipitating cause was the stormy reaction given to [his report on the Agyapa Deal, a proposal to sell](#) most of Ghana's future gold royalties, presently owned by the government, to a company based on the British island of Jersey, a well-known tax haven.

“The reaction I received for daring to produce the Agyapa Royalties Limited Transactions anti-corruption report convinces me beyond any reasonable doubt that I was not intended to exercise any independence as the Special Prosecutor in the prevention, investigation, prosecution, and recovery of assets of corruption,” Amidu wrote. “My position as the Special Prosecutor has consequently become clearly untenable.”

Amidu’s report highlighted the risks involved in selling almost 76% of the royalties generated from 16 large Ghanaian gold mines to a company in a well-known tax haven and a secrecy jurisdiction, including money laundering. [Ghanaian Finance Minister Ken Ofori-Atta claimed in August](#) the deal was totally transparent and that posting 49% of the company’s royalties on the London Stock Exchange - a first for any African gold company - would only enhance the country’s wealth.

[According to Graphic, the president’s office](#) had reportedly sat on the report for two weeks before a frustrated Amidu released it publicly on November 2. [The outlet reported that two days later](#), Ofori-Atta “refuted” Amidu’s assessment, and Akufo-Addo pressured the special prosecutor to accept the rebuke.

“That would have compromised my independence as the” special prosecutor, Amidu told the outlet.

The Agyapa Deal has since gone back to the Parliament of Ghana, which will have to OK it again before the end of the year.

Corruption Probes Blocked From Document Access

Amidu further noted in his letter that during his tenure, he encountered one barrier after another to his attempted corruption probes - a complaint he has made almost as long as he has been a special prosecutor.

“You ask for information; you can’t get it. You ask for docket; the docket cannot be produced. You ask a minister for a record; the record cannot be produced. How do you fight corruption when those appointed by the president who has a vision are not coordinating with the Office of the Special Prosecutor to achieve his mandate? That is the challenge we have to face,” [Amidu told the Ghana Audit Service in 2018](#).

Indeed, some thought that resigning would be an appropriately dramatic way for Amidu to call attention to the repeated interference with his office. [Journalist Manasseh Azure Awuni told GhanaWeb](#) just hours before Amidu’s letter became known that he was surprised it hadn’t happened yet.

“My surprise is why Martin Amidu hasn’t resigned. Because he keeps giving one reason to the other, if all of these is continuing and you have no solution to it, the best is to resign so they could be some attention to the challenges in that office,” Awuni said. “You have somebody in office and for 3 years the only work he’s done is the Agyapa deal. So if there are challenges that are not being resolved, the best thing for him is to resign.”

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## 'There's No Explanation': Cindy McCain Asserts Trump Administration Has Damaged US' Reputation

Cindy McCain, the widow of the late Sen. John McCain (R-AZ), has stated that what she sees as US President Donald Trump's repeated disrespect to US service members was the final straw and what ultimately prompted her to vote for Democratic challenger Joe Biden.

McCain indicated in an [interview with the Washington Post](#), published Tuesday, that the Trump administration is actively damaging the US' global reputation and is to blame for the negative shift in views of the country.

McCain explained in the Tuesday published article that in her travels around the world, she has found herself continuously struggling to defend the actions of the administration.

"I was overseas at least once a month, if not more," she said, noting that her travels for advocacy work came to a halt with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I'd watch the demise of respect of our country around the globe, watch us leave our allies on the battlefield, watch us throw away our treaties, etc. You say, 'Well, we're better than that.' But finally, there comes a time when there's no explanation anymore, and that was very much the case with me."

Although McCain did not specify a particular treaty that the US withdrew from during Trump's presidency, there have been a slew of agreements, including the [Paris Climate Accords](#), the [Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action](#), the [Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty](#) and the [Trans-Pacific Partnership](#).

Additionally, the Trump administration saw the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) renegotiated as the [United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement](#) after Trump proclaimed that the "terrible" NAFTA deal had [left Americans at a disadvantage](#) in the global economy.

One of the more concerning incidents McCain outlined in the interview involved the alleged remarks from the president in which he dismissed a November 2018 visit to the Aisne-Marne American Cemetery in France, reportedly saying it was ["filled with losers."](#)

"There were so many people like my husband and so many millions of other people who served so nobly. And then to have it tossed away by someone who I don't believe really understands what it means to serve," she said. "I thought, 'My God, how could somebody say something like this about our young people who are willing to fight and die for this country without being asked?'"

McCain's late husband served in the US Navy during the Vietnam War, and was held as a prisoner of war for several years. In fact, on various occasions Trump criticized the late senator, [even after his death in 2018 from brain cancer](#).

In the end, McCain stated that the disregard for those serving in the US military was the final straw that persuaded her to vote for Biden in the November 3 election. "That was all it took for me," she said.

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'This is Idiotic': Ted Cruz Bashes Fellow US Lawmaker for 'Being a Complete A\*\*' Over Mask

While masks are mandatory in the US Congress' House of Representatives, the Senate chamber does not require lawmakers to follow such rules - instead, face coverings are only recommended.

US Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) took to Twitter late Monday to provide his take on a heated exchange of words between two fellow senators, calling one of his colleagues a "complete a\*\*" for demanding that another lawmaker wear a mask while inside the congressional chamber. The Monday dispute regarding the use of masks involved Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Sen. Dan Sullivan (R-AK). Video footage of the interaction shows a mask-wearing Brown standing at a lectern, immediately requesting that Sullivan, who was presiding over the Senate at the time, wear a mask.

"I'd start by asking the presiding officer to please wear a mask as he speaks," Brown said, before quickly remarking that he "can't tell [Sullivan] what to do." Sullivan, in turn, retorted that he does not wear a mask when "speaking" in the chamber, like "most senators."

"I don't need your instruction," the Alaska senator told Brown.

The remainder of the verbal exchange saw Brown remark that "there clearly isn't much interest in this body in public health," and that Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) "doesn't seem to care."

However, hours after the exchange, Cruz weighed in on the matter, calling the incident completely "idiotic."

"This is idiotic," Cruz [wrote in a late-night tweet](#). "[Brown] is being a complete a\*\*. He wears a mask to speak - when nobody is remotely near him - as an ostentatious sign of fake virtue." "[Sullivan] was over 50 feet away, presiding. Last I checked 50 feet is more than 6 feet," he added.

The Monday altercation, however, isn't the first time that Brown has called on a colleague to don a mask. In fact, in a tweet fired off later in the day, the Ohio senator wrote that his concerns were "[once again ... refused](#)."

[According to the Washington Post](#), while masks are mandatory on the House floor, the same cannot be said in the Senate, where it's only recommended that officials wear a mask.

The incident comes as the US Centers of Disease Control and Prevention [updated their guidance](#) on masks, which indicate that face coverings are strongly suggested to "prevent the transmission of SARS-CoV-2," the virus that causes COVID-19.

"Masks are primarily intended to reduce the emission of virus-laden droplets ('source control'), which is especially relevant for asymptomatic or presymptomatic infected wearers who feel well and may be unaware of their infectiousness to others, and who are estimated to account for more than 50% of transmissions," reads the health agency's bulletin.

The [agency has also urged individuals](#) to "wear a mask in public settings and when they are around people who do not live in their household," underscoring that masks themselves are not a substitute for social distancing.

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## Explosive Exits - Cartoon

Throughout the Trump administration, tensions between the US and Iran have remained on alert and on occasion seen severe escalations, most recently with the January drone strike that killed top Iranian Gen. Qasem Soleimani, among other officials.

US President Donald Trump reportedly inquired about launching a military strike on an Iranian nuclear site last week after international inspectors reported that the Middle Eastern country continued to [stockpile enriched uranium at its Natanz facility](#).

However, [according to the New York Times](#), which was the first to publish the revelation, a group of senior advisers that consisted of US Vice President Mike Pence, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, acting Defense Secretary Christopher Miller and Gen. Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, advised against such an action, as it could snowball into a larger conflict in the last days of the Trump administration.

Although US officials believe a potential military strike is no longer a viable option, the outlet hinted that “Trump might still be looking at ways to strike Iranian assets and allies, including militias in Iraq.”

In response to the report, Ali Rabiei, spokesperson for the Iranian government, indicated that [“any action against the Iranian nation would certainly face a crushing response.”](#)

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## Trump Mulling Near-Total Withdrawal of US Forces From Somalia Amid Global Pullback, Report Suggests

Following to removal of US Defense Secretary Mark Esper, the Pentagon and acting Defense Secretary Christopher Miller have announced a withdrawal of thousands of troops from Afghanistan and Iraq, leaving around 2,500 residual personnel in both countries.

US President Donald Trump is reportedly looking to withdraw nearly all US military personnel from Somalia as part of a global pullout that is slated to see a decline in American forces in Afghanistan and a reportedly smaller withdrawal from Iraq.

Citing anonymous US officials, [Reuters reported](#) Tuesday that Miller, who previously served as director of the National Counterterrorism Center, is seeking to carry out a near-total [withdrawal of the roughly 700 US troops in Somalia](#), who have been stationed in the East African country to combat local al-Shabaab militants.

The US has recently conducted pullouts in the Somali cities of Bossaso and Galkayo. Somali Colonel Ahmed Abdullahi Sheikh told the outlet that further withdrawals by the US would undermine trust and provide militants with an upper hand.

“It would create a vacuum. The Somali security forces have good morale because of the US troops ... there’s the possibility of air support if they are attacked, they can have medevacs,” he declared.

However, no finalized decisions have been made, and no orders have been delivered to US military leadership regarding Somalia, according to the US officials who spoke to Reuters. Miller announced Tuesday afternoon that the Pentagon would be officially reducing the US military presence in Afghanistan and Iraq to 2,500 troops each, [USA Today reported](#). There are presently around 4,500 US military personnel stationed in Afghanistan and 3,000 personnel in Iraq.

"This is consistent with our established plan and strategic objectives," he argued, hours after informing members of the US Congress of the decision.

Many US officials and allies have expressed concern over the now-confirmed pullout of troops from Afghanistan.

A U.S. Marine from Bravo Company of the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines gestures during an operation in Marjah, Helmand province February 21, 2010. NATO forces are facing strong resistance eight days into a major offensive in southern Afghanistan as Taliban fighters dig in to fight to the death.

"The price for leaving too soon or in an uncoordinated way could be very high. Afghanistan risks becoming once again a platform for international terrorists to plan and organize attacks on our homelands," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said in [a statement to CNN on Tuesday](#).

"And [Daesh] could rebuild in Afghanistan the terror caliphate it lost in Syria and Iraq."

The US President [tweeted in December](#) that Americans should expect to see the "small remaining number of our BRAVE Men and Women serving in Afghanistan home by Christmas!" However, with no finalization in the Afghan peace process, the region is already facing a possible "humanitarian disaster" linked to government and Taliban clashes, according to UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi.

"If this peace effort collapses then we could see a big humanitarian disaster in the country that is for sure, I hope it won't," [he told the Associated Press Tuesday](#). "I think we need to be ready for everything here, we need to be ready for more humanitarian issues."

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Greenland's Largest Glaciers May Melt Much Faster Than Forecasted - Study  
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Researchers examining Greenland's glaciers have determined that by the year 2100, sea levels may spike up to 14.9 millimeters if measures are not put in place to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

Greenland's largest, most vulnerable glaciers may soon lose a more sizable amount of ice than ever previously predicted should emissions of greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide continue to accelerate the melting, according to [new findings published Tuesday](#) in the journal Nature Communications.

Researchers examining the country's three largest glaciers - Jakobshavn Isbræ, Kangerlussuaq and Helheim - found that the trio make up roughly 12% of Greenland's entire ice sheet, but that

they have lost nearly 3 trillion tonnes of ice from the years 1880 to 2012 and as such have contributed to a 8.1-millimeter rise in global sea levels over time.

Although the main driver of sea-level spikes has been attributed to melting glaciers as a result of global warming, the recent rise in water levels has largely been driven by the melting ice sheets of Greenland and Antarctica, [measurements from NASA satellites](#) recently determined.

Based in Denmark and Britain, officials involved in the newly published study came to their conclusions by reviewing satellite data and historical images taken during aerial surveys from the early to mid-20th century by Danish explorer Lauge Koch. Tapping both sources, officials used the data to identify “trimlines” to determine how much the glaciers had receded over time. Shfaqat Abbas Khan, a researcher involved in the study, [told AFP](#) that “historical measurements over the 19th and 20th century may hide important information that can significantly improve our future projections.”

However, researchers also used models which ultimately led to the determination that should nothing be done to curb global greenhouse gas emissions, temperatures would skyrocket to more than 3 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels by 2100.

Additionally, models predicted that sea levels would rise between 9.1 to 14.9 millimeters by the end of the century.

“To look at more than a hundred years gives us confidence that our measurements are correct, and not caused by short-term weather fluctuations,” Anders Bjørk, a co-author of the study, told Earther in an [emailed statement](#). “This study tells us that it is likely that the best models we have at the moment are very likely underestimating what will happen in the future.”

“What the models are missing is higher-resolution input data and the ability to be coupled with other models,” the ice researcher noted, adding that even the best models are unable to factor in a variety of aspects affecting ice loss.

The latest finding comes after a [study published in October concluded](#) that Greenland’s ice sheet was melting at its fastest rate within the last 12,000 years.

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US Charges Ex-CEO With Afghan War Contract Fraud - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 17(Sputnik) - The chief executive officer of a US company has been charged for defrauding the government related to US military work in Afghanistan, the Justice Department said in a press release.

"The former chief executive officer of a US government contractor was charged today in connection with schemes to defraud the US Department of Defense regarding contracts related to US military efforts in Afghanistan," the release said on Tuesday.

The CEO for the Alabama-based company, Paul Daigle, has been charged with conspiracy, four counts of wire fraud, and four counts of false claims.

The release said Daigle, between 2013 and 2017, allegedly engaged in two fraudulent schemes that involved using unqualified employees for government contracts and allegedly falsely billing the US government for work unrelated to the government contract.

Daigle was the CEO of Black Hall Aerospace, an aviation solutions company that offers fixed and rotary wing aircraft services with capabilities that include maintenance, engineering, training and flight operations.

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#### Trump Fires Election Security Director Krebs Over Statement Disputing Vote Fraud Claims

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump in a statement said he has fired US Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) Director Chris Krebs for allegedly making a highly inaccurate statement rejecting voter fraud occurred in this year's presidential election.

"The recent statement by Chris Krebs on the security of the 2020 Election was highly inaccurate, in that there were massive improprieties and fraud - including dead people voting, Poll Watchers not allowed into polling locations, 'glitches' in the voting machines which changed votes from Trump to Biden, late voting, and many more. Therefore, effective immediately, Chris Krebs has been terminated as Director of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency," Trump said via Twitter on Tuesday.

Last week, Krebs along with other state and private election officials, said there has been no evidence that any US voting system had deleted or lost votes, changed votes, or was in any way compromised. Krebs was reportedly expected to be fired.

The House Homeland Security Committee in response to the termination said Trump had no reason to fire Krebs, adding that he was doing his job and helped make the US election secure. 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. All major US media outlets have projected Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden the winner of the election held earlier in November.

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#### US State of Ohio Governor Imposes 21-Day Curfew to Curb COVID-19 Surge

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - The US state of Ohio is imposing a curfew that will last for 21 days to contain the spread of COVID-19, Governor Mike DeWine said in a statement. "We are issuing a curfew in Ohio that will start Thursday. This will run from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. [EST] for 21 days. We believe this will help reduce #COVID19 spread," the governor said in a tweet Tuesday.

The curfew will not apply to essential workers, people who have an emergency or medical need, DeWine said adding that the public can go to the grocery store and to pick up a carry-out or drive-thru meal.

DeWine urged people in Ohio to make an extra effort to avoid contact with other people and to wear a mask as steps to prevent hospitals in the state from being overwhelmed.

US governors across the United States are reimposing restrictions as a third wave of COVID-19 cases surges across the country, overwhelming some hospitals in certain hotspot cities.

The United States has confirmed more than 11.3 million cases of COVID-19 and more than 248,400 deaths caused by the disease as of Tuesday night, according to the Johns Hopkins University tally.

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#### Michigan's Largest County Fails to Certify Election Results - State Republican Chair

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - The canvassing board of the most populous county in Michigan was unable to certify the presidential election results, state Republican Party Chair Laura Cox said in a statement.

Projected President-elect Joe Biden won 68% of the vote in Wayne county, which includes the city of Detroit, where more than 850,000 ballots were cast, according to official results posted by Fox News. Biden won the state by roughly 146,000 votes, or 2.7% of the total.

"Enough evidence of irregularities and potential voter fraud was uncovered resulting in the Wayne County Board of Canvassers refusing to certify their election results. This action will allow more time for us to get to the bottom of these deeply troubling irregularities," Cox said Tuesday.

The board vote split 2-2 along partisan lines, The Detroit Free Press's Nancy Kaffer reported. All major US media outlets have projected Biden the winner of the election held earlier in November. Trump, who has yet to concede, has filed several legal challenges, citing alleged voter fraud. However, a coalition of federal and state election agencies in a joint statement said the 2020 vote was the most secure in US history.

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**US-Led Coalition Suffers No Casualties in Attack on Baghdad - Operation Inherent Resolve**

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - US troops and their coalition partners sustained no casualties in a rocket attack on Baghdad's Green Zone, Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve spokesperson Wayne Marotto said in a statement.

"This attack targeting an Iraqi base resulted in no Coalition casualties," Marotto said via Twitter on Tuesday.

Earlier on Tuesday, Iraqi security agencies said in a statement that seven rockets fell in and near the Iraqi capital's Green Zone - an area that houses diplomatic missions and government buildings - killing a child and injuring five more civilians.

The United States announced that it will reduce its military presence in Iraq to 2,500 servicemen by January 15, 2021.

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**Indigenous Group Agrees to Invest \$1Bln in Keystone XL Pipeline – Operator**

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - Natural Law Energy (NLE), a group of Native American tribes, will invest up to \$1 billion for ownership shares in the Keystone XL Pipeline, the pipeline operator TC Energy said in a press release.

"This partnership will facilitate important input and guidance from NLE on the project," Keystone XL President Richard Prior said in the release on Tuesday. "It will also enable the realization of

long-term, meaningful economic benefits derived from an attractive return of and on NLE's investment."

The agreement will supplement more than \$600 million in indigenous supplier and employment opportunities expected to be created through the project's construction.

"This represents our first investment in Canada's energy infrastructure and we are excited to partner with TC Energy as together, we will ensure that the pipeline is held to the highest levels of environmental and social responsibility," Nekaneet First Nation Chief and NLE Energy President Alvin Francis said in the release.

Keystone is an oil pipeline system that moves a crude oil from the Canadian province of Alberta to the US states of Illinois, Oklahoma and Texas. The first three phases of the system are currently operational, however, the construction of the fourth phase, better known as Keystone XL, which is planned to transport oil to Nebraska, has become a partisan political issue in the United States.

The Obama administration blocked the pipeline project for eight years. The Trump administration authorized construction while the campaign of presumed President-elect Joe Biden announced plans to halt the project.

In September, US Supreme Court rejected a request from the Trump administration and TC Energy to dismiss a lower court ruling blocking further construction of the pipeline because of a violation related to a water-crossing permit.

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US Republican Senator Grassley Tests Positive for COVID-19

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - Republican Senator Chuck Grassley said he has tested positive for COVID-19 but is feeling good and following federal guidelines.

"I've tested positive for coronavirus. I'll be following my doctors' orders/CDC guidelines & continue to quarantine. I'm feeling good," Grassley said in a tweet Tuesday.

The senator said he will work from home and looks forward to resuming his normal schedule soon.

The virus has infected more than 20 lawmakers, USA Today reported last week. In all, nearly 80 US congressional representatives and senators have been quarantined, tested positive for COVID-19, or came in contact with someone with the disease, according to govtrack.us.

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Maryland Re-Imposes Strict Measures Due to Rise in COVID-19 Cases - Governor

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - The US state of Maryland is re-imposing strict measures to contain the novel coronavirus because the number of new infections exceeds 1,000 cases 13 days in a row, Governor Larry Hogan told reporters.

"Today, the Maryland Department of Health is issuing an order, which will restrict hospital visitations state-wide until further notice," Hogan said during a press briefing on Tuesday. The governor said excepted individuals include parents or guardians of pediatric patients and individuals who support people with disabilities.

Hogan noted that hospitals in Maryland are reaching capacity despite the surge plan, which allowed adding some 6,000 beds.

"All across the country, this virus is spiking out of control at a rate much worse than it was in the spring," Hogan warned.

The Maryland authorities also imposed limitations on visiting nursing homes and will mandate all visitors to show proof of negative test within 72 hours.

In addition, Hogan announced additional restrictions on mass gatherings effective Friday, to include all bars and restaurants and all facilities where food and alcohol are served to close by 10:00 p.m.

All retail businesses and religious institutions will revert back to 50 percent capacity, Hogan also said.

Maryland remains in a state of emergency and any violations of the regulations would be considered a crime and are subject of a \$5,000 fine and a sentence of up to one year in prison, Hogan added.

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**Trump's Choice of Federal Reserve Chair Judy Sheldon Fails to Win Senate Vote**

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - The US Senate voted against President Donald Trump's nominee Judy Sheldon to be the next chair of the Federal Reserve.

"Not invoked, 47-50: Motion to invoke cloture on Executive Calendar #760 Judy Shelton to be a Member of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System," the Senate Cloakroom said via Twitter on Tuesday.

Trump nominated Shelton last year to replace incumbent Federal Reserve Chairman Jay Powell when his four-year term expires in February 2022.

The White House said in a statement via Twitter that it was confident Shelton's nomination would be accepted if put to another vote.

"President Donald Trump's nominee to the Federal Reserve is incredibly qualified. The White House fully supports her, and we remain confident that Judy Shelton will be confirmed upon reconsideration," White House Deputy Assistant Press Secretary Judd Deer said.

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US Activist Coalition to Deliver 100-Day Criminal Justice Reform Plan to Biden - Member

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik), Barrington M. Salmon - Projected President-elect Joe Biden will be presented with an ambitious criminal justice reform plan by a coalition of more than 100 advocacy groups to implement during his first 100 days in office, Sentencing Project Strategic Initiatives Director Kara Gotsch told Sputnik.

Biden when he takes office on January 20 will be under significant pressure to deliver results in the "first 100 days" - a much-hyped performance benchmark for new administrations. The tradition began in 1933 under President Franklin D. Roosevelt who enacted 76 laws during this symbolic period. However, the former vice president is likely to face a divided Congress.

"I'm part of a coalition - the Justice Roundtable - and we're putting together... very ambitious, comprehensive recommendations for the first 100 days to transform criminal justice," Gotsch said.

The coalition's blueprint of steps that must be accomplished to overhaul the system is expected to be done by the end of the week, she said. The process will be gradual and incremental, Gotsch acknowledged, especially considering a split congress means that passing anything will be difficult for Biden. However, she is more optimistic about opportunities under Biden than the current administration.

"There was some criminal justice reform, but it was limited," she said. "This [Trump] administration reversed policies of the Obama administration and Attorney General Eric Holder on private prisons, the 'Smart on Crime' policies and they decided not to pursue the elimination of mandatory-minimum provisions."

Even the Trump administration's signature criminal justice achievement, the First Step Act, was rife with pushback, said Gotsch.

President Donald Trump signed the bipartisan legislation in 2018, which is designed to reduce recidivism.

"First Step is very limiting and trying to add the prison reform provision was exhausting," she recalled. "Senator Chuck Grassley was brave enough to say the bill wouldn't move until sentencing reform and another provision were added. So far, sentencing reform had worked marginally and has not been implemented for two years. It's completely absurd. Yet they took credit when First Step passed."

Gotsch said they have been especially disappointed with Trump's handling of the pandemic crisis in prisons.

"Congress gave the Department of Justice the opportunity to transfer vulnerable people who're in prisons and jails home. But they have been overly restrictive and opposed every attempt at compassionate release. It's a very cruel approach," she said. "I know people with severe pre-existing conditions... were told they're going home and then they say, 'Oops,' no you're not. There are people who are at health risk and we're very concerned about them."

According to The Marshall Project, wardens approved less than 2 percent of 11,000 prisoner requests for compassionate release from March through May 2020.

Biden, projected to win the presidency by all major media outlets, will likely face a divided Congress because while the Democratic Party maintained control of the House, they failed to outright seize the 100-member Senate. The Democrats are projected to win 48 seats, the Republicans 50. However, the Republicans are favored to win at least one of two run-offs set for January.

Trump, who has yet to concede, has filed several legal challenges, citing alleged voter fraud. However, a coalition of federal and state election agencies in a joint statement said the 2020 vote was the most secure in US history.

The Sentencing Project advocacy group promotes legal reforms to reduce incarceration and address unjust racial disparities in the criminal justice system. The group's leadership includes human rights lawyers and experts from groups like the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).

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#### California Prosecutors Charge 2 With Submitting Thousands of Phony Voter Registrations

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - Two men in southern California face charges in a 41 count criminal complaint for allegedly submitting thousands of fake voter registration applications on behalf of homeless people, the Los Angeles County District Attorney's office said in a press release.

"Carlos Antonio De Bourbon Montenegro (dob 9/9/67), aka Mark Anthony Gonsalves, and Marcos Raul Arevalo (dob 3/15/86) were each charged in case BA491333 with one count of conspiracy to commit voter fraud, eight counts of voter fraud, four counts of procuring and offering a false or forged instrument and four misdemeanor counts of interference with a prompt transfer of a completed affidavit," the release said on Tuesday.

Montenegro allegedly submitted more than 8,000 fraudulent voter registration applications between July and October 2020. The defendant also is accused of falsifying names, addresses and signatures on nomination papers under penalty of perjury to run for mayor in the California city of Hawthorne, the release said.

If convicted as charged, Montenegro faces a possible maximum sentence of 15 years and eight months in state prison, while Arevalo faces a possible maximum sentence of seven years in prison, the release added.

President Donald Trump continues to claim massive election fraud cost him the 2020 election, especially in states such as California that sent unsolicited ballots to every person on voter registration lists with the possibility to mail them in. Trump is disputing the election results and has initiated recounts and audits as well as filed lawsuits in state and federal courts.

Trump's allegations have been dismissed as unsubstantiated by the major US media networks. Several US states have said they found no substantial evidence of election fraud, but in several counties the election result was corrected upon finding irregularities.

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#### Pennsylvania Supreme Court Rules Philadelphia Did Not Violate State Election Law - Filing

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - The Pennsylvania Supreme Court said in a ruling that the city of Philadelphia did not violate state election law when it restricted the distance poll observers had to maintain to observe the processing of mail-in ballots due to the novel coronavirus, a court document revealed.

"Critically, we find the Board's regulations as applied herein were reasonable in that they allowed candidate representatives to observe the Board [of Elections] conducting its activities as prescribed under the Election Code," the court wrote in a 5-2 opinion on Tuesday.

The Court said the Philadelphia County Board of Elections did not act contrary to law in making its regulations for governing the positioning of candidate observers during the processing of mail-in ballots because the Election Code does not specify minimum distance parameters for the location of the observers.

Major US media outlets projected Democratic nominee Joe Biden to be the winner of the November 3 presidential election. Biden declared victory but so did incumbent President Donald Trump, who has said his victory was stolen via massive fraud and impropriety.

The Trump campaign has demanded audits and recounts and has filed multiple lawsuits in several states, including the so-called battleground states Pennsylvania, Georgia, Arizona, Nevada and Michigan. Some of the states have said they found no substantial evidence of election fraud, but several counties have corrected the election results upon finding irregularities.

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#### US Welcomes Russia's Decision to Release Calvey From House Arrest - White House

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - The United States welcomes the Russian Supreme Court's decision to release Baring Vostok founder Michael Calvey from house arrest, National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien said in a statement on Tuesday.

On Thursday, the Russian Supreme Court released US investor Calvey and several other defendants in the case of Vostochny Bank from house arrest.

"The US welcomes Russia's decision to lift Michael Calvey's house arrest. We look forward to quick resolution of the remaining charges against him. Upholding the rule of law is a critical step to any advancement in the US-Russia business relationship," O'Brien said in a statement provided by the White House.

Calvey and his colleagues were detained in February 2019 on charges of defrauding Vostochny Bank. According to the investigation, they offered to pay back a debt to the bank with a controlling stake of another company owned by Calvey. The defendants said the shares were

worth 3 billion rubles (\$38.7 million), but investigators found that they were worth 600,000 rubles at most. Each of the defendants has dismissed the charges.

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#### House Armed Services Chief Backs Plan to Cut US Troops in Afghanistan to 2,500

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - President Donald Trump's plan to cut US military deployments in Afghanistan from about 5,000 to 2,500 won an endorsement from House Armed Services Committee Chair Adam Smith in a press release.

"After speaking with the Acting Secretary [of Defense] this morning, I believe reducing our forward deployed footprint in Afghanistan down to 2,500 troops is the right policy decision. At the same time, this reduction must be responsibly and carefully executed to ensure stability in the region," Smith said on Tuesday.

Smith also said after nearly 20 years of armed conflict, Americans and Afghans alike are ready for the violence to end.

Groups like the Islamic State terror group (banned in Russia) and the Taliban will continue to fight and sow chaos, but "ultimately it is up to the Afghans to find a sustainable path to peace," Smith added.

Smith noted that the US military's original mission was to prevent transnational terrorists from launching an attack against the United States from Afghanistan. He urged the Trump administration to coordinate its drawdown with allied and partner nations, to meet original goals of the US intervention to prevent terrorist attacks launched from the nation.

Smith issued the release following a meeting with acting US Defense Secretary Christopher Miller, who replaced fired defense chief Mark Esper after President Donald Trump earlier this month.

While the release did not attempt to characterize Miller's views, Miller said in his first address to US forces over the weekend that it was time to come home, according to media reports.

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#### SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, November 17(Sputnik)

#### US REDUCES TROOP LEVELS IN AFGHANISTAN, IRAQ

\* Acting Defense Secretary Christopher Miller announced on Tuesday the Trump administration plans to reduce by January 15 the number of US troops in Afghanistan and Iraq to 2,500 in each country.

\* Afghanistan has enough resources to stop relying on foreign troops, First Deputy Minister of Defense Shah Mahmood Miakhel told Sputnik.

#### NAGORNO-KARABAKH

\* It is an exaggeration to think that the United States and France would be offended by their lack of involvement in the signing of the ceasefire agreement that ended the recent Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Tuesday.

\* The Turkish parliament approved the decree by the president on sending the Turkish military to Azerbaijan, the voting results showed.

\* Another 502 refugees arrived in Stepanakert, so that the number of residents, who had previously left their homes and then returned, exceeded 1,700, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

\* A joint Russian-Turkish center will use unmanned aerial vehicles to monitor the situation on the frontlines in Nagorno-Karabakh as the ceasefire in the disputed region continues to hold, Putin said.

#### EU-BELARUS RELATIONS

\* Belarus is preparing a substantial response to the possible expansion of sanctions by the European Union, Foreign Minister Vladimir Makei said on Tuesday.

\* Belarus will reduce its participation in the EU Eastern Partnership initiative to the level of experts due to the politicized approach of the partners, Makei said.

#### OPEC+ MINISTERIAL MEETING

\* The compliance of the OPEC+ oil producing countries with the oil production curtailment agreement last month reached 101 percent, OPEC said on Tuesday after the Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee (JMMC) meeting.

\* At the recent meeting of the joint ministerial monitoring committee (JMMC), OPEC+ states agreed to continue monitoring the situation on the oil market and consider its actions for 2021 at a meeting of the alliance on December 1, the Russian government said.

\* The next meeting of the OPEC+ Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee (JMMC) is scheduled for December 17, while the Joint Technical Committee (JTC) will meet on December 16, OPEC said in a communique.

## BRICS LEADERS MEETING

\* BRICS countries want to prepare a legally binding document that would ensure that there are no weapons in space, the declaration of BRICS leaders said on Tuesday.

\* BRICS countries welcome the ceasefire agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh region and support political efforts to restore peace there, the declaration, which was adopted at the summit of BRICS leaders, said.

\* BRICS countries should speed up their work on establishment of joint center for development of vaccines, Russian President Vladimir Putin said Tuesday at a BRICS summit.

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## US State of Georgia Audits Dominion Vote Machines, Finds No Foul Play - Statement

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - An audit of Dominion voting machines that were used during the presidential election in the US state of Georgia found no evidence of being hacked or tampered, Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger announced in a statement on Tuesday.

"Pro V&V found no evidence of the machines being tampered. We are glad but not surprised that the audit of the state's voting machines was an unqualified success," Raffensperger said.

Last week, he ordered Pro V&V, a US Election Assistance Commission certified testing laboratory, to do an audit of a random sample of Dominion Voting Systems voting machines throughout the state using forensic techniques.

"According to the Pro V&V audit, all of the software and firmware on the sampled machines was verified to be the software and firmware certified for use by the Office of the Secretary of State,"

according to the statement. "Coupled with the risk-limiting audit of all paper ballots relying solely on the printed text of the ballots, these steps confirm the assessment of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency that there are no signs of cyber attacks or election hacking." Some Trump supporters allege that Dominion voting machines deleted hundreds of thousands of ballots cast for the incumbent or switched them to his Democratic rival Joe Biden who was declared the winner of the race by major US media outlets. Trump refuses to concede, accuses all-denying opponents of stealing the election through massive fraud and files lawsuits in an attempt to block Biden's path to the White House.

Georgia, one of key battleground states, where Trump trails Biden by just 14,000 votes, is performing a manual recount of all ballots due to the proximity of the results.

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US Designates 2 Senior Leaders of Al-Shabab as Global Terrorists - Pompeo

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - The United States has designated two senior leaders of the al-Shabab terror organization as global terrorists, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced in a statement on Tuesday.

"Today, the Department of State has designated Abdullahi Osman Mohamed and Maalim Ayman, senior leaders of al-Shabaab, the Somalia-based al-Qa'ida affiliate, as Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGTs)," Pompeo said.

Pompeo explained in the statement that Abdullahi Osman Mohamed, known as "Engineer Ismail," is the group's senior explosives expert in charge of al-Shabaab's explosives operations and manufacturing.

"He is also a special adviser to the so-called "emir" of al-Shabaab and is the leader of al-Shabaab's media wing, al-Kataib," he noted.

Maalim Ayman, Pompeo continued to say, is the leader of Jaysh Ayman, which is the group's unit carrying out terrorist attacks and operations in Kenya and Somalia. "Ayman was responsible for preparing the January 2020 attack on Camp Simba in Manda Bay, Kenya, that killed one U.S. military service member and two American contractors," Pompeo said.

Al-Shabab is widely considered to be the most active affiliate of the al-Qaeda terror group (banned in Russia).

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**Trump Hopes to Have All US Troops Home from Afghanistan, Iraq by May - White House**

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump expects to bring all the remaining forces from Afghanistan and Iraq by May, White House National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien said on Tuesday.

Acting Defense Secretary Christopher Miller earlier on Thursday formally announced plans to cut the number of troops to 2,500 each in Afghanistan and Iraq by January 15.

"By May it is President Trump's hope that they will come home safely and in their entirety," O'Brien said.

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**US Senate Majority Leader Warns Against 'Precipitous Drawdown' From Iraq, Afghanistan**

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - US Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell in a press conference on Tuesday warned against a steep withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan and Iraq.

Earlier on Tuesday, Acting Defense Secretary Christopher Miller announced plans to reduce by January 15 the number of US troops in Afghanistan and Iraq to 2,500 in each country.

"I think it's extremely important here in the next couple of months not to have any earthshaking changes with regard to defense and foreign policy. I think a precipitous drawdown in either Afghanistan or Iraq would be a mistake. I have so said publicly yesterday, and I hope that's precisely where these discussions end up," McConnell said.

The Senate Majority Leader said on Monday that the "premature" withdrawal of US troops could have disastrous consequences.

Roughly 4,500 US armed forces personnel are currently stationed in Afghanistan and 3,000 in Iraq.

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#### US Withdrew 3,600 Troops From Afghanistan in 3 Months - Inspectors General

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) – The United States pulled 3,600 American service members from Afghanistan, leaving about 5,000 military personnel in the country at the end of September, US inspector generals said on Tuesday.

"The United States met its commitments to reduce the number of troops in Afghanistan to 8,600 and to withdraw from five bases in Afghanistan by July," a press release summarizing the report said. "Since July, the United States continued a steady reduction military personnel, and then-Secretary of Defense Mark Esper stated that the United States would have fewer than 5,000 military members in Afghanistan by the end of November."

The report came from the inspector generals from the Defense and State Departments plus the Agency for International Development (USAID).

The initial withdrawal completed in July followed a US.-Taliban agreement signed on February 29 in Qatar. The subsequent withdrawal in the July-September quarter coincided with September 12 peace talks between the Afghan government and Taliban, also in Qatar, the release added.

The report noted that peace negotiations had stalled by the end of September amid an increase in Taliban attacks against government forces, leading to "distressingly high" levels of violence threatening negotiations.

US media outlets reported on Monday that US military commanders had been told to begin preparations to cut current Afghan deployments in half and to withdraw about 500 troops from about 3,000 now in Iraq.

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#### One-Third of Americans Consider China a US "Enemy," Nearly Double Level in 2018 - Poll

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - A third of Americans now view China - the source of the novel coronavirus pandemic - as an enemy nation, almost twice the 18 percent level in early 2018, a new Rasmussen Reports poll revealed on Tuesday.

"Thirty-three percent now consider China an enemy of the United States, up from 18 percent in March 2018 and a new high. Twelve percent still see the Chinese as allies, while 47 percent rate them somewhere in between," a press release explaining the poll said.

Reflecting the impact of the coronavirus crisis on public opinion toward China, 60 percent of those surveyed said that the country should pay at least some of the financial costs of addressing the pandemic, the release said.

In mid-March, the early stages of the pandemic, just 42 percent said China should swallow at least some costs of the global response, which rose to 53 percent in July, the release added.

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Pentagon Chief Announces Reducing US Troops in Iraq, Afghanistan to 2,500 by January 15

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - Acting Defense Secretary Christopher Miller announced on Tuesday plans to reduce by January 15 the number of US troops in Afghanistan and Iraq to 2,500 in each country.

"By January 15, 2021, our forces, their size in Afghanistan will be 2,500 troops. Our force size in Iraq will also be 2,500 by that same day," Miller told reporters during a Defense Department briefing.

Miller presented the move to reduce in half US military presence in both countries as a decision of President Donald Trump.

Miller said Trump's decision is based on continuous engagement with his national security cabinet for the past several months, including ongoing discussions with him and various colleagues across the United States government.

"I have also spoken with our military commanders and we all will execute this repositioning in a way that protects our fighting men and women, our partners in the intelligence community and diplomatic corps and our superb allies that are critical to rebuilding Afghan and Iraqi security capabilities and civil society for a lasting peace in troubled lands," Miller said.

The Acting Defense Secretary added that he updated on the plans the key leaders in Congress as well as United States' allies abroad, including NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg and Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani.

"We went in together, we adjust together, when the time is right we will leave together," Miller said.

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Netanyahu Spoke to 'US President-Elect' Biden, Agreed to Meet Soon - Statement

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Joe Biden on Tuesday held a conversation over the telephone and agreed to meet soon, Netanyahu's office said in a statement referring to Biden as the "US President-elect." "Prime Minister Netanyahu spoke this evening (Tuesday, 17 November 2020) with US President-elect Joe Biden. In a warm conversation, the President-elect reiterated his deep commitment to the State of Israel and its security," the statement said. Major US media networks projected Biden to be the winner of the 2020 US presidential election. However, President Donald Trump said he is the winner, but his victory has been stolen by a massive election fraud and impropriety. Trump has demanded audits and recounts in several states and filed lawsuits in state and federal courts. Some states have said they did not find instances of substantial election irregularities, but several counties in other states have corrected election tallies. Netanyahu's office noted that the Israeli Prime Minister said that the special bond between Israel and the United States "is a fundamental component of Israel's security and its policy." Netanyahu and Biden agreed to meet soon in order to discuss many issues on the agenda and reiterated the need to continue bolstering the steadfast alliance between the United States and Israel, the statement said.

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Palestine Ready to Attend if Biden Supports Conference on 2-State Solution- Prime Minister

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - Palestine is prepared to attend an international conference aimed at reaching a two state solution if Joe Biden - projected by US media networks to be the winner of the 2020 presidential election - is willing to support such a gathering, Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority Mohammad Shtayyeh said in Tuesday. "We are calling for our right for self-determination... Our strategy is very clear: we want two states through peaceful means on the negotiating table," Shtayyeh said. "We are ready for three things. One, international conference on the basis of international law, under the auspices of the quartet, we are ready for that. If President Biden is ready for this, we will be more than happy to attend." Shtayyeh said a second option would be for Palestine to resume talks with Israel right away if Israel is ready to resuming the talks from where they ended in 2014. "And what was the agenda of these talks - Jerusalem, refugees, borders, security and water," he said. "The third, as I said earlier... the moment Israel is ready to respect the agreement, we are ready to engage. Very simple."

Shtayyeh also noted that a Palestinian engagement has four dimensions - a political-security one, but also economic, financial and legal.

"So, we will sit down with the Israelis and see where things are going," Shtayyeh said. "The two state solution is the only option for both of us because the rest of it is a disaster for us and for the Israelis. It is not sustainable for them, it is not sustainable for us... We are committed to direct negotiations or we are ready for an international conference."

The two-state solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict envisages an independent state of Palestine alongside the state of Israel, west of the Jordan River. The boundary between the two states is still subject of dispute, with Palestinian and Arab leaders insisting on the 1967 borders that are not accepted by Israel.

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Global Air Cargo Requires 2,430 Dedicated Aircraft Over Next 20 Years - Boeing

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - Nearly 2,500 aircraft exclusively dedicated to carrying freight will be needed to handle a projected increase in air cargo over the next two decades, Boeing said in a report on Tuesday.

"Enabled by a rebound in global trade and long-term growth, the WACF [World Air Cargo Forecast] forecasts demand for 2,430 freighters over the next 20 years, including 930 new production freighters and 1,500 freighters converted from passenger airplanes," a press release summarizing the report said.

The novel coronavirus pandemic, while slashing passenger airline traffic, has led to an expansion of e-commerce, thereby boosting demand for cargo-only carriers in the near term, the release said.

As a result, about 200 airlines have converted more than 2,000 passenger wide-body aircraft for cargo-only operations thus far in 2020, in some cases generating quarterly profits for carriers despite minimal passenger operations, the release added.

Traffic for all cargo air carriers increased 6 percent this year, and Boeing predicted that cargo growth will continue as e-commerce keeps expanding after the pandemic subsides.

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US Designates 2 Senior Leaders of Al-Shabab as Global Terrorists - Pompeo

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - The United States has designated two senior leaders of the al-Shabab terror organization as global terrorists, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced in a statement on Tuesday.

"Today, the Department of State has designated Abdullahi Osman Mohamed and Maalim Ayman, senior leaders of al-Shabaab, the Somalia-based al-Qa'ida affiliate, as Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGTs)," Pompeo said.

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Syria's Kurds Keep 2,000 Foreign Terrorists, 70,000 Family Members - US Official

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - The United States is aware of 2,000 foreign terrorist fighters held in the custody by Kurdish militias in Syria together with some 70,000 of their family members and advocates that they be repatriated, the US State Department Coordinator for Counterterrorism Nathan Sales said on Tuesday.

"We assess there is about two thousand foreign terrorist fighters who have been captured in Syria and are currently in the custody of the Syrian Democratic Forces, our Kurdish partners on the ground," Sales said. "I should say they really come from all over the globe, a handful from the United States, a much bigger handful from Western Europe and Central Asia, a lot from North Africa."

The Justice Department announced earlier that every US citizen who was accused in Syria of supporting the Islamic State terror organization (banned in Russia) has been repatriated to face criminal charges.

Sales mentioned the Justice Department announcement, but did not clarify whether his previous words imply that there are more Americans held in Syria by the Kurds.

"We assess that in addition to that two thousand fighters there is another 70 thousand or so family members from Western Europe, Syria, Iraq and indeed the rest of the world... Keeping them in makeshift prisons in desert is no-one's idea of a long-term solution," Sales said. "What we need to do is to make sure that these fighters will never be able to return to the battlefield. That's not going to happen if they are in a makeshift prison that used to be a school."

In addition, Sales said if fighters have committed crimes they need to face justice and if their family member have been exposed to the toxic Islamic State ideology they need to be rehabilitated and reintegrated into society.

The United States is ready to assist every country with repatriation of its citizens from Syria, Sales added

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Senior US Official Pledges Cooperation With Moldovan President-Elect Sandu - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - US Under Secretary of State David Hale talked to Moldovan President-elect Maia Sandu and expressed the United States' commitment to

cooperate with Moldova, State Department spokesperson Cale Brown said in a statement on Tuesday.

"Under Secretary Hale congratulated President-elect Sandu on her victory in the November 15 presidential election, and noted the U.S. commitment to advancing cooperation on shared priorities including the rule of law, combatting corruption, fostering economic growth, and supporting Moldova's sovereignty and territorial integrity," Brown said.

Moldova held a run-off election on Sunday, in which incumbent President Igor Dodon faced former Prime Minister Sandu.

According to the Central Election Commission's data, Sandu won 57.75 percent of the vote while Dodon won 42.25 percent.

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US Urges Armenia, Azerbaijan to Re-Engage With Minsk Group to Settle Conflict - Pompeo

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - The United States has urged Armenia and Azerbaijan to re-engage promptly with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group Co-Chairs to reach a sustainable solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement on Tuesday.

"We urge the sides to re-engage as soon as possible with the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs to pursue a lasting and sustainable political solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict based on the Helsinki Final Act principles of the non-use or threat of force, territorial integrity, and the self-determination and equal rights of peoples," Pompeo said.

As a Co-Chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, the United States is fully engaged in this effort and has welcomed the recent ceasefire agreement between the sides, Pompeo said.

The Secretary of State pointed out that the United States will provide \$5 million in support of humanitarian operations in the region after the armed confrontation there.

"The new assistance, provided by the Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development, will support local efforts to provide food, health, shelter, and other emergency assistance to conflict-affected persons," Pompeo said.

The Secretary of State called on the international community to also increase support to respond to the needs of civilians in the region.

Last week, the leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia adopted a joint statement on the cessation of hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh from November 10.

Under the terms of the deal, Azerbaijan retains control of the territories it captured during the conflict, while Russia deploys peacekeepers along the line of contact of the warring parties and to the Lachin corridor connecting Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia.

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## US Official Pledges Washington Will Watch Taliban Closely Amid Troop Drawdown Expectations

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - The United States does not absolve the Taliban movement of their commitments and is going to watch their compliance closely despite expectations of an expedited troop drawdown from Afghanistan, US State Department Coordinator for Counterterrorism Nathan Sales said on Tuesday.

Sales refused to elaborate on media reports that President Donald Trump wants to reduce the US contingent in Afghanistan by almost half from current levels to 2,500 servicemen before Inauguration Day on January 20.

"We have made commitments to the Taliban, the Taliban have made commitments to the United States. And we expect them to leave up to their obligations. Secretary of State [Mike Pompeo] has been perfectly clear that any future action by the United States in terms of implementing various other portions of that deal are entirely contingent upon the Taliban living up to their commitments they have made to us," Sales said.

Sales also said the United States will watch very closely the verification of the commitments undertaken by the Taliban.

"There is the old Russian proverb or saying... 'trust but verify.' In this case, it is just verify. We are going to be watching very closely to verify that the Taliban are living up to their word," he added.

On Monday, media reported that the US Defense Department is anticipating an order from the White House to reduce by half the number of troops in Afghanistan and Iraq by mid-January.

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US, UK Sign Civil Air Transport Agreement - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - The United States and the United Kingdom have signed a bilateral civil Air Transport Agreement, the US State Department said in a statement on Tuesday.

"The agreement includes all of the essential elements of Open Skies, such as unrestricted capacity and frequency, open routes, open code-sharing opportunities, a liberal charter regime and market-determined pricing," the statement said.

The agreement also provides special traffic rights for cargo carriers and full market access to United Kingdom overseas territories, the statement said.

"Pending the agreement's entry into force via an exchange of diplomatic notes, both sides are prepared to apply its terms on the basis of comity and reciprocity as soon as the US-EU Air Transport Agreement no longer applies to the United Kingdom," the statement said.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Secretary of Transportation Elaine Chao signed the agreement a week ago in Washington, while British State Secretary for Transport Grant Shapps completed the process today.

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US Provides \$5Mln to Support Aid Operations in Karabakh After Recent Fighting - Pompeo

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) -The United States will provide \$5 million in support of humanitarian operations in Nagorno-Karabakh following the recent armed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the region, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement on Tuesday.

"In tandem with our diplomatic engagement, the United States is providing \$5 million in humanitarian assistance to support the operations of the International Committee of the Red Cross and other international organization and non-governmental organization partners to assist people affected by the recent fighting," Pompeo said.

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US Gives Chevron Until June 2021 to Wind Down Operations in Venezuela - Treasury

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - The US government has extended energy giant Chevron's deadline to wind down operations in Venezuela by June 2021, the Treasury Department said in a statement on Tuesday.

"All transactions and activities prohibited by E.O. [Executive Order] 13850, as amended, or E.O. 13884... that are ordinarily incident and necessary to the wind down of operations, contracts, or other agreements in Venezuela involving PdVSA or any entity in which PdVSA owns... are authorized through 12:01 a.m. eastern daylight time, June 3, 2021," the statement said.

PdVSA refers to Venezuela's state-owned oil and natural gas company Petroleos de Venezuela, S.A.

The Treasury Department said the order with respect to Chevron also applies to Halliburton, Schlumberger Limited, Baker Hughes and Weatherford International.

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Biden Campaign Members Cement Selected White House Positions - Transition Team

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - Several members of projected President Joe Biden's campaign have cemented their selected positions at the White House, the Biden transition team announced on Tuesday.

"The Biden-Harris White House Senior Staff will be composed of diverse, experienced and talented individuals who demonstrate President-elect Biden's commitment to building an administration that looks like America, has deep expertise governing, and will be ready to help the president-elect deliver results for working families on Day One," the transition team said. Deputy campaign manager Anthony Bernal will serve as Senior Adviser to Jill Biden, chief strategist for the Biden campaign Mike Donilon will serve as Senior Adviser to the President and Biden campaign manager Jen O'Malley Dillion will serve as Deputy Chief of Staff.

General counsel to the Biden campaign Dana Remus will serve as Counsel to the President, Biden campaign chairman Steve Ricchetti will serve as Counselor to the President, US Congressman Cedric Richmond will serve as Senior Advisor to the President and director of the White House Office of Public Engagement, and former US Ambassador to Uruguay Julissa Reynoso Pantaleon will serve as Chief of Staff to Jill Biden.

Deputy campaign manager Julie Rodriguez will serve as the director of the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs and campaign aide Annie Tomasini will serve as Director of Oval Office operations.

Major media outlets have projected Democratic nominee to be the winner of the 2020 presidential election but the results have not been certified and they are disputed. President Donald Trump has said he is the winner of the election, but the victory was stolen via massive election fraud and impropriety.

At present, Trump is seeking redress by asking for audits and recounts in several states and filing lawsuits in state and federal courts. Some states have said they found no evidence or insufficient evidence of substantial election fraud.

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McConnell Urges Senate, House to Finish Funding US Gov't. in 2021 by End of Week

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell on Tuesday urged negotiators from both chambers of Congress to agree this week on spending levels in each of 12 appropriations bills needed to fund the US government in fiscal 2021, even as lawmakers remain deadlocked over the next COVID-19 relief package.

"What needs to happen now is quite simple," McConnell said in a speech on the Senate floor. "Our colleagues on the committees and their counterparts in the House need continue their bicameral discussions on several of top line dollar amounts for each separate bill."

McConnell said he was hopeful for an overall agreement "by the end of this very week."

At the same time, McConnell indicated there was little likelihood of the House and Senate agreeing on a COVID-19 relief package to supplement the \$2.3 trillion CARES Act approved earlier.

McConnell said the Senate had previously approved hundreds of billions of dollars in aid to workers and businesses, but was unwilling to accept a House-passed measure to create what he called a slush fund for state governments that is not directly related to the coronavirus pandemic.

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Twitter Labels 300,000 Tweets for Being 'Misleading' on US Election - CEO Dorsey

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - Twitter has labeled 300,000 tweets as misleading on the November 3 US election, Chief Executive Jack Dorsey said on Tuesday during a Senate hearing held to question the CEOs of social media companies, including Facebook, on their companies' conduct during the election.

"We applied labels to add context and limit the risk of harmful election misinformation spreading without important context because the public told us they wanted us to take these steps,"

Dorsey told the hearing. "An initial assessment of our efforts from October 27th to November 11th has found the following: Approximately 300,000 Tweets have been labeled under our Civic Integrity Policy for content that was disputed and potentially misleading. These represent 0.2 percent of all US election-related Tweets sent during this time period."

President Donald Trump, White House officials and his Republican allies have accused Twitter and Facebook of unfairly targeting tweets by the president and his supporters during the election, while being more lenient with those issued by the Democratic party and its candidate Joe Biden, who is the projected winner of the election.

Twitter has labeled many posts by Trump as potentially misleading on the election, including ones in which he disputed official results, alleged fraud or claimed he had won.

The president and his supporters were infuriated with Twitter even before the election for blocking the sharing of a New York Post story on alleged wrongdoing by Biden and his son Hunter in dealings with China during the Obama administration years when the Democrat served as vice-president.

Dorsey said Twitter got ahead of potentially misleading information by showing every US user on the microblogging site series of what he called "pre-bunk prompts."

"These prompts, which were seen 389 million times, appeared in people's home timelines and in search, and reminded people that the announcement of election results were likely to be delayed, and that voting by mail is safe and legitimate. Our efforts to safeguard the conversation on Twitter about the 2020 US elections continue unabated," he said.

Of the 3000,000 tweets that were labeled, a total of 456 were covered by a warning message and had engagement features limited, where the tweets could be Quote Tweeted but not Retweeted, replied to, or liked, Dorsey said.

Approximately 74 percent of viewers saw those tweets after they were labeled, and there was an estimated 29 percent decrease in quote tweets of those labeled, he added.

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**US Condemns Attack by Tigray People's Liberation Front, Urges De-Escalation - Pompeo**

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) - The United States has denounced the attack by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) on an airport in Eritrea and is calling on all parties to de-escalate, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement on Tuesday.

"The United States strongly condemns the attack carried out by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) on the airport in Eritrea's capital of Asmara on November 14," Pompeo said.

On Saturday, media reported that at least two rockets, suspected to have been launched by the leaders of Ethiopia's Tigray Region, have hit Asmara. Eyewitness said the rockets appeared to be long-range missiles.

Pompeo said the United States is deeply concerned by the TPLF's attempt to cause regional instability and expand its conflict with the Ethiopian authorities to neighboring countries."

"We also continue to denounce the TPLF's November 13 missile attacks on the Bahir Dar and Gondar airports in Ethiopia," he said.

Pompeo pointed out that the United States is strongly urging the TPLF and the Ethiopian authorities to de-escalate the conflict and protect civilians, adding that Washington appreciates Eritrea's restraint that has helped prevent further spreading of the conflict.

On Saturday, Chairman of the TPLF and acting President of Tigray Region Debretsion Gebremichael claimed responsibility for two missile attacks in the Amhara region of Ethiopia and did not exclude more strikes, including in Eritrea, saying on Tigray TV that all means would be used "to defend ourselves."

At the beginning of November, the Ethiopian government accused the TPLF of attacking a federal military base and launched an offensive in the Tigray Region.

The Ethiopian Parliament approved last week the establishment of a provisional government in Tigray. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali said law enforcement operations in Tigray were proceeding as planned and that they would cease only when the "criminal junta" is disarmed.

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#### US Shoots Down ICBM With Interceptor Missile Fired from Navy Ship – Pentagon

WASHINGTON, November 17 (Sputnik) – A US Navy warship shot down an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) over the Pacific Ocean during a successful test of a ship-launched interceptor, the Missile Defense Agency said in a statement on Tuesday.

"The US Missile Defense Agency (MDA), and US Navy sailors aboard the USS John Finn (DDG-113), an Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) System-equipped destroyer, intercepted and destroyed a threat-representative Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) target with a Standard Missile-3 (SM-3) Block IIA missile during a flight test demonstration in the broad ocean area northeast of Hawaii, Nov. 16," the statement said.

The MDA launched the ICBM target toward the ocean northeast of Hawaii at around 7:50 p.m. local time from a test site located on the Kwajalein Atoll in the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the statement said.

The Navy destroyer used tracking information provided by the Command and Control Battle Management Communications (C2BMC) network to track and destroy the target with the SM-3 Block IIA guided missile.

MDA Director Jon Hill described the test, the first of its kind, as an "incredible accomplishment" and a "critical milestone" for the military.

"We have demonstrated that an Aegis BMD-equipped vessel equipped with the SM-3 Block IIA missile can defeat an ICBM-class target," he said in the statement.

The MDA suggested that the test, which was delayed from May 2020 due to COVID-19 restrictions, met its primary goal to demonstrate the ability of an SM-3 Block IIA missile to intercept an ICBM target.