

1/3/22 Monday

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Saudi Coalition Intercepts Five Drones Launched by Yemen's Houthis From Sana'a
By - Morgan Artyukhina

Saudi air defenses intercepted several explosives-laden drones launched by Yemen's Houthi movement and targeting the country's border region with Yemen, Saudi state television reported late on Monday.

The drones were reportedly launched from near Sana'a, the Yemeni capital controlled by the rebel Houthi movement. They reportedly followed intercepts of three other drones the day prior. "We are monitoring the sources of the threat to destroy and neutralize them," the Saudi military said, [according to Arab News](#). "Operational options are on the table in response to the threat and deterring the hostile behavior of the Houthi militia."

The Saudi Royal Air Force has pounded Sana'a and the Houthi [front lines in Ma'rib](#) Governorate for months, part of a yearslong campaign to block the Zaidi Shiite movement from seizing the entire country from the control of Yemeni President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi. [Recent airstrikes](#) in Sana'a late last month, which the Riyadh-led coalition said targeted munitions and drones used to target the kingdom, caused a massive explosion and several fires.

The Saudi and Emirati air forces have enjoyed near-total air supremacy since the war began in 2015, but in recent years the Houthis have mounted near-daily strikes into Saudi Arabia itself, targeting military bases and civilian infrastructure, such as the petroleum facilities essential to the Saudi economy, with drones and ballistic missiles.

The United Arab Emirates has mostly pulled out of the war, and the United States claims to have ended its support for Saudi offensive operations in Yemen. However, Washington continues to sell the Saudi monarchy [air defense weaponry](#), enabling it to better fend off Houthi attacks and continue to prosecute its bombing campaign with minimal consequences on the home front.

The bombing campaign has destroyed Yemen's already-fragile infrastructure, and combined with a Saudi blockade of the country, it has created what the [United Nations referred to](#) as the world's worst humanitarian crisis. UN [estimates from late November](#) put the war's death toll at 377,000, the majority of whom have died from noncombat causes such as famine, diseases like cholera and COVID-19, a lack of access to adequate food, water, or medicine, and other infrastructure-related causes.

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US Jury Finds Theranos Founder Elizabeth Holmes Guilty on 4 of 11 Fraud Counts
By - Morgan Artyukhina

A California jury has reached a verdict in the fraud case against Elizabeth Holmes, the disgraced founder of tech startup Theranos.

The jury found Holmes guilty on four of the 11 charges brought against her: one count of conspiracy against Theranos investors between 2010 and 2015, one count of wire fraud against Theranos investors, and two counts of wire fraud.

The jury also found her not guilty of one count of conspiracy against patients who paid for blood testing services between 2013 and 2016, one count of wire fraud in connection with a bank transfer, and two counts of wire fraud in connection with two different patients' lab results.

The jury failed to reach a verdict on two counts of wire fraud in connection with money transfers, which could potentially be retried. A 12th charge was dropped.

Each charge brings up to 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine, plus restitution costs. Holmes is 37 years old.

The jury has deliberated in San Jose for [more than two weeks](#), coming after a three-month-long trial during which the prosecution brought 29 witnesses, including ex-Theranos employees, retail executives and former US Secretary of Defense Jim [Mattis, who served](#) on Theranos' board. The defense called just three witnesses.

Holmes founded Theranos in 2003, claiming the firm would revolutionize blood testing by using just a few drops of blood to detect a wider range of diseases than ever before. The company drew millions in investment and was valued at \$9 billion by 2014. However, revelations in 2015 that the company's equipment was only capable of performing a dozen tests instead of the 1,000 Holmes had told investors, and that Theranos was actually using other manufacturers' machines to run their tests, led to closer examinations by the authorities and the filing of charges against Holmes and Theranos CEO Ramesh Balwani in 2018. [Theranos folded](#) that same year.

Balwani faces the same charges as Holmes and is set to be tried in February.

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Ramped Up US Sanctions Sending Cuba Closer to Russia & China, Moscow's Trade Rep Says
By - Morgan Artyukhina

Cuba, China and Russia helped form a UN group of 18 nations in March 2021 to stand up against unilateral sanctions and other moves against them by the United States and European Union.

Cuba's relationships with Russia and China have deepened in recent years as US sanctions attempt to choke off all trade with the socialist island nation.

Aleksandr Bogatyr, Russia's trade representative in Havana, told Russian media on Friday that while bilateral trade in 2021 was still suffering due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which hit Cuba badly in the middle of the year, recent economic reforms hold the promise of further opening up trade with Russia.

"The exit from tough anti-COVID restrictions gradually returns the life of people and functioning of the economy to a normal path," Bogatyr said. "Indeed it is still far from the 'as it was' state in Cuba just as globally, but the process is underway."

He noted that Cuba's gross domestic product declined by 11% in 2020, the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, and was only expected to grow by about 2% in 2021. Trade turnover with Cuba totaled \$97.9 million between January and October 2021, about 14.5% less than the same period in 2020.

A week prior, the Cuban Foreign Ministry said in a ministerial-level meeting with their Russian counterparts, "the parties exchanged views on various urgent issues of the international multilateral agenda, including the aggravation of the economic, trade and financial blockade imposed by the US government against Cuba in the context of the [coronavirus] pandemic."

Russia's Long Friendship With Cuba

The US has maintained sanctions barring most trade with Cuba since the 1959 revolution that ousted the US-backed dictator Fulgencio Batista and ushered in a socialist government, which allied itself with the Soviet Union. The USSR became Cuba's primary trade partner, providing it with fuel and machinery in exchange for buying up the sugar it once sold to the US, but this time at prices balanced in Havana's favor.

That relationship ended when the USSR dissolved in 1991, plunging Cuba into the Special Period of economic strife. However, Cuba's relations with Russia slowly improved, making a major leap in 2014, when the US and its allies positioned themselves as opposing Russia's so-called aggression against Ukraine. Crimea declared independence from Ukraine and voted to rejoin Russia after a US-backed coup brought a right-wing nationalist government to power in Kiev, but the NATO powers refused to recognize the Crimean referendum's legitimacy and began treating Russia as an enemy, positioning large numbers of troops in the NATO nations on Russia's western border.

That year, [Moscow forgave 90%](#) of Cuba's \$32 billion Cold War-era debt. Three years later, when US sanctions on Venezuela began seriously impeding that country's "oil for doctors" deal with Cuba, [Russia stepped in](#) and sent them 250,000 tons of oil and diesel fuel.

In October 2020, Cuban Foreign Minister [Bruno Rodriguez said](#) the blockade had cost Cuba a total of \$144 billion in lost revenue which, "for a small economy like Cuba's, is an overwhelming burden," he noted.

"Not a week goes by without some new additional measure against Cuba and its population being issued in Washington," Rodriguez said at the time, calling the sanctions "an act of genocide and economic warfare" against the Cuban people.

That was before the July 2021 protests fueled by anger over power brownouts associated with the island's largest-ever Covid outbreak, which [the US seized on](#) as anti-government demonstrations and mounted an all-out ideological offensive to amplify and drive a deeper wedge into Cuban society. A slew of [new sanctions followed](#), adding to the [243 new sanctions](#) put in place by former US President Donald Trump since 2017.

However, the summer outbreak was followed by a mass vaccination campaign which by [October had succeeded](#) at getting 82.8% of the population at least one shot from one of several indigenously developed SARS-CoV-2 vaccines; on Friday, the Cuban Ministry of [Public Health announced](#) that 86.4% of Cubans had finished their vaccination scheme. The victory allowed

both [schools and tourism](#) to reopen in November, bringing the promise of greater economic recovery.

Despite the lower overall numbers, in 2021 Russia became Cuba's primary tourism market, with 170,000 Russian tourists visiting the island by the end of November, [according to Cuban Tourism Minister Juan Carlos Garcia](#).

Cuba Joins China's BRI

Cuba's relationship with China has burgeoned in recent years, as well. In late December, the two governments signed a cooperation plan to promote the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a massive world-spanning infrastructure project begun by China, [Kawsachun News reported](#). The agreement lays out a timetable and various areas of cooperation, including infrastructure, technology, culture, education, tourism, energy, communications and biotechnology, which the paper notes are "in line with Cuba's development plans for the short and long term." Cuba had previously joined the BRI's energy partnership in October, which promises to help them achieve their 2030 goal of producing [24% of its energy](#) from renewable sources, such as with wind turbines and photovoltaic cells.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) is already Cuba's largest trading partner, and Cuba is China's second-largest trading partner in the Caribbean. Beijing's relationships in the Caribbean are expanding all around, with [Nicaragua recently switching](#) its recognition of the Chinese government from Taipei to Beijing - again, under the pressure of US sanctions against its left-wing government. Honduras' president-elect, Xiomara Castro, ran on a platform of making the same switch, but recently her incoming administration indicated that change [wouldn't be immediate](#).

"China is actively maintaining the normal order of international relations and striving to promote common development across the world, unlike the US, which, under the banner of democracy, has imposed an economic embargo on some Latin American countries, interfering in their internal affairs and limiting cooperation among foreign companies," Zhou Zhiwei, a research fellow on Latin American studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, [told the Global Times](#).

Like Russia and Cuba, China has also become the target of US hostility in recent years as Washington shifts its global strategy from the War on Terror toward what it calls "great power competition" with Moscow and Beijing. While the change was articulated under Trump, US President Joe Biden has maintained and expanded that strategy, deepening its sanctions and its ideological offensive against all three nations and many more, such as Venezuela, Iran, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and Eritrea.

In March 2021, all the above-mentioned states joined up with more than a dozen others commonly targeted by US foreign policy to form the Group of Friends in Defense of the Charter of the United Nations. The [group of 18 nations said](#) it was concerned about "a growing resort to unilateralism, marked by isolationist and arbitrary actions, including the imposition of unilateral coercive measures or the withdrawal from landmark agreements and multilateral institutions, as well as by attempts to undermine critical efforts to tackle common and global challenges."

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Israel's Mossad Bombed German, Swiss Firms in 1980s Aiding Pakistan's Nuclear Program, Paper Claims

By - Morgan Artyukhina

Last month, a Jewish London paper revealed that Israel's Mossad was behind a slew of recent bombings and sabotage operations against Iranian nuclear facilities, ostensibly aimed at preventing an Iranian nuclear bomb, even though Israel's own military intelligence says Iran isn't trying to develop one.

The Mossad's secret espionage campaign against Iran's nuclear program may have actually begun decades ago: according to one Swiss paper, the intelligence agency bombed firms helping Pakistan's infant nuclear weapons effort as well, fearful it would aid Tehran's quest for a bomb.

A [report in the Saturday](#) edition of Switzerland's Neue Zürcher Zeitung (NZZ) claims that "new, previously unknown documents from archives in Bern and Washington" reveal that a series of bombings in Germany and Switzerland in the early 1980s that has long been [attributed to the Mossad](#) actually had more explicit connections to Iran than previously known.

The first victim was Eduard German, the managing director of CORA Engineering, whose house in Berne was bombed on February 20, 1981, although he survived the explosion. CORA had supplied Pakistan with a gasification and solidification unit two years earlier, and was preparing to export another rig.

The second target was the office of Wälischmiller Engineering in Markdorf, where a bomb exploded on May 18, 1981.

The third was against Heinz Mebus, a West German engineer who had helped Pakistan build its first fluoride and uranium conversion plants in 1979. A letter bomb exploded at his house on November 18, 1981, killing his dog.

According to the NZZ, Mebus had also joined Pakistan's top nuclear scientist, Abdul Qadeer Khan, at meetings in Zurich and Dubai with Masud Naraghi, then head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran.

Swiss and West German police were never able to track any of the perpetrators, with the attacks being claimed by obscure groups called "Group for Non-Proliferation in South Asia," "Committee to Safeguard the Islamic Revolution" and "League for Protecting the Sub-Continent," of which no record has existed before or since.

Many of the victims also received intimidating phone calls after the bombings. Other firms got phone calls as well, including Siegfried Schertler, the founder of vacuum valve manufacturer Vakuu-Apparate-Technik (VAT). According to Swiss Federal Police files viewed by NZZ, Schertler said a figure named David from the Israeli embassy in Bonn had called him and urged him to stop "these businesses" with nuclear weapons and switch to the textile business instead. Nonetheless, the NZZ is careful to note, following prior historians, that no "smoking gun" has ever directly connected the Mossad to the 1981 bombings.

The terrorism campaign ultimately failed, as many of the firms soon accepted lucrative new deals from the government of Pakistani President Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, NZZ noted. Pakistan eventually detonated five nuclear weapons underground on May 28, 1998, becoming the world's

eighth nuclear power and third outside the UN Security Council, joining Israel and Pakistan's regional rival, India, which detonated a bomb in 1976.

While the Mossad hasn't been directly tied to the 1981 bombings, a memoir titled "The Quiet Sabra," [published in January 2021](#) by Michael "Micky" Ron, a former engineer at Israel's Dimona nuclear reactor, revealed its involvement in another similar operation. On the night of April 6, 1979, [five bombs went off](#) at the factory of the CMIM company in La Seyne-sur-Mer, Toulon, France, where several reactor cores for Iraq's Osirak reactor was built.

According to Ron, the explosives failed to totally destroy the reactors because the Mossad didn't follow the advice given to them by the Israel Atomic Energy Commission, which was well-familiar with the targeted equipment because Osirak was a virtual copy of the EL-3 reactor in Saclay, France, that [Dimona was based on](#). As a result, the Israeli Air Force was forced to carry out [a daring air raid](#) on the Osirak plant itself south of Baghdad on June 7, 1981.

Ironically, Iran secretly helped Israel plan the Osirak bombing, as it was at war with Iraq at the time and equally feared an Iraqi nuclear weapon.

The Jewish Chronicle [revealed last month](#) that the Mossad had also been behind a series of explosions and sabotage operations at Iran's nuclear facilities in Natanz and Karaj in recent years.

According to the paper, Israeli intelligence officers coopted several Iranian nuclear scientists by leading them to believe they were working with Iranian dissident groups abroad, convincing them to place explosives and fly bomb-laden drones at the facilities in several 2020 and 2021 operations aimed at halting Iran's nuclear program. Tehran says it has no nuclear weapons program any longer after giving up its quest in 2003 and later declaring them haram, and [IDF intelligence has said](#) Iran's increased uranium purification effort has no equivalent effort toward weapons development.

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Split Screen Day - Cartoon

Recalling the crowd size debate of 2017, news consumers may soon be dealt with another rating squabble, as former US President Donald Trump and current US President Joe Biden are set to make separate televised addresses to mark the anniversary of the deadly Capitol riot that occurred on January 6, 2021.

Both US President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris will be giving remarks on Thursday as part of a series of events organized by Democrats to acknowledge the January 6, 2021, storming of the US Capitol, the White House detailed Sunday.

The day's events will include remarks from historians Jon Meacham and Doris Kearns, as well as a moment of silence in the congressional House chamber and testimonials from lawmakers who were present on Capitol Hill when Trump supporters stormed the federal building.

And then there's former US President Donald Trump, who earlier announced that he would give a press conference of sorts from inside his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida. It's anticipated that

Trump will use the moment to reiterate his unsubstantiated claims that the 2020 election was fraudulent.

Trump's timing for his press conference has been widely condemned, with former Trump-era official Alyssa Farah Griffin [telling](#) CNN that it would be best if her ex-boss "stay silent" during the commemoration.

Thursday could prove to be a day to remember, indeed.

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Verizon, AT&T Agree to Delay 5G Rollout for Two Weeks After Plea From Airline Industry
By - Gaby Arancibia

Earlier, the US airline industry and the nation's Federal Aviation Administration had urged major communication firms Verizon and AT&T against moving forward with their rollout the new 5G service, over safety concerns regarding commercial flights.

AT&T and Verizon Communications announced late Monday that they would postpone for a period of two weeks the rollout of their new 5G service, after concerns were raised by airlines over the potential effect the telecommunications technology could have on aircraft electronics. The separate Monday statements came just two days before the companies were expected to move ahead with their highly-anticipated 5G launch, and one day after they rejected a request from top level administration officials to delay their effort.

"We've agreed to two-week delay which promises the certainty of bringing this nation our game-changing 5G network in January," Verizon said in a statement following intensive talks with the US Federal Aviation Administration and other government officials.

The release issued by AT&T further noted that the firms remained "committed to the six-month protection zone mitigations" that were previously outlined in a Sunday letter that relayed the two firms would not accede to the FAA and the US Department of Transportation's request to postpone their 5G efforts.

The potential compromise proposes that the companies avoid deployment of the C-band spectrum meant to expand 5G services around certain "priority airports."

"We know aviation safety and 5G can co-exist and we are confident further collaboration and technical assessment will allay any issues," according to the brief release.

A response from Verizon and AT&T emerged shortly after airline and aircraft manufacturers argued that the 5G project would have a negative effect on altitude-sensing radar altimeters, prompting unsafe landings for commercial flights.

Earlier, the Airlines for America trade group predicted that some 350,000 flights would be affected with the rollout, a move that would have far-reaching effects on millions of travelers.

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Massive US Snowstorm Kills at Least Two, Hundreds of Thousands Without Power

The powerful storm comes as a shock as unpredictable weather caused by human-induced climate change increases. So far this year the mid-Atlantic has experienced an unusually warm and snow-free winter, with the nation's capital having experienced a high of 66 degrees on Jan. 2, 2022.

Millions of Americans across the mid-Atlantic woke up to one of the biggest snowstorms in recent years on Monday as many were left in limbo after being forced to deal with the aftermath of vast power outages.

The snow fell quickly, accumulating to about a foot throughout Washington, DC, Virginia, Maryland, Delaware and southern New Jersey. The storm also stretched toward northern Alabama, northern Georgia, Tennessee, North Carolina, and even the Florida Panhandle. Over yonder in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, officials reported 9 inches of snow, whereas Swiss, North Carolina, reported 11 inches. In Moores Mill, Alabama, residents saw 7 inches accumulate.

The snow buildup comes as a particular shock to Birmingham, Alabama, who experienced New Year's Day in 80-degree weather, and are now faced with temperatures as low as 35 degrees Fahrenheit and strong wind gusts.

Other unpredictable weather patterns in Tennessee and Georgia resulted in the deaths of two children.

After heavy snowfall in Townsend, Tennessee, a tree collapsed on a rental home killing a 7 year-old girl who was in her bed. A similar tragedy occurred in Decatur, Georgia, involving 5 year-old Zachariah Jackson who died when a tree fell on his home. Officials are speculating the tree in Decatur fell due to extremely wet and windy weather conditions.

The snowstorm will have extensive negative impact, as nearly 1 million Americans are without power in the southeast and mid-Atlantic. Virginia has been hit particularly hard with over 400,000 currently without power.

Extreme and unpredictable weather has caused a combined 7,200 international and US flights to be grounded as of midday Monday and delayed another 10,158 flights.

The storm also caused some difficulty in travel for Air Force One and the presidential motorcade as they returned US President Joe Biden to the White House after a weekend in Delaware.

Virginia State Police reported some 82 car accidents by 8 a.m. Monday - that number climbed to 522 accidents and stranded vehicles by 12:30 p.m. To date, no injuries have been reported.

Washington DC Mayor Muriel Bowser earlier declared a snow emergency in the district, which is planned to remain in effect until 7 p.m. on Monday. The district's health department has also canceled all COVID-19 testing due to the snow. Additionally, federal buildings, the Washington Metropolitan Transit Authority, and all Smithsonian museums are closed and/or have suspended services due to the weather.

Although much of the storm is expected to end by Monday evening, travel may be disrupted for Tuesday commuters due to freezing temperatures overnight.

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Airlines Warn of Hefty Costs, Flight Delays as Verizon And AT&T Reject 5G Delay

The airline industry and the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) fear major costs, delays, and safety issues will be on the horizon if adjustments are not made to the 5G rollout plan by major companies AT&T and Verizon that are set to start Jan. 5, 2022. The mobile companies' original start date for the rollout had been Dec. 5, 2021.

The Airlines for America trade group predicts that up to 350,000 commercial flights and 32 million travelers will be impacted by the looming 5G rollout that could potentially result in costs of up to \$2.1 billion for the industry.

However, wireless tycoons have cited their costs as a reason to continue with the introduction of 5G services, having already invested some \$80 billion in an auction for access to the 5G frequencies.

US Transportation Secretary Buttigieg and Stephen Dickson, who is head of the FAA, earlier requested a two-week delay in a Friday letter to the mobile companies, which was subsequently rejected by the receiving parties.

"Your proposed framework asks that we agree to transfer oversight of our companies' multi-billion dollar investment in 50 unnamed metropolitan areas representing the lion's share of the U.S. population to the FAA for an undetermined number of months or years," chief executive of Verizon Hans Vestburg and chief executive of AT&T John Stakey said in response to requests for the delay. "Even worse, the proposal is directed to only two companies."

The figures issued their response just two days after the request was made.

Airlines and aircraft manufacturers have also cited safety concerns stemming from the rollout, explaining that the frequencies of the 5G signals could have an effect on the altitude-sensing radar altimeters that could potentially result in unsafe landings.

A compromise, however, may be on the horizon for the two major industries, as the mobile companies have expressed a willingness to delay their 5G launch for up to 6 months - but only in specific airports selected through negotiations with US officials and the aviation industry. These would most likely include what Buttigieg and Dickson referred to in their Friday letter as "priority airports."

The six-month offer is being modeled after a similar one taken in France, which the FAA has made clear that Paris already uses lower power levels for their 5G than is currently allowed in the US.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) feels confident that after several years of study, the frequencies used by the 5G should not impact radar altimeters as the two are separated by more than 200 megahertz of blank "guard band" spectrum.

Relations between the wireless companies and airlines could grow increasingly unsteady as Airlines for America has threatened to go to court sometime the first week of January if the FAA refuses their request for a delay.

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Biden Stranded on Air Force One After Severe Snowstorm Strikes US Mid-Atlantic

A snowstorm that ripped through the mid-Atlantic on Monday left US President Joe Biden stuck on his presidential jet for about 30 minutes at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland.

The president had spent the weekend in his home state of Delaware when snow began accumulating early Monday. The storm came as a surprise to many, and quickly became one of the most severe storms in recent years in Washington DC and other parts of the mid-Atlantic, causing flight and travel issues not only for the president, but for millions of Americans.

Despite crew members at Andrews Air Force Base valiantly clearing the snow from the ground prior to Air Force One's landing, Biden, White House staffers and the president's Secret Service detail struggled to deplane due to an airstair truck becoming stuck in the snow.

After photos and videos of Biden deplaning Air Force One went viral during the snowstorm, some social media users saw it as an opportunity to poke fun at and compare Biden to former US President Donald Trump.

The plane was decidedly the safest way for the president to travel back to the White House, as driving from Delaware to the nation's capital would have presented additional security issues.

Severe weather blocked visibility, preventing the president from taking a helicopter from Andrews Air Force Base to the White House; he was made to travel via motorcade.

Once on the ground, the president's motorcade encountered struggles as a result of poor road conditions. The motorcade is said to have driven through DC at barely 20 miles per hour, slowing as it passed other vehicles stranded on slick roads. The trip usually takes the motorcade 30 minutes to complete - Monday's weather turned the trip into an hour-long drive.

Earlier, the severe snowstorm forced the White House to cancel its daily press briefing. Many other federal offices, transport services, and museums in DC were also closed as a result of the inclement weather.

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Videos: Two Dead, One Hospitalized After IDF Chopper Crashes Near Israel's Haifa Coast
By - Nevin Brown

An Israel Defense Forces helicopter with three individuals on board crashed Monday night off the coast of Haifa after undergoing a technical malfunction, the service confirmed hours after reports first emerged.

The Israeli Air Force (IAF) detailed in a late Monday [statement](#) that a Muscov patrol officer suffered moderate injuries and is being treated at Rambam Hospital. Resuscitation efforts were made on the two pilots aboard the aircraft, but they ultimately succumbed to their injuries.

The helicopter was taking part in a training exercise, according to the military service, which did not offer specifics on the cause of the crash. The IAF is launching an investigation into the accident.

Video footage of the incident surfaced on social media shortly after reports first emerged of the development, capturing first responders arriving on the scene.

The search-and-rescue teams from the Israel Defense Forces' Unit 669 had been dispatched to rescue the crew. Videos show flares were launched over the coastal waters to assist in the rescue mission.

Unconfirmed footage has emerged purportedly showing the exact moment that the bat-type chopper struck the water.

What is believed to be parts of the helicopter have since washed ashore and collected by some passersby.

The helicopter model was described as a Eurocopter Panther, called the "bat". The helicopter is utilized in a wide variety of military roles, from combat assault to medical evacuations. The Israel Navy currently operates seven Eurocopters.

Amid the ongoing investigation into the crash, Major General Amikam Nurkin, the commander of the IAF, has ordered the grounding of the "bat" array of helicopters and the halting of training flights in the IAF.

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Former New York Governor Andrew Cuomo to Avoid Charges Over Nursing Home Death Count
By - Nevin Brown

An investigation into the criminal culpability of Andrew Cuomo's handling of nursing homes death reporting in the early days of the coronavirus pandemic will see the former governor avoid charges, according to his attorney.

Cuomo is represented by Elkan Abramowitz, a criminal defense attorney, as the investigation began while Cuomo was still in office.

"I was contacted today by the head of the Elder Care Unit from the Manhattan District Attorney's Office who informed me they have closed its investigation involving the Executive Chamber and nursing homes," [a statement made by Abramowitz](#) reads. "I was told that after a thorough investigation – as we have said all along – there was no evidence to suggest that any laws were broken."

The investigation began in early 2021 after the New York state Attorney General [released a report](#) that claimed the administration had undercounted nursing home deaths by an estimated 50%.

Questions were raised from the onset, however, over Cuomo's use of nursing homes at the height of the pandemic.

At the beginning of the pandemic, New York hospitals became overrun with Covid patients. Under pressure from New York's powerful hospital lobby, Cuomo looked for ways to ease the burden that hospitals faced.

His administration landed on a risky and politically-polarizing decision to transfer patients to nursing homes. On March 25, 2020, he issued a directive that nursing homes could not deny patients based upon their Covid status.

Days later, Cuomo would add a provision making it difficult for patients to sue hospitals or nursing homes.

Cuomo's administration made the decision to send Covid-positive patients to nursing homes to alleviate the stress placed on hospitals, essentially, according to some, prioritizing hospitals over nursing homes at the height of a crisis.

There was reportedly reason to believe that the policy would fail as, at the earliest stages of the pandemic, it quickly became clear that the elderly were at increased risk of serious illness and death from COVID-19.

The policy was eventually reversed in May 2020, but by that time the damage was already done.

Cuomo's decision to allow hospitals to send Covid patients to nursing homes may have been a mistake, but what he and his administration did in the aftermath was, according to prosecutors, far worse.

The administration steadfastly stonewalled inquiries into nursing home death data following the policy, with the data that they did release being either altered or suggested to be intentionally misleading.

When initially reporting nursing home deaths from Covid, the state of New York only included deaths that physically occurred in a nursing home, not instances of individuals who had gotten Covid in a nursing home and later died in a hospital.

The administration also under-reported the number of patients sent from hospitals to nursing homes by 40%, according to an [Associated Press](#) report. A later [report](#) would emerge based on video footage of one of Cuomo's aides claiming to have hidden data on nursing home deaths. The Cuomo administration's alleged deceit led to a criminal investigation, which soon included the FBI.

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US Could Fall to Far-Right Dictatorship by 2030, Political Scientist Warns

By - Nevin Brown

A prominent Canadian political scientist, Thomas Homer-Dixon, has written an op-ed postulating that the US is headed toward becoming a far-right dictatorship, and it could be in place as early as 2025.

Homer-Dixon has studied violent conflict throughout his career and believes the US is on its way toward a serious internal conflict that could give rise to a right-wing dictatorship.

"By 2025, American democracy could collapse, causing extreme domestic political instability, including widespread civil violence. By 2030, if not sooner, the country could be governed by a right-wing dictatorship," [Homer-Dixon writes](#).

Detailing a "political and social landscape flashing with warning signals," Homer-Dixon believes that the supporters of former US President Donald Trump could act as a wrecking ball to American democracy, adding that a political climate conducive to the collapse of American democracy has been building for decades.

The academic recounts anecdotally how in the 1980s he would listen to conservative radio personality Rush Limbaugh chisel away at "the moral authority of US political institutions." In the

following decades, those blows, according to him, have “amplified through social media and outlets such as Fox News and Newsmax.”

Homer-Dixon views Trump’s awarding in 2020 of the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Limbaugh as both a symbolic and practical embrace of “bullying, populist white ethnocentrism – a rancid blend of aggrieved attacks on liberal elites, racist dog-whistling, bragging about American exceptionalism and appeals to authoritarian leadership.”

The political scientist doesn’t hold Limbaugh solely responsible for the current American political landscape, also noting a long track record of distrust in government that dates back to the country’s founding.

Economic factors have played a sizable role in creating an environment ripe for social upheaval, he suggests, observing that over the past five decades the US economy has shifted from manufacturing to service, information and finance.

“Economic insecurity is widespread in broad swaths of the country’s interior, while growth is increasingly concentrated in a dozen or so metropolitan centres,” writes Homer-Dixon.

Homer-Dixon also points to how the wealthiest Americans, using their influence, have contributed to the creation of a nation ripe for distrust in the government.

“The wealthy and powerful in America are broadly unwilling to pay the taxes, invest in the public services, or create the avenues for vertical mobility that would lessen their country’s economic, educational, racial and geographic gaps. The more an under-resourced government can’t solve everyday problems, the more people give up on it, and the more they turn to their own resources and their narrow identity groups for safety.”

The combination of rapid changes to the economy, to social mores, and in demographics, coupled with a government financially constrained to provide services for its neediest creates a perfect environment for distrust in the government, according to Homer-Dixon.

He believes the Republican party has capitalized and fanned these insecurities to gain political power at the expense of democracy.

Homer-Dixon points to Trump’s baseless claims that the 2020 presidential election was stolen as a “potent anti-democratic poison.” By making the embrace of the so-called “Big Lie” a “litmus test of Republican loyalty,” the party is now “one step away from the psychological dynamic of extreme dehumanization that has led to some of the worst violence in human history.”

The “win at all costs” mentality that engulfs the Republican party, according to Homer-Dixon, is fueled by “a moral crusade against evil” as Democrats purportedly stealing elections makes the latter deserving of punishment or worse.

A second Trump presidency could lead America from a Democracy to a far-right dictatorship, Homer-Dixon fears.

When the academic asked other political experts what a second Trump presidency could accomplish, “all agreed that under a second Trump administration, liberalism will be marginalized and right-wing Christian groups super-empowered, while violence by vigilante, paramilitary groups will rise sharply.”

He describes five similarities between the current political climate in the United States and that of 1920s- and 1930s-era Germany on the eve of the Nazi party’s power grab.

“First, in both cases, a charismatic leader was able to unify right-wing extremists around a political program to seize the state. Second, a bald falsehood about how enemies inside the polity had betrayed the country – for the Nazis, the ‘stab in the back,’ and for Trumpists, the ‘Big

Lie' – was a vital psychological tool for radicalizing and mobilizing followers. Third, conventional conservatives believed they could control and channel the charismatic leader and rising extremism but were ultimately routed by the forces they helped unleash. Fourth, ideological opponents of this rising extremism squabbled among themselves; they didn't take the threat seriously enough,...the fifth parallel is the most disconcerting: the propagation of a 'hardline security doctrine,'" Homer-Dixon writes.

The opinion piece further offers advice on how Canada, America's northern neighbor, should prepare for the possibility of the collapse of US democracy and the rise of a right-wing dictatorship.

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Iraqi Forces Shoot Down Two Drones Targeting Air Base Hosting US Troops - Coalition

WASHINGTON, January 3 (Sputnik) – Iraqi forces on Tuesday shot down two explosives-laden drones targeting an air base in Western Iraq that houses US troops in the second such attack in 24 hours, the US-led coalition said.

"Two drones approaching Ain al-Asad Air Base were shot down outside the base's vicinity without casualties early this morning," the coalition said via Twitter, citing the Security Media Cell of Iraq.

The latest attack comes on the heels a similar incident on Monday, when the Iraqi air defense system shot down two explosives-laded drones over the diplomatic zone at the Baghdad airport. An Iraqi security source who provided Sputnik with several photos of the wreckage of Monday's attack that showed the drones bearing the inscription "Revenge for Soleimani."

Monday marked the second anniversary of the assassination of Qasem Soleimani, the commander of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' elite Quds Force, who was killed in a US airstrike on the outskirts of Baghdad on January 3, 2020.

On December 22, 2021, Iraq's Joint Operations Command confirmed the withdrawal of coalition forces from Iraq except for military advisers. A group of advisers of the international coalition arrived in Iraq on December 30, according to Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi.

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RPT - Tales About Hussein, Soleimani Part of US Record of 'Systematic Deception' - Ex-UK Envoy

WASHINGTON, January 3 (Sputnik) - The United States is establishing a record of systematic deception in its now-discredited public accounts of the capture of Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein and the assassination of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps commander Maj. Gen. Qasem Soleimani, former UK Ambassador to Syria Peter Ford told Sputnik.

Monday marked two years since the US assassination of Soleimani, which comes less than a week after the 15-year anniversary of Hussein's execution.

"It is helpful when a counter-narrative with the ring of truth eventually emerges, because cumulatively the United States is establishing a track record of systematic deception," Ford said. "When the US kills or captures its eminent enemies, deception is standard operating procedure (SOP)."

On December 30, 2006, Hussein was executed after the United States invaded Iraq on the pretext of searching for weapons of mass destruction - which were never found.

Following Hussein's arrest at the end of 2003, the Pentagon claimed that the former Iraqi president was found hiding in an eight-foot-deep hole under a farm. However, a former interpreter with US forces told Sputnik that Hussein was in a room and unconscious at the time of his arrest.

"In the endgame of the illegal invasion of Iraq the US was terrified lest Saddam emerge as a hero, defeated but unbowed. Regardless of truth the politics demanded that Saddam be arrested in humiliating conditions," Ford said. "It can't be proven, of course, but seen in this light the interpreter's denial of the story that Saddam was found cowering in a hole must be seen as highly likely to be true."

With respect to Soleimani, killed by a US drone strike in Baghdad on January 3, 2020, Ford recalled that "no proof was ever provided" to support Washington's allegations that the Iranian commander was planning imminent operations against US troops.

"The same SOP was used, obviously, to justify the original invasion of Iraq with fabricated charges of production of weapons of mass destruction. Similarly Syria was framed with crisis actors for alleged use of chemical weapons," Ford said.

Libyan ruler Muammar Qaddafi, he added, was liquidated after the United States invented a story that his troops were aiming at a bloodbath in Benghazi.

Ford said the US government continues to fabricate these tales basically because "it gets away with it."

"Most international media uncritically relays the US narrative," Ford concluded. "Occasionally, as with Iraqi Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs), the US gets found out, but by that time the caravan has moved on."

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RPT- UNGA President Welcomes P5 States' Statement on Nuclear War Prevention - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, January 3 (Sputnik) - UN General Assembly President Abdulla Shahid welcomed a statement issued by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council affirming that nuclear war cannot be won, his spokesperson Paulina Kubiak told Sputnik. On Monday, China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States said in the joint statement that their nuclear weapons were not aimed at each other.

"President Abdulla Shahid welcomes the joint statement made by the five nuclear powers who are also the Permanent members of the security council," Kubiak said. "The commitment to Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) obligations, including Article VI obligation and the desire to increase mutual understanding and confidence, and prevent an arms race that would benefit none and endanger all, is the right message to the entire planet as we begin the new year." UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is also encouraged by the commitment of the five permanent member states to prevent nuclear war and avoid an arms race, Spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a statement on Monday.

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Ex-Theranos Chief Found Guilty on 4 Counts in Investor Fraud Case - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 3 (Sputnik) - A US jury convicted former founder of the Theranos health tech company Elizabeth Holmes on four of 11 charges she faced related to defrauding investors, ABC News reported.

Holmes will be sentenced at a later date, but she could face decades in prison, the report said after the verdict was read on Monday.

The company attracted millions in investment on claims that it invented reliable methods to test blood for a range of diseases using only several drops before media suggested in 2015 that the company's own testing equipment might produce unreliable results and that Theranos was using other manufacturers' machines to run their tests.

The media claims were followed by closer examinations by the authorities, lawsuits and, eventually, criminal charges for Holmes and former Theranos CFO Ramesh Balwani.

Holmes testified during the trial that Balwani, with whom she was romantically involved, abused and held control over her during the time when the alleged crimes occurred.

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Ontario Implements Emergency Measures to Curb Spread of Omicron Variant - Premier's Office

WASHINGTON, January 3 (Sputnik) - Schools in the Canadian province of Ontario will move to remote learning and retail stores will operate at 50 percent capacity beginning on January 5 to curb the spread of the coronavirus Omicron variant and create opportunity to administer more vaccines for maximum protection, the Premier's office said in a statement.

"As we continue with our provincial vaccine booster efforts, we must look at every option to slow the spread of the highly contagious Omicron variant," Premier Doug Ford said in the statement on Monday. "Putting these targeted and time-limited measures in place will give us more opportunity to deliver vaccines to all Ontarians and ensure everyone has maximum protection against this virus."

All school buildings would be permitted to open for childcare operations, including emergency childcare, offer in-person instruction for special education students who cannot be taught

remotely and for school staff who are unable to deliver quality instruction from home, the statement said.

The government seeks that businesses and other entities ensure employees work remotely unless they have no choice but be on-site, the statement said.

The restrictions will affect retail establishments, including shopping malls, where a 50 percent capacity will be allowed but resident will have to observe social distancing and food courts must be closed, the statement said.

Personal care services will operate at a 50 percent capacity and saunas, oxygen bars and steam rooms will be closed, the statement said.

Indoor meeting and event spaces will also be closed - with limited exceptions - and outdoor spaces will be allowed to remain open with restrictions in place, the statement said. Similarly, indoor dining at restaurants, bars and other food or drink establishments will be prohibited and outdoor dining, takeout, drive through and delivery services remains permitted.

Alcohol sales are being restricted after 10 p.m. and drinking alcohol on-site will not be permitted after 11 p.m., but liquor stores as well as grocery and convenience stores selling alcoholic beverages are exempted from the restrictions, the statement said.

The government is also closing all cinemas, theaters, indoor venues, rehearsals and recorded performances, the statement added.

Museums, zoos, landmarks, historic sites, botanical gardens and other attractions, amusement parks, festivals and other sites are also affected by the imposed emergency measures, according to the statement.

Health authorities in South Africa, where Omicron was first detected, but also in other countries have said that while the variant is more transmissible, it results in mild cases.

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RPT - Nearly 740,000 Americans Left Without Power Amid Winter Storm - Outage Tracking Service

(Adds missing word in lede)

WASHINGTON, January 3 (Sputnik) - Some 740,000 Americans residing in eight US states are experiencing power outages after a winter storm hit the North-East portion of the United States, including the states of Virginia and Maryland and the Washington metropolitan area, Poweroutage.us revealed.

The winter storm affected Virginia more than the other states on Monday, leaving nearly 450,000 residents without electricity as of 4:30 p.m. ET (21:30 GMT), according to the portal. More than 82,000 residents in North Carolina and 67,000 in Maryland are also without electricity, Poweroutage.us data showed.

The Washington metropolitan area too was hit by the first snowfall in 2022, resulting in transportation disruptions at the Ronald Reagan National Airport, Dulles International Airport and the Baltimore-Washington Thurgood Marshall International Airport with hundreds of flights being canceled and delayed.

The National Weather Service issued a winter storm warning for the Washington metropolitan area, saying the total snow accumulations will be between five and ten inches.

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US Stocks Up on Bets for Improving Economy in 2022

NEW YORK, January 3 (Sputnik) - US stocks were broadly higher on Monday in their debut for 2022 as investors bet that the economy will continue to triumph over the effects of the COVID-19 measures two years into the pandemic.

Wall Street's three major equity indexes - the Dow Jones Industrial Average, the S&P 500 and Nasdaq Composite - all rose more than half a percent each in the first trading session of the New Year, after finishing 2021 up about 20% or more.

The economy shrank by 3.5% for all of 2020 due to shutdowns and other disruptions caused by the COVID-19 measures. The Federal Reserve has projected a 5.5% growth for 2021 and 4% for 2022.

In Monday's session, Wall Street's Big Tech indicator Nasdaq led the action in stocks, rising 1.2% to settle at 15,833.

Iphone maker Apple was the star of the day, crossing \$3 trillion in market capitalization as the world's most valuable company. Nasdaq also benefited from all-round gains in stocks such as Facebook, Netflix and Google, after a 21% rally last year.

The S&P 500, which lists the top 500 US stocks, rose 0.6% to finish at 4,795. Last year, the index rose 27%.

The blue-chip Dow, which lists a wide variety of stocks from leisure to banking and agriculture, gained 0.7% to close at 36,585. In 2021, the Dow finished up 19%.

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Cuomo Will Not Face Charges for New York Nursing Home COVID-19 Deaths - Statement

WASHINGTON, January 3 (Sputnik) - Former New York Governor Andrew Cuomo will not face charges in connection with COVID-19 deaths in the state's nursing homes, Cuomo representative Elkan Abramowitz said in a statement.

"I was contacted today by the head of the Elder Care Unit from the Manhattan District Attorney's Office who informed me they have closed its investigation involving the Executive Chamber and nursing homes. I was told that after a thorough investigation - as we have said all along - there was no evidence to suggest that any laws were broken," Abramowitz said in the statement on Monday.

Cuomo has been criticized for instituting a policy that returned residents to nursing homes after being treated for COVID-19 in hospitals regardless of whether they had received a negative coronavirus test, effectively exposing them to a life threatening environment.

Cuomo has also been criticized after the New York Attorney General report found that in light of the policy, the governor's office under Cuomo understated nursing home deaths approximately by half - or 3,000 deaths.

Cuomo resigned in August of 2021 amid allegations that he sexually harassed nearly a dozen colleagues, in addition to the nursing home deaths scandal. Cuomo has maintained that he did anything wrong and characterized the allegations as false.

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Apple Hits \$3 Trillion in Market Capitalization as World's Most Valuable Firm

(Updates with details, context, paragraphs 3-6)

NEW YORK, January 3 (Sputnik) - Shares of iPhone phone maker and consumer tech giant Apple hit record highs, crossing \$3 trillion in market capitalization to become the world's most valuable company, trading data showed.

Apple's stock hit a lifetime high of \$182.87 on Monday to exceed the \$3 trillion valuation, data tabulated from New York's Nasdaq platform for Big Tech stocks showed.

The tech powerhouse reached the milestone on the first trading day of the New Year after Wedbush Securities analyst Daniel Ives provided a positive outlook on the company for 2022.

Ives said in a research note that demand outstripped supply for Apple in December sales. The analyst added that he believes Apple sold over 40 million iPhones during the holiday season, a record number despite chip shortages. He added that China remains a major source of strength for the company.

That aside, Apple's upcoming iPhone SE 5G has potential to attract nearly 1.4 billion low- to mid-end Android users and about 300 million users of older iPhone models, analysts have said. As Apple's stock climbed in the past several months, analysts have also raised their price targets, with J.P.Morgan and BofA Global Research upping their expectations to \$210 a share. Such a target would put Apple's market capitalization at about \$3.5 trillion.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, January 3 (Sputnik) -

P5 STATEMENT ON NUCLEAR WAR PREVENTION

* The leaders of the five nuclear-weapons states - Russia, the United States, France, the United Kingdom and China - said on Monday that they will work toward preventing unintended use of nuclear arms and reaffirmed that they are not targeting any country.

* UN General Assembly President Abdulla Shahid welcomed a statement issued on Monday by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council affirming that nuclear war cannot be won, his spokesperson Paulina Kubiak told Sputnik.

* Monday's joint declaration of the five nuclear powers was penned on Russia's initiative and is aimed at easing tensions and dialing back the arms race, a spokeswoman for the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

INTERNATIONAL TALKS ON UKRAINE

* US Secretary of State Antony Blinken discussed by phone with the representatives of the Bucharest Nine group the buildup of Russian forces near Ukraine and the need for a NATO stance for collective defense, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Monday.

* Blinken discussed with his Turkish counterpart coordination efforts amid Russian-Ukrainian tensions as well as the normalization process with Armenia, the State Department said.

* German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock will meet with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Washington on Wednesday to discuss Russia and Ukraine, her spokesperson said.

APPLE MARKET CAPITALIZATION

* Shares of iPhone phone maker and consumer tech giant Apple hit record highs on Monday, crossing \$3 trillion in market capitalization to become the world's most valuable company, trading data showed.

COVID-19

* The Kuwaiti cabinet agreed on Monday to impose a seven-week ban on indoor social gatherings from January 9, the Center for Government Communication said on Monday.

* US Speedskating, the governing body for the sport of speed skating in the United States, announced in a statement that the Long Track Olympic Team Trials this week will take place without spectators as a precaution for athletes who will attend the Winter Olympic Games in Beijing next month.

* Only a quarter of children 5-11 years old in the United States have received with at least one dose of a coronavirus vaccine, US Food and Drug Administration Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research Director Peter Marks said.

SNOWFALL IN US

* Hundreds of flights have been canceled and delayed in the three airports serving the Washington metropolitan area as a result of the first snowfall in 2022 on Monday, according to flightaware.com.

* The White House said on Monday that the first snowfall in Washington, DC in 2022 has forced it to cancel its regular press briefing for the day.

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UN Chief Encouraged by P5 States' Commitment to Prevent Nuclear War - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, January 3 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is encouraged by the commitment of the five permanent member states of the UN Security Council to prevent nuclear war and avoid an arms race, UN Spokesperson Staphane Dujarric said in a statement on Monday.

Earlier in the day, China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States said in the joint statement that their nuclear weapons were not aimed at each other.

"The Secretary-General welcomes the joint statement by the nuclear-weapon States on the prevention of nuclear war and avoidance of arms races," Dujarric said. "He is encouraged by the nuclear-weapon States' commitment to pursue measures to prevent nuclear war, consistent with his long-standing call for dialogue and cooperation to this end."

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UN Chief Condemns Violence Against Sudan Protesters - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, January 3 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres condemned the violence against demonstrators in Sudan protesting the military takeover of power and urged security forces to show utmost restraint, UN Spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a statement on Monday.

The Central Committee of Sudan Doctors said on Sunday two protesters were killed by live fire in the city of Omdurman. This brings to 56 the number of civilians killed by Sudanese security forces since the military, led by Gen. Abdel Fattah Burhan, arrested Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok on October 25.

"The Secretary-General condemns the continued violence targeting protestors and calls upon the Sudanese security forces to exercise the utmost restraint and adhere to their obligations in relation to the rights to freedom of assembly and expression," Dujarric said.

The spokesman also said Guterres has taken note of the resignation of Prime Minister Hamdok, adding it is regretful that a political understanding on the way forward is not achieved despite the gravity of the situation the country.

"The Secretary-General encourages all stakeholders to continue engaging in meaningful dialogue in order to reach an inclusive, peaceful and lasting solution," Dujarric said.

Hamdok was reinstated on November 21 after signing a pact with Burhan that seeks to install a civilian cabinet that will be subject to military oversight. Protesters demand transition to a fully civilian rule.

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US Court Delays Arraignment for Russian National Klyushin Until January 5 - Judge

WASHINGTON, January 3 (Sputnik) - The arraignment of Russian national Vladislav Klyushin was rescheduled for January 5 at 1:00 p.m. EST (1800 GMT) by US Judge Marianne Bowler on Monday in order to give Klyushin's legal team additional time to make filings with the court. Bowler moved Klyushin's arraignment and detention hearing from Monday to Wednesday so that the defendant's legal team can submit more filings to the court prior to the hearing. Klyushin alongside four other Russian nationals were indicted by US authorities in December over alleged involvement in a global hacking and trading scheme that purportedly netted the defendants at least \$82 million in profit by using stolen company data to inform trading decisions.

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Ontario Court Awards \$107Mln to Families of Flight 752 Victims - Reports

NEW YORK, January 3 (Sputnik) - The Ontario Supreme Court of Justice decided to award \$107 million to the families of six passengers killed on Ukraine International Airlines Flight 752 by an Iranian missile minutes after taking off from Tehran, media reported on Monday. In May the court's Justice Edward Belobaba ruled the downing of a commercial airplane was an international act of terrorism that killed 55 Canadians and 35 permanent residents.

Families of the victims who have filed a civil lawsuit against Iran will be awarded \$1 million for the loss of guidance, care and companionship, and \$6 million for pain and suffering, CBC reported citing court's decision. Some \$100 million in punitive damages will be shared by the estates of the six victims.

The lawyer of the families Mark Arnold said he will seek to seize Iranian assets in Canada and abroad to pay compensation.

Iran rejected May's ruling stating it lacked legitimate evidence. Iran also did not defend itself in court which made it a default judgment.

All 176 passengers and crew perished on January 8, 2020, when the flight from Iran to Ukraine was shot down shortly after taking off from Tehran's Imam Khomeini International Airport. After initially denying responsibility, Iran's government admitted that its military had shot down the Boeing 737-800 jet, having mistaken the aircraft for a cruise missile.

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Hochul to Propose Term Limits for Future New York Governors - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 3 (Sputnik) - New York Governor Kathy Hochul is planning to propose establishing a limit of two four-years terms for governors as well as other elected officials statewide, the New York Times reported on Monday citing unnamed officials.

The proposal will require approval from both the state legislature and voters and can significantly curb the power of the governor's office in the of New York, which remains one of a dozen US states without such term limits, the report said.

The proposed term limits would also apply to the lieutenant governor, attorney general and the comptroller, the report said.

Moreover, Hochul's proposal includes a provision that would bar any elected official from receiving outside income, except when such income comes from teaching, the report added. Hochul is expected to announce the proposal during her first State of the State address on Wednesday, according to the reports.

In August, Kathy Hochul was named New York State Governor after Andrew Cuomo resigned when a months-long investigation by state Attorney General Letitia James found that he sexually harassed nearly a dozen colleagues. Cuomo has denied any wrongdoing.

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Blinken Discusses Ukraine Buildup, Collective Defense with Bucharest 9 Group - State Dept.

(Updates with more details in paras 4, 5)

WASHINGTON, January 3 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken discussed by telephone with the representatives of the Bucharest Nine group the buildup of Russian forces

near Ukraine and the need for a NATO stance for collective defense, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Monday.

"The Secretary and Foreign Ministers discussed Russia's destabilizing military buildup along Ukraine's border; the need for a united, ready, and resolute NATO stance for the collective defense of Allies; and transatlantic cooperation on issues of shared concern," Price said in a readout of the call.

Blinken also reconfirmed the United States' commitment to close consultations and coordination with allies and partners as they work toward de-escalating tensions between Russia and Ukraine, Price added.

The Bucharest Nine group - composed of NATO's eastern flank allies, including Hungary, Poland and Romania - also discussed with Blinken their solidarity with Lithuania in the face of escalating tensions with China after allowing Taiwan to open a representative office there, Price said.

In December, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan also spoke with the Bucharest Nine representatives about the Ukraine-Russia tensions and related diplomatic and security efforts.

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WASHINGTON, January 3 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken discussed by phone with the representatives of the Bucharest Nine group the buildup of Russian forces near

Ukraine and the need for a NATO stance for collective defense, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Monday.

"The Secretary and Foreign Ministers discussed Russia's destabilizing military buildup along Ukraine's border; the need for a united, ready, and resolute NATO stance for the collective defense of Allies; and transatlantic cooperation on issues of shared concern," Price said in a readout of the call.

Blinken also emphasized the United States' commitment to close consultation and coordination with allies and partners as they work toward de-escalation of tensions between Russia and Ukraine, Price added.

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Jury in Trial of Elizabeth Holmes Cannot Reach Unanimous Verdict on 3 Counts - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 3 (Sputnik) - The jury deliberating the trial of Theranos health technology company founder Elizabeth Holmes delivered a note to the court saying they cannot reach a unanimous verdict on three of the 11 criminal counts, ABC reported on Monday.

On their seventh day of deliberations, the jury reportedly informed the court they are unable to come to a unanimous verdict on three of the 11 criminal charges related to an alleged scheme to defraud investors in Theranos, the report said.

The company attracted millions in investment on claims that it invented reliable methods to test blood for a range of diseases using only several drops before media suggested in 2015 that the company's own testing equipment might produce unreliable results and that Theranos was using other manufacturers' machines to run their tests.

The media claims were followed by closer examinations by the authorities, lawsuits and, eventually, criminal charges for Holmes and former Theranos CFO Ramesh Balwani.

Holmes testified during the trial that Balwani, with whom she was romantically involved, abused and held control over her during the time when the alleged crimes occurred, the report said.

The jury, which listened to testimony from 32 witnesses over the course of a three-month trial, was brought into the courtroom by Judge Edward Davila, where he read modified jury instructions pertinent to a deadlock situation, the report added.

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Apple Hits \$3 Trillion in Market Capitalization as World's Most Valuable Firm

NEW YORK, January 3 (Sputnik) - Shares of iPhone phone maker and consumer tech giant Apple hit record highs on Monday, crossing \$3 trillion in market capitalization to become the world's most valuable company, trading data showed.

Apple's stock hit a lifetime high of \$182.87 to exceed the \$3 trillion valuation, data tabulated from New York's Nasdaq platform for Big Tech stocks showed.

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Blinken, Turkish Counterpart Discuss Coordination Amid Escalation in Ukraine - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 3 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken discussed with his Turkish counterpart coordination efforts amid Russian-Ukrainian tensions as well as the normalization process with Armenia, the State Department said in a press release on Monday. "Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken spoke today with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu. Secretary Blinken and Foreign Minister Cavusoglu discussed the importance of continued coordination regarding the threat of Russian escalation in Ukraine. They also discussed issues related to the Horn of Africa, Turkey's appointment of a Special Envoy to discuss the process of normalization with Armenia," the release said. The two diplomats also discussed ways to deepen bilateral cooperation as NATO allies in areas of mutual concern, the release added.

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US Speedskating to Hold Olympic Team Trials Without Spectators as COVID-19 Precaution

WASHINGTON, January 3 (Sputnik) - US Speedskating, the governing body for the sport of speed skating in the United States, announced in a statement that the Long Track Olympic Team Trials this week will take place without spectators as a precaution for athletes who will attend the Winter Olympic Games in Beijing next month. "US Speedskating will hold its 2022 US Long Track Olympic Team Trials Jan. 5-9 at The Pettit National Ice Center in Milwaukee without spectators, as a COVID-19 precaution for athletes just a month prior to the Olympics," the statement said on Monday. Officials will continue keeping a strong focus on the health and welfare of athletes, US Speedskating Executive Director Ted Morris said in the statement. "Our ability to create a competition bubble provides us with the best situation to protect our athletes while providing them with the opportunity to qualify for the Beijing team at the Olympic Trials," Morris added. The 2020 Winter Olympic Games will be held on February 4-20.

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Authorities Cancel Hundreds of Flights in US Capital Area Due to First Snowfall in 2022

WASHINGTON, January 3 (Sputnik) - Hundreds of flights have been canceled and delayed in the three airports serving the Washington metropolitan area as a result of the first snowfall in 2022 on Monday, according to flightaware.com.

The authorities at the Ronald Reagan Washington National airport canceled or delayed more than 300 flight departures and 280 arriving flights, the tracker revealed. The Dulles International Airport saw almost 180 cancellations and 90 delays.

In addition, more than 350 flights have been canceled or rescheduled at the Baltimore-Washington Thurgood Marshall International Airport.

The authorities issued a statement saying they also have made changes in the Washington's public transportation schedules.

"Metrobus is temporarily suspending service immediately due to rapidly deteriorating weather and hazardous road conditions throughout the region," the statement said.

However, Metro trains continue to operate on a normal schedule with trains available every 12-24 minutes, the statement added.

Many schools and offices in the area announced closures due to the snow storm as well.

The National Weather Service issued a winter storm warning for the Washington metropolitan area, saying the total snow accumulations will be between five and ten inches.

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Trump Endorses Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban for Re-Election - Statement

WASHINGTON, January 3 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump endorsed Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban for re-election this spring in a statement shared by spokesperson Liz Harrington on Monday.

"Viktor Orban of Hungary truly loves his country and wants safety for his people," Trump said in the statement. "He is a strong leader and respected by all. He has my Complete support and Endorsement for reelection as Prime Minister!"

Orban has done a "powerful and wonderful job" stopping illegal immigration and creating jobs and trade, Trump said.

Orban should be allowed to continue doing so in the upcoming election, Trump added.

Hungary holds parliamentary election every four years and the next vote will take place April of 2022.

Orban first served as Prime Minister from 1998 to 2002. He was reelected in 2010 and has served since.

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About Quarter of Children 5-11 Year Old in US Received At Least 1 COVID-19 Vaccine - FDA

WASHINGTON, January 3 (Sputnik) - Only a quarter of children 5-11 years old in the United States have received with at least one dose of a coronavirus vaccine, US Food and Drug Administration Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research Director Peter Marks said on Monday.

"Only about 25% of eligible five- to 11-year-olds have been vaccinated," Marks told reporters. The percentage of adolescents who have been fully vaccinated is even lower at just over 14%, according to data compiled by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). In November, the CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices voted unanimously to recommend the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for children between five and 11 years old. The CDC reported last month that children in that age bracket were reporting local and systemic reactions after receiving the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccines.

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Myocarditis to Be 'Extremely Rare' in 12-15 Year Old Adolescents After Booster Dose - FDA

WASHINGTON, January 3 (Sputnik) - The current data suggests that heart muscle inflammation or myocarditis in adolescents aged 12-15 years old will be "extremely rare" after they receive the third vaccine dose against the novel coronavirus, US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Acting Commissioner Janet Woodcock said on Monday.

"The data on myocarditis with the third dose, with the booster in adolescence, we expect that would be extremely rare. We have real-world evidence from the Israeli experience to help us with that analysis," Woodcock said during a press briefing.

The second dose of the primary vaccination has up to three times higher risk of myocarditis in 12-15-year-olds than the booster shot, US Food and Drug Administration's Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research Peter Marks Director said during the briefing.

At the same time, the heart inflammation risk peaks in the 16-17 year age range and is primarily affecting males due to androgenic steroids present in their bodies during puberty, Marks added. Earlier in the day, the FDA issued an emergency use authorization (EUA) for the Pfizer-BioNTech booster vaccine against the novel coronavirus for use in 12 to 15-year-old adolescents. The FDA also shortened the period of time after which adolescents and adults can get a Pfizer booster shot from six to five months after they received the second vaccine dose.

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New York Attorney General Subpoenas 2 of Trump's Children in Fraud Inquiry - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 3 (Sputnik) - The New York Attorney General has subpoenaed two of former US President Donald Trump's children as part of an ongoing investigation into his business practices, the New York Times reported on Monday.

The Attorney General's office subpoenaed Donald Trump Jr. and Ivanka Trump on December 1, the report said citing a person familiar with the matter.

Last month, Trump filed a lawsuit against New York Attorney General Letitia James as part of an effort to halt the investigation into his business dealings. In the complaint, Donald Trump is accusing James of violating his constitutional rights and is asking a judge to halt the probe. James has been digging into Trump's real estate business for more than two years in an attempt to find evidence of wrongdoing. However, James can only file a lawsuit against Trump should any wrongdoing be found because it is a civil inquiry.

James has said she plans to get testimony from Trump under oath early this month.

Trump has said the investigation is a continuation of the political witch by Democrats hunt against him.

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US Senate to Vote on Filibuster Rules by January 17 to Advance Voting Rights Bill- Schumer

WASHINGTON, January 3 (Sputnik) - The US Senate will vote to change its filibuster rules by January 17 in order to secure the passage of new voting rights legislation, Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said in a letter to his colleagues on Monday.

"Over the coming weeks, the Senate will once again consider how to perfect this union and confront the historic challenges facing our democracy. We hope our Republican colleagues change course and work with us. But if they do not, the Senate will debate and consider changes to Senate rules on or before January 17, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, to protect the foundation of our democracy: free and fair elections," the letter said.

Senate Republicans have used the the filibuster rules to delay during a prolonged debate and prevent the passage of the Democrat-backed legislation despite the latter holding a majority. Schumer criticized the fact that Republicans can pass election security laws at the state level with a simple majority, but Democrats in the US Senate cannot pass their own voting rights legislation on a federal level in the same way due to the existing filibuster rules.

The Democrats' voting rights legislation in connected to the upcoming anniversary of the January 6 breach of the US Capitol, Schumer said, adding that the bill would help counter the "anti-democratic motives" allegedly held by the protesters.

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Airbnb Agrees to \$91,000 Settlement With US Treasury over Cuba Sanctions Violations

WASHINGTON, January 3 (Sputnik) - The vacation rental company Airbnb has agreed to a settlement of more than \$91,000 for processing payments that violated US sanctions against Cuba, the Treasury Department said on Monday.

"Airbnb Payments agreed to remit \$91,172.29 to settle its potential civil liability for apparent violations of sanctions against Cuba," the Treasury Department said in a statement, citing the action by the wholly-owned unit of San Francisco, California-based Airbnb.

Airbnb Payments processed payments related to guests traveling for reasons outside of categories authorized by the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), the statement said.

In addition, Airbnb Payments failed to keep certain required records associated with Cuba-related transactions, according to the statement.

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US to Allocate \$1Bln to Expand Meatpacking, Break Dominance of Few - White House

WASHINGTON, January 3 (Sputnik) - The US government is allocating \$1 billion to expand meat processing facilities to break up the dominance of a handful of companies that profit by squeezing what they pay farmers while raising prices for consumers, the White House announced on Monday.

"The Biden-Harris administration will dedicate \$1 billion in American Rescue Plan funds for expansion of independent processing capacity," the White House said in a statement.

The White House explained in the statement that due to profiteering by middle men, farmers received 39 cents of every dollar consumers spent on beef now compared with more than 60 cents five decades ago, and 19 cents for hogs from 40 to 60 cents previously.

With four large meat-packing companies controlling 85% of the beef market, 54% of poultry and 70% of hogs, security of supply was also at stake, the statement said, citing COVID-19-related supply chain disruptions as one example of the breakdown that can be caused by too few operators in the market.

The Biden administration will channel \$1 billion of funds through multiple programs aimed at expanding and diversifying meat and poultry processing capacity; increasing producer income; raising farmers' stake in processing facilities and creating stable, well-paying jobs in the industry, the statement said.

The Biden administration voiced particular concern about the pricing of beef, given the importance of that meat to American consumers.

"Right now, meatpackers have outsized power in setting the prices for beef," the statement said.

"The dominance of opaque contracts and insufficient competition undermine price discovery and fairness in the independent livestock markets, which ultimately lock producers into prices that aren't the product of free and fair negotiation."

New and stronger rules will also be issued under the Packers and Stockyards Act, a law which was designed to combat abuses by meatpackers and processors but has been systematically weakened by the previous Trump administration, the statement added.

To better coordinate enforcement actions, the departments of Justice and Agriculture will launch within 30 days a portal for reporting concerns about potential violations of competition laws in the meat industry, according to the statement.

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White House Cancels Press Briefing Monday Due to First Snowfall in US Capital in 2022

WASHINGTON, January 3 (Sputnik) - The White House said on Monday that the first snowfall in Washington, DC in 2022 has forced it to cancel its regular press briefing for the day. Earlier on Monday, the Office of Public Management (OPM) said that all federal offices in Washington, DC will be closed, but the so-called emergency and telework employees will continue to work.

"Due to the federal office closure, there will be no press briefing," the White House said. Other federal agencies like the State and Defense departments also issued statements that they will not hold press briefings due to the snowfall.

The National Weather Service issued a winter storm warning for the Washington metropolitan area, saying the total snow accumulations will be between 5 to 10 inches.

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US Marshals Service Apprehended Over 84,000 Fugitives in 2021 - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 3 (Sputnik) - The US Marshals Service (USMS) apprehended more than 84,000 fugitives wanted with arrest warrants in Fiscal Year 2021, the Justice Department said on Monday.

"At a time of unprecedented challenges posed by a global pandemic, the US Marshals continue to deliver on their mission, tracking down and arresting more than 84,000 fugitives. The Department of Justice, through our law enforcement components like the US Marshals Service, will continue to prioritize our efforts to reduce violent crime and keep our neighborhoods safe," Deputy US Attorney General Lisa Monaco said in a press release.

USMS apprehended more than 10,500 sex offenders, 6,000 murder suspects and 1,200 international fugitives, the release said, noting that it also seized over 7,000 guns during the so-called violence reduction and counter gang operations in 2021.

The federal law enforcement agency averaged 337 fugitive arrests per day, and cleared more than 99,000 local, state and federal warrants in the process, the release added.

USMS conducted 591 international removals - including extraditions, deportations and expulsions - in addition to their domestic work, according to the release.

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US Authorizes Pfizer's COVID-19 'Booster' Vaccine for 12-15 Year Old Adolescents - FDA

WASHINGTON, January 3 (Sputnik) - The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced on Monday that it has issued an emergency use authorization (EUA) for the Pfizer-BioNTech's booster vaccine against the novel coronavirus for 12- to 15-year-old adolescents.

"On January 3, 2022, having concluded that revising this EUA is appropriate to protect the public health ..., FDA is reissuing the December 16, 2021 letter of authorization in its entirety with revisions incorporated to amend the EUA for COMIRNATY (COVID-19 Vaccine, mRNA) and Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine to: (i) authorize the use of the vaccine as a single booster dose in individuals 12 through 15 years of age," FDA said in a letter to Pfizer.

The FDA also said it has shortened the period of time, after which both, adolescents and adults, can get a Pfizer booster shot - from six to five months after they received the second vaccine dose.

In addition, the FDA said it has authorized booster vaccine shots for immunocompromised children in the 5-11 age group, according to the letter.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is expected to hold its Advisory Committee meeting later this week to vote on the changes endorsed now by the FDA.

Over the past seven-day period, US health authorities reported 2.14 million of new COVID-19 infections with average per day count reaching nearly 320,000 amid the growing prevalence of the Omicron variant. Health experts have said the coronavirus Omicron variant cases are mild and the instances of hospitalization are significantly less than the Delta variant.