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More Dangerous Than Pershing II: DARPA Making Intermediate-Range Surface-Launched Hypersonic Missile

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Since the US unilaterally withdrew from the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in August 2019, the Pentagon has tested several ground-launched missile systems that would have violated the treaty's parameters, which were intended to keep the peace by removing provocative weapons from the battlefield.

The Pentagon's experimental weapons bureau has announced its program to build a ground-launched intermediate-range hypersonic missile has advanced to the assembly and testing phase.

On Monday, [the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency \(DARPA\) said](#) the Operational Fires (OpFires) program, being headed up by defense contracting giant Lockheed Martin, would begin the Phase 3b process of development, which includes missile fabrication, assembly and flight testing.

The US has lagged behind Russia and China in hypersonic weapons development for years: both countries already have at least one missile capable of flying faster than 5 times the speed of sound in service, while the US has not yet test-fired any of the hypersonic weapons currently in development.

Earlier this week, [Air Force Magazine reported](#) that contrary to expectations by the US Air Force, the AGM-183A Air-launched Rapid-Response Weapon (ARRW) did not get its first test flight last month, reporting the service is now only claiming the test will take place "later this year." [The ARRW is an air-launched hypersonic missile](#) that has so far only performed captive-carry tests under the wing of a B-52 Stratofortress bomber.

The other major US hypersonic weapons program, the Hypersonic Air-breathing Weapon Concept (HAWC) being built by Raytheon, Lockheed Martin and DARPA, has suffered repeated setbacks due to "dumb mistakes," postponing its test firing until 2021 as well, [Air Force Magazine reported](#).

[According to Breaking Defense](#), DARPA's program is aimed at the longer-term, with a full test of the weapon not expected before 2023. According to the outlet, the program began in 2017 - before the Trump administration torpedoed the range-limiting INF Treaty - based on the assumption that the treaty banned cruise missiles and ballistic missiles, but not hypersonic missiles.

INF Treaty Range Limits Gone

Signed in 1987, the INF Treaty between the US and the Soviet Union removed from the battlefield ground-based missiles with ranges of between 500 kilometers and 5,500 kilometers (310 to 3,420 miles). The US was the primary loser in this deal, as it required the provocative

Pershing II ballistic missiles to be decommissioned. The US had based the nuclear-tipped weapons in Europe several years earlier, boasting they could reach Moscow in just six to eight minutes.

That left a narrow window for a response - and an even narrower margin for error. [One incident in 1983 nearly became](#) a nuclear exchange, but the commander of the Soviet radar site that believed it had detected a ballistic missile launch correctly diagnosed the blip as a computer error.

The treaty formally lapsed in August 2019 after the Trump administration claimed Russia had violated the treaty with its Iskander launch system, but Moscow has denied the missiles were in violation of the treaty. Just weeks after the treaty lapsed, the US tested its own treaty-violating missile, a ground-based version of the Tomahawk cruise missile, and had sunk more than \$1 billion into [new missiles that would have violated the INF Treaty](#).

More Dangerous Than a Pershing II

However, the OpFires missile promises to be even more dangerous than the Pershing II: according to Breaking Defense, DARPA is trying to make it “throttleable,” enabling it to strike closer targets.

As Breaking Defense explains, solid-fueled rockets are forced to burn through their entire fuel supply once they turn on, and changing the rocket’s trajectory before then can cause the missile to break apart. However, if DARPA can figure out how to make a rocket engine as safe and reliable as a typical solid-fueled rocket, but which can turn its engine off early if necessary like a liquid-fueled rocket, then it can build a super-fast projectile with incredibly versatile range.

“If you give it a lot of energy, it’s going to go far, and it’s actually really hard to make it go less far ... without actually breaking it in the process,” DARPA’s program manager, Army Lt. Col. Amber Walker, told Breaking Defense in September.

[Last June. Exquadrum carried out](#) its first hot test of just such an engine, on contract from DARPA. However, the other two firms given contracts for the project - Aerojet and Sierra Nevada Corporation - have yet to test their engines. The throttleable engine will be the second stage of the rocket, which activates once it’s already in flight.

Because of the incredible complexity of the weapon’s engine, the rest of the missile will rely on ready-made items, such as the hypersonic glide vehicle the ARRW will use, and a basic solid-fueled first stage rocket engine.

However, Walker told the outlet the Army may not be interested in the OpFires weapon once it’s completed, since it will already have both a ground-launched long-range hypersonic weapon (LRHW) and an intermediate-range conventional missile by then.

The US Air Force has denied it is pursuing a nuclear-tipped hypersonic weapon, but it [might have tipped its cards last August](#) when its Nuclear Weapons Center posted a mysterious public solicitation request for, among other things, a potential hypersonic upgrade to an intercontinental ballistic missile. While an ICBM need not be nuclear-armed, all of the US’ ICBMs are.

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Pompeo’s Europe Trip Canceled After Brussels Diplomats ‘Embarrassed’ to Meet - Report

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

In the wake of the failed January 6 putsch at the US Capitol by supporters of US President Donald Trump, some of the US' closest allies, including leaders of the European Union, denounced the violence and demanded the peaceful process of power transition be respected in Washington.

[According to Reuters](#), the shoe was on the other foot on Tuesday when US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo abruptly canceled his planned trip to Europe, as it was actually European diplomats who had refused to meet with Pompeo.

Anonymous European diplomats told Reuters that Pompeo was snubbed by Brussels and Luxembourg after European Union officials were disgusted by the failed January 6 insurrection in Washington, DC.

One source told Reuters that US allies were "embarrassed" by the prospect of meeting Trump's chief diplomatic envoy just days after his supporters stormed the US Capitol building and dispersed Congress in an attempt to void the results of the November 2020 election, which Trump lost to US President-elect Joe Biden. Their efforts failed, and the results were later certified, although five people were killed in the riot.

[Leading figures in many of Washington's closest allies](#) firmly denounced the attempted putsch, including [Jens Stoltenberg](#), the secretary-general of the NATO alliance, whom Pompeo was scheduled to meet privately during the now-canceled trip.

Earlier on Tuesday, [Pompeo announced all State Department travel plans](#) had been canceled, saying only that doing so was necessary in order to focus on the presidential transition of power, which is expected to take place on January 20.

According to Pompeo's spokesperson, the trip aimed to "highlight the enduring importance of the Transatlantic partnership, champion NATO's ongoing success in safeguarding the Transatlantic community and adapting to new security challenges, and reaffirm the strength of the bilateral relationship between the United States and Belgium."

In the hours after police cleared the insurrectionists from the Capitol, [Pompeo offered vague platitudes](#) on Twitter about violence being "intolerable both at home and abroad," but not enough to satisfy diplomats in his own department, who in the days that followed demanded that Pompeo more strongly and explicitly distance himself from Trump.

"Failing to publicly hold the president to account would further damage our democracy and our ability to effectively accomplish our foreign policy goals abroad," one internal dissent cable read, [according to the New York Times](#).

Another noted, "Just as we routinely denounce foreign leaders who use violence and intimidation to interfere in peaceful democratic processes and override the will of their voters, the department's public statements about this episode should also mention President Trump by name."

On Monday, House Democrats [introduced a new article of impeachment](#) aimed at removing Trump from office by faulting him for the January 6 insurrection. His supporters swarmed the US Capitol after a stormy rally hosted by Trump outside the White House at which he encouraged them to take action and "stop the steal."

[Thousands of US National Guard troops](#) have been deployed to the national capital city in the wake of the insurrection in order to ensure a peaceful transition of power.

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US Counterintelligence Chief Calls for 'Accountability' by Police, Security for Capitol Insurrection by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

More than a dozen members of the US Capitol Police force have been suspended or are being investigated for alleged misconduct during the January 6 insurrection by supporters of US President Donald Trump that dispersed Congress and killed five people.

The US government's counterintelligence chief said on Tuesday that people in the law enforcement and security communities are "going to have to be held accountable" for the January 6 insurrection in Washington, DC, which he said was driven by "home-grown violent extremism" similar to radical terrorist groups abroad.

"I'll let the investigations play themselves out ... I think the investigation will be long, it'll be thorough. People died, and I think a lot of folks are going to have to be held accountable both in the law enforcement community, in the security community," William Evanina, director of the National Counterintelligence and Security Center (NCSC) and the principal counterintelligence and security advisor to the director of national intelligence, [told the Washington Post's Ellen Nakashima](#) in a Tuesday interview.

Evanina added that "the perpetrators who stormed the Capitol" are "just about as un-American as we've seen in a long time."

On Monday, two US Capitol Police officers were suspended for allegedly helping the pro-Trump insurrectionists to storm the national legislature last week, [according to US Rep. Tim Ryan \(D-OH\)](#), who noted another 10-15 officers are under investigation as well.

[As Sputnik reported, it's not just](#) the officers tasked with the security of the Capitol who are being investigated: across the United States, police forces and military units are probing potential involvement in the failed putsch by their members. From the plethora of video and photographic evidence accumulated during the event, [dozens of people have been identified](#), ranging from retired military personnel to Republican state legislators and members of neo-Nazi and other white nationalist groups. Numerous instances of [potential collusion between the insurrectionists and the police](#) have appeared as well.

The US [Justice Department said on Tuesday afternoon](#) it expects "hundreds" of cases to soon be filed in connection with the uprising.

Numerous political figures, including US President-elect Joe Biden, whose election victory the insurrectionists attempted to void during the Wednesday putsch, have [condemned the participants as "domestic terrorists."](#) Evanina noted the term is imprecise, but agreed there were similarities.

Evanina told the Post he saw "logical parallels" between how his agency understands the radicalization of terrorists happens abroad and the creation of the "home-grown violent extremism" on display at the Capitol. He said the situation demands a "paradigm shift in how we look at this activity."

Thousands of Trump supporters mobbed the US Capitol on the afternoon of January 6 immediately after the conclusion of a rally hosted by Trump outside the White House. In a

stormy speech, Trump urged his followers to “stop the steal,” continuing a monthslong mantra that the November 3, 2020, election results were fraudulent. Congress had convened on Wednesday to certify the results of the election, which showed Biden as the winner. While the rioters succeeded in temporarily dispersing Congress, it reconvened after the rioters were evicted from the Capitol and finished the certification process.

Biden is due to be sworn in on January 20, but Trump has waffled on a commitment to a peaceful transfer of power in the week since the uprising. While on the evening of the riot he condemned violence and later seemed to concede defeat to Biden in a roundabout way, Trump has since reportedly [walked those statements back in private](#).

Trump spent weeks promoting the January 6 rally on social media, but in the hours after the insurrection, the mixed messages he sent on social media platforms prompted [Facebook and Twitter to shut down his accounts](#) for allegedly violating rules regarding glorification of violence. Evanina said that while Twitter is a private company that made a “business decision,” the situation calls for a “whole-of-American-society, maybe a blue-ribbon panel, to really look at where we’re going to go with social media and free speech.”

“Society needs to now come to grips with where we are with that safe space between First Amendment rights and the ability and willingness of private companies to do what they want on their own platforms,” the counterintelligence chief said. “I personally think that a private business has the right to do what they want to do, but my concern is: who is that behind the keyboard making the determination that what Bill says should be restricted but what Ellen says is not restricted?”

He added that “like the government, private-sector organizations and software companies, big tech, have an obligation to protect America.”

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Rep. Liz Cheney, Other Republicans Support Trump Impeachment as McConnell Reportedly in Favor
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

In addition to impeachment, lawmakers are due to formally call on US Vice President Mike Pence to invoke the 25 Amendment and remove US President Donald Trump from office on the grounds that he is unfit to carry out the duties of his office.

After House Democrats [introduced an article of impeachment on Monday](#) charging US President Donald Trump with “incitement of insurrection,” they are also winning the support of leading Republicans, who see an opportunity to rid themselves of a troublesome factional leader in the party.

Rep. Liz Cheney (R-WY), chair of the House Republican Conference and third most powerful Republican in the US House of Representatives, sharply condemned the attack on the US Capitol last week, blaming Trump for both sparking the riot and for failing to rein it in.

“On January 6, 2021 a violent mob attacked the United States Capitol to obstruct the process of our democracy and stop the counting of presidential electoral votes. This insurrection caused

injury, death and destruction in the most sacred space in our Republic," she said Tuesday, [according to The Hill](#).

"Much more will become clear in coming days and weeks, but what we know now is enough. The President of the United States summoned this mob, assembled the mob, and lit the flame of this attack. Everything that followed was his doing. None of this would have happened without the President. The President could have immediately and forcefully intervened to stop the violence. He did not. There has never been a greater betrayal by a President of the United States of his office and his oath to the Constitution," she added. "I will vote to impeach the President."

While Cheney has a history of being critical of Trump's policies, preferring a more adversarial foreign policy like that of her father, former US Vice President Dick Cheney, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) has long supported the Trump administration.

McConnell, who leads the Republicans in the Senate and was instrumental in ensuring Trump's acquittal during his first impeachment in December 2019, [reportedly also expressed his support](#) for removing Trump from office on Tuesday.

[The New York Times reported](#), citing "people" familiar with his thinking, that McConnell believes Trump committed impeachable offenses and that impeaching him will make it easier to purge him from the Republican Party. Trump's unexpected rise to party presidential nominee in 2016 [was opposed by other leading Republicans](#), who denounced his anti-establishment posturing and tendency to say the quiet part out loud as inimical to the party's brand of politics.

His subsequent administration has polarized the Republican Party, sending increasing numbers of party figures into the Democratic Party or prompting them to form a "never Trump" internal opposition, with such leaders as former national security adviser John Bolton, former Secretary of State Colin Powell and former chair of the Republican National Committee Michael Steele vocally opposing the president.

Another, Rep. Adam Kinzinger (R-IL), [said in a Tuesday statement](#), "There is no doubt in my mind that the President of the United States broke his oath of office and incited this insurrection."

"He used his position in the Executive to attack the Legislature," Kinzinger said, adding that if Trump's actions "are not worthy of impeachment, then what is an impeachable offense?"

Trump's first impeachment, on charges of abuse of power and obstruction of Congress, came after he allegedly pressured the Ukrainian government to open an investigation into his election rival, Democratic candidate Joe Biden, and the business dealings of Biden's son, Hunter. Republicans fervently opposed the Democratic initiative, and the GOP-controlled Senate rejected the charges brought against him by the Democrat-controlled House.

Biden defeated Trump in the November 3, 2020, election, but Trump claimed the results were fraudulent and declared himself the victor. Last Wednesday, Trump's followers stormed the US Capitol after attending a rally hosted by Trump outside the White House at which he urged them to "stop the steal."

However, after the insurrection failed to halt Congress' certification of the election results, Trump condemned the violence and asked the rioters to leave the Capitol.

Since then, Republicans have rallied against Trump and the insurrection, both of which have been condemned by leading GOP figures, and several members of his Cabinet have tendered their resignations. Sen. Kelly Loeffler (R-GA), who had previously opposed certification of the

election results, [changed her mind after the violence](#) sent her and other lawmakers scrambling to safety, and she voted to certify them once Congress reconvened after the rioters had been evicted from the Capitol.

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US Cancer Death Rate Fell by Record 2.4% From 2017 to 2018 - Report by [Mary F.](#)

The latest data reveals that there were an estimated 1.8 million new cancer cases diagnosed and more than 600,000 cancer deaths in the US in 2020. The American Cancer Society predicts that 1.9 million new cancer cases will be diagnosed this year and that more than 600,000 Americans will die from cancer in 2021.

A new [report](#) released this week by the [American Cancer Society](#) reveals that the death rate from cancer in the US dropped by 2.4% from 2017 to 2018, a record decline for one year. The report also notes that overall cancer death rates in the US decreased by 31% between 1991 and 2018.

The reduction in mortality rates for the leading cancers in the US, namely, lung, breast, colorectal and prostate cancers, are due to reductions in smoking, earlier detection and improvements in treatment, the report explains. Lung cancer specifically is the most common cause of US cancer mortality and accounts for more deaths than breast, prostate and colorectal cancers combined.

According to the American Cancer Society, lung cancer “accounted for almost half (46%) of the overall decline in cancer mortality in the past 5 years and spurred a record single-year drop (2.4% from 2017 to 2018) for the second year in a row.”

The decrease in lung cancer mortality is also due to better treatment for a common subtype of the disease, namely non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC), one of the two major types of the disease which can impact both smokers and nonsmokers.

“Two-year relative survival for NSCLC has increased from 34% for patients diagnosed during 2009 through 2010 to 42% for those diagnosed during 2015 through 2016, including absolute gains of 5% to 6% for every stage of diagnosis,” the report notes.

Despite the fact that recent advances in treatment have decreased cancer mortality rates, the report notes there is still a need for additional investment in fighting the disease.

“While recent advances in treatment for lung cancer and several other cancers are reason to celebrate, it is concerning to see the persistent racial, socioeconomic and geographic disparities for highly preventable cancers,” said William G. Cance, chief medical and scientific officer at the American Cancer Society.

“There is a continued need for increased investment in equitable cancer control interventions and clinical research to create more advanced treatment options to help accelerate progress in the fight against cancer,” he added.

In addition, there is concern that the COVID-19 pandemic has stressed the health care system and will disrupt the progress made in cancer mortality reduction.

"The impact of COVID-19 on cancer diagnoses and outcomes at the population level will be unknown for several years because of the time necessary for data collection, compilation, quality control and dissemination," explained Rebecca Siegel, lead author of the report. "We anticipate that disruptions in access to cancer care in 2020 will lead to downstream increases in advanced-stage diagnoses that may impede progress in reducing cancer mortality rates in the years to come."

Despite the reduction in cancer mortality, the disease is still the second leading cause of death in the US, following heart disease, according to the [latest data](#) by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

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US DoJ Working Toward Sedition, Conspiracy Charges Against Capitol Rioters
by [Mary F.](#)

US President Donald Trump supporters breached the Capitol building in Washington, DC, on January 6 to protest against the certification of the Electoral College vote and confirmation of Joe Biden as the winner of the 2020 presidential election.

The US Department of Justice (DoJ) is currently working to bring sedition and conspiracy charges against some of the rioters who stormed the Capitol last week, Michael Sherwin, the acting US attorney for Washington, DC, said in a Tuesday news conference.

"Just yesterday, our office organized a strike force of very senior national security prosecutors and public corruption prosecutors," Sherwin told reporters, [The Hill reported](#). "Their only marching orders from me are to build seditious and conspiracy charges related to the most heinous acts that occurred in the Capitol."

Sherwin's latest comments come after he revealed Tuesday that prosecutors have already filed more than [70 charges](#) following the riot, while the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has spearheaded investigations into more than 170 people. Those charged with sedition could face up to 20 years in prison, while conspiracy charges can [carry prison sentences of up to five years](#).

Many of the rioters arrested and charged over the last few days are facing various charges, ranging from trespassing to carrying weapons to assaulting police officers.

"With this strike force that was established to focus strictly on sedition charges, we're looking at and treating this just like a significant international counterterrorism or counterintelligence operation," Sherwin explained.

"We're looking at everything: money, travel records, looking at disposition, movement and communication records, so no resource related to the FBI, or the US Attorney's Office will be unchecked in terms of trying to determine exactly if there was a command and control, how it operated and how they executed these activities," he added.

In addition, the FBI is currently investigating who planted pipe bombs on the day of the Capitol riots. The bombs were found near the Republican National Committee and the Democratic National Committee headquarters in DC.

The FBI on Wednesday released photos and a reward of up to \$50,000 for information that would lead to the arrest of a suspect linked to the pipe bombs, [Fox 25 reported](#).

On Tuesday, the [Washington Post](#) reported that one day before the rioters stormed the Capitol, an FBI office in Virginia issued an internal warning that extremists were planning to travel to DC to commit violence. The Post's report contradicts claims by the FBI that the bureau had no intelligence that pro-Trump protesters were planning to commit acts of violence.

"As of 5 January 2021, FBI Norfolk received information indicating calls for violence in response to 'unlawful lockdowns' to begin on 6 January 2021 in Washington, DC," reads the document obtained by the Post. "An online thread discussed specific calls for violence to include stating 'Be ready to fight. Congress needs to hear glass breaking, doors being kicked in, and blood from their BLM and Pantifa slave soldiers being spilled. Get violent. Stop calling this a march, or rally, or a protest. Go there ready for war. We get our President or we die. NOTHING else will achieve this goal.'"

During the Tuesday news conference, Steven D'Antuono, the head of the FBI's Washington field office, defended the bureau's actions before the riot.

"As offensive as a statement can be, the FBI cannot open an investigation without a threat of violence or alleged criminal activity," D'Antuono explained, [The Hill](#) reported. "However, when that language does turn to a call of violence or criminal activity, the FBI is able to undertake investigative action. And in this case, we had no indication, information was linked to any specific person, but that this is a matter of an online discussion."

"This information was immediately disseminated through a written product, and briefed to our command post operations to all levels of law enforcement," he added.

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US Federal Prosecutors Announce First Indictments Over Capitol Riots
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Earlier, a criminal complaint was filed against Aaron Mostofsky, the son of a New York judge, for participating in the January 6 storming of the US Capitol that turned deadly after five individuals, including a Capitol Police officer, were killed.

Federal prosecutors in Washington, DC, on Tuesday acquired the first indictments against individuals who played a role in the Wednesday insurrection that saw hundreds of pro-Trump rioters breach security barriers and ransack the US Capitol.

Documents obtained by Josh Gerstein, the senior legal affairs contributor to Politico, name two individuals: Mark Jefferson Leffingwell and Lonnie Leroy Coffman.

Leffingwell [was hit with six charges](#): civil disorder; entering and remaining in a restricted building; disorderly and disruptive conduct in a restricted building; violent entry and disorderly conduct in a Capitol building; act of physical violence in the Capitol building; and assaulting, resisting or impeding certain officers or employees.

The indictment notes that Leffingwell “did unlawfully, knowingly, and intentionally forcibly assault, resist, oppose, impede, intimidate, or interfere” with Capitol Police Officers Daniel Amendola and Wyatt Hart as they attempted to quell the insurrection.

An [affidavit signed by Amendola](#) states that after Leffingwell stormed the federal building with fellow rioters on January 6 and was prevented from moving closer to the Senate chamber, Leffingwell began to repeatedly punch the officer with a closed fist.

“I was struck in the helmet that I was wearing and in the chest,” Amendola recalled, before noting that Leffingwell continued to resist arrest while being detained.

As for Coffman, [a total of 17 criminal counts](#) were signed by acting US Attorney for the District of Columbia Michael Sherwin, and include possession of an unregistered firearm, carrying a pistol without a license and unlawful possession of ammunition, among others. However, he was not charged with any crime that related to participation in the Capitol riots.

The indictment documents state that Coffman had in his possession multiple firearms, such as a shotgun, rifle and handguns, and a variety of ammunition which included .223-caliber rounds, 45-millimeter rounds and 9-millimeter rounds.

Mason jars, cloth rags, igniter liquid and lighters - all components needed to create an explosive Molotov cocktail - were also in Coffman’s possession. In total, his vehicle contained 11 explosive devices, authorities said.

An [affidavit provided by Capitol Police Special Agent Lawrence Anyaso](#) explains that officers apprehended Coffman sometime after 6:30 p.m. local time on January 6 after discovering several firearms and destructive devices inside a vehicle registered to the Alabama resident. Investigators were led to Coffman’s vehicle amid reports of an explosive device near the Capitol building.

The latest development came as prosecutors have brought [at least 55 criminal cases](#) in connection with the Capitol unrest that sought and inevitably failed to halt the certification of the US Electoral College vote.

Additionally, earlier Tuesday, federal authorities [filed a criminal complaint](#) - not an indictment - against Mostofsky and charged him with theft of government property, illegal entry into a restricted area and disorderly conduct. The difference between a criminal complaint and an indictment is that a complaint is presented to a grand jury that will later determine whether to indict someone on its charges.

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Joint Chiefs of Staff: US Capitol Riot Was ‘Direct Assault’ on American Democracy
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

In the wake of last week’s storming of the US Capitol, officials across the political spectrum have condemned the violent events that unfolded on January 6, as law enforcement officials have continued to investigate and track down individuals who participated in the insurrection.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Pentagon body comprising the US military’s top generals, issued a [military-wide memo on Tuesday](#) that condemned the deadly riots and reiterated US

President-elect Joe Biden would be the next commander-in-chief of the armed forces come Inauguration Day.

Headed by Gen. Mark Milley, who serves as its chairman, the top military body described the turbulent unrest as a “violent riot” that became a “direct assault on the US Congress, the Capitol building and our Constitutional process.”

“We witnessed actions inside the Capitol building that were inconsistent with the rule of law. The rights of freedom of speech and assembly do not give anyone the right to resort to violence, sedition and insurrection,” the memo states.

“As service members, we must embody the values and ideals of the nation. We support and defend the Constitution. Any act to disrupt the Constitutional process is not only against our traditions, values and oath; it is against the law.”

The address also reaffirmed the US military would protect and defend the Constitution “against all enemies, foreign and domestic,” before calling on service members to “stay ready, keep your eyes on the horizon, and remain focused on the mission.”

The memo proved to be a rare example of military brass voicing political criticism in the public domain.

Remarks by the Joint Chiefs came moments after Michael Sherwin, the acting US attorney for Washington, DC, revealed during a news conference that he had assembled a group of lawyers with expertise in national security and public corruption to build sedition and conspiracy charges against Capitol rioters. Such charges could lead to prison sentences of up to 20 years.

The latest details from the Federal Bureau of Investigation note the agency has [opened more than 170 case files and charged some 70 individuals](#) in connection to the deadly riots that claimed the lives of five individuals, including Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick.

Earlier on Tuesday, federal prosecutors [unveiled their first indictments](#) linked to the Capitol events against Mark Jefferson Leffingwell and Lonnie Leroy Coffman.

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McConnell Reportedly ‘Pleased’ With Democratic Impeachment Push Amid Hopes to ‘Purge’ Trump From GOP
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Since the violent January 6 riots unfolded at the US Capitol, House Democrats have taken up efforts to remove US President Donald Trump from the Oval Office. The two options recently put forward were invoking the 25th Amendment or introducing impeachment articles against Trump for the second time during his presidency.

US Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) is reportedly “pleased” with recent impeachment efforts taken up by Democrats in the US House of Representatives, as he believes the push will make it much easier to “purge” the president from the Republican Party. Citing sources familiar with the matter, [the New York Times reported Tuesday](#) that the Republican official informed associates that Trump had “committed impeachable offenses” in

relation to the deadly riots that forced congressional lawmakers to temporarily abandon efforts to certify the results of the US presidential election.

Although McConnell previously voted to acquit Trump during Democrats' push to impeach Trump over the Russiagate allegations, recent reports suggest the Kentucky official has had a change of heart and blames the commander-in-chief for Republicans losing their hold on the US Senate after the Georgia runoff elections shifted control of the chamber to Democrats.

However, McConnell isn't alone.

While House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) has stated he is not in support of impeaching Trump, reports suggest he isn't [planning on lobbying members](#) to vote against the House impeachment procedures. Additionally, sources have stated the lawmaker reached out to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) to see whether the chamber would consider censuring Trump over the role he played in inciting rioters, a request that was promptly denied, the Times reported.

But that's not all, folks.

Breaking from McCarthy's public statement, Rep. Liz Cheney (R-WY), the number three Republican in the House, announced she will be voting in favor of impeaching the president. [In a statement](#), Cheney fully blamed Trump for the insurrection, saying he "assembled the mob, and lit the flame of this attack."

In light of the Capitol riots, House lawmakers immediately began initiating talks on how to remove Trump from the White House after his remarks at the "Stop the Steal" rally encouraged thousands of his supporters to march toward the US Capitol, where a joint session of Congress was working to certify US President-elect Joe Biden as the winner of the 2020 election.

Within moments of lawmakers beginning their first debate on the results, rioters broke past security barriers and began to trespass the grounds, developments which promptly saw many officials evacuated from their respective chambers and taken into a secure bunker. US Vice President Mike Pence, who presided over the electoral certification, was among those taken to safety.

The first of the two options considered by lawmakers - invoking the 25th Amendment - [will be voted on late Tuesday](#); however, on Wednesday, officials will take up [votes on a single impeachment article](#) against Trump for incitement of insurrection. If the House approves the article, it will be the second time the chamber has impeached Trump.

For his part, Trump has brushed off any blame for the violent unrest. At a speaking event in Texas on Tuesday, [the president remarked](#) that the 25th Amendment vote poses "zero risk to me," and that the impeachment measure is a "continuation of the greatest and most vicious witch hunt in the history of our country and is causing tremendous anger, division and pain."

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Enemy Schenemy - Political Cartoon

Iran, whose population is predominantly Shia, has long been considered an enemy of the Sunni-based al-Qaeda. Claims that the pair have collaborated in terrorist acts have been voiced

before by the US; however, officials have failed to ever provide sufficient evidence to back those accusations.

Without providing any hard evidence, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo [alleged on Tuesday](#) that Iran has provided support and welcomed the terrorist group al-Qaeda into the Middle Eastern country to create its “new home base.”

However, the unsubstantiated claims were immediately shot down by Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, who accused Pompeo via Twitter of spreading “[more warmongering lies](#).” Zarif added, “No one is fooled. All 9/11 terrorists came from [Pompeo’s] favorite [Middle East] destinations; none from Iran.”

[Reports have suggested](#) that the latest stance taken by the Trump administration is an attempt to further escalate tensions between the US and Iran, as well as tap the 2001 Authorization of Use of Military Force, which may clear Washington to use force against Iran if al-Qaeda were proven to be present there.

With political turmoil and a pandemic already in hand, adding on an even more tense relationship with Iran will be quite the parting gift for US President-elect Joe Biden. Gone are the days when one was given a [present from Tiffany & Company](#).

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‘Political Escapade’: Michigan Prosecutors Plan to Charge Former Governor Over Flint Water Scandal
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

The Flint water crisis began in early 2014 when city officials decided to switch the community’s water source as a cost-saving measure; however, the move subsequently prompted lead to leach out of corroded pipelines. The water switch is also believed to be responsible for an outbreak of Legionnaires’ disease that killed 12 individuals.

Emerging reports revealed on Tuesday that former Gov. Rick Snyder (R-MI) would soon be getting hit with criminal charges stemming from the recently renewed investigation into the devastating Flint water scandal.

A pair of sources [informed the Associated Press](#) that the office of Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel had informed defense lawyers that indictments would be coming, and as such, to anticipate court appearances.

Although the outlet was unable to “determine the nature of the charges,” the individuals placed under the investigative office’s microscope include Snyder, former health department director Nick Lyon and Snyder’s former top aide Rich Baird, among other former officials.

Randy Levine, Baird’s attorney, told the AP he was informed on Monday that his client would be facing charges as [part of the new investigation that was launched in 2019](#). The attorney remarked that Baird was never ordered to investigate the crisis, “but rather he raised his hand and volunteered.”

Unlike Baird’s legal representative, Snyder’s lawyer Brian Lennon lashed out by saying the looming indictments would be “outrageous.” He added, “Rather than following the evidence to

find the truth, the Office of Special Counsel appears to be targeting former Gov. Snyder in a political escapade.”

Snyder served as the Great Lakes State’s governor when state-appointed officials decided to flip Flint’s water source from Lake Huron to the Flint River, a nearly 80-mile-long body of water that flows through several Michigan counties. The switch was carried out as a way to cut costs; however, almost immediately, residents began noticing that the water was cloudy and gave off a foul smell.

The subsequent water crisis that emerged revealed a failure to apply corrosion inhibitors to the city’s water pipes when the water source was changed and ultimately exposed tens of thousands of residents to dangerously toxic levels of lead.

Estimates suggest that as many as 12,000 children were exposed to lead in their drinking water, raising concerns of developmental damage, as the toxic element can cause serious brain and nervous system issues. At the same time, the water change is also believed to be responsible for the outbreak of Legionnaires’ disease that affected at least 90 individuals and killed some 12 people. The disease is a type of pneumonia that spreads through water mist.

The Flint crisis drew national interest and quickly became an example of widespread governmental mismanagement, environmental mistreatment and racism, as residents of the majority-Black city were forced to line up for bottled water.

While in office, Snyder acknowledged in 2016 that the state’s government had failed at every level, and that he had been informed of the Legionnaires’ outbreak weeks before speaking on the subject to the press.

A judge [previously ruled in 2019](#) that Flint residents were clear to file class action lawsuits against a number of former state and local officials, including Snyder, over the massive water scandal.

Courtney Covington Watkins, a spokesperson for the attorney general’s office, told the AP that officials intended on revealing specifics of their investigation “as soon as we’re in a position to do so.”

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US State Dept. Cancels All Trips Planned for Week Over Transition, Including Pompeo’s Europe Visit

by [Evan Craighead](#)

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was previously scheduled to travel to Brussels, Belgium, on Wednesday “to reaffirm the deep and enduring partnership between the United States and Belgium and the unwavering US support for NATO,” according to a Monday memo from the State Department.

The State Department announced Tuesday that all departmental travel, including that of Pompeo, would be canceled so officials can focus on carrying out transition work ahead of US President-elect Joe Biden’s assumption of office.

“We are expecting shortly a plan from the incoming administration identifying the career officials who will remain in positions of responsibility on an acting basis until the Senate confirmation

process is complete for incoming officials," the State Department statement read, [as reported by Reuters](#). "As a result, we are cancelling all planned travel this week, including the Secretary's trip to Europe."

This development comes just a day after the office of [Pompeo's spokesperson proclaimed](#) the official would be meeting NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg and Belgian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sophie Wilmès during his January 13-14 trip to Brussels. "Secretary Pompeo will highlight the enduring importance of the Transatlantic partnership, champion NATO's ongoing success in safeguarding the Transatlantic community and adapting to new security challenges, and reaffirm the strength of the bilateral relationship between the United States and Belgium," the announcement read.

The State Department's recent decision will also nix US Ambassador to the United Nations Kelly Craft's [planned visit to Taipei, Taiwan](#), from January 13-15. Craft's visit was positioned to be the first time an American ambassador has visited the self-governing island since US President Jimmy Carter signed the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act and broke formal relations between the US and Taiwan.

The planned visit was [condemned by Beijing](#), with the Chinese mission to the UN stating last week that the US "will pay a heavy price" for its "crazy provocation." The mission also emphasized that these moves are "creating new difficulties for China-US relations."

"Any actions which harm China's core interests will be met with a firm counter-attack and will not succeed," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Lijian Zhao asserted to reporters on Monday, [as reported by the BBC](#).

China has maintained that it views Taiwan as a breakaway province, and while the island has had its own government since 1949, the "One-China policy" states that there is only one sovereign China.

Mainstream US media outlets have speculated that the State Department's decision to cancel travel may be linked to the possible second impeachment vote against US President Donald Trump, who many believe incited the deadly riots and storming of the Capitol building in Washington, DC, on January 6.

The US House of Representatives is set to vote Tuesday night on a resolution that calls for outgoing Vice President Mike Pence to invoke the 25th Amendment and remove Trump from office before his term wraps on January 20.

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Virginia FBI Report Warned of Possible 'War' at US Capitol Ahead of Deadly Jan. 6 Riots - Report
by [Evan Craighead](#)

Two days after the Capitol City riots and related protests over the Electoral College presidential vote certification, Steven D'Antuono of the FBI's Washington Field Office told reporters "there was no indication" of anything taking place "other than First Amendment-protected activity," according to the Washington Post.

The Washington Post revealed in a Tuesday exclusive that a Federal Bureau of Investigation office in Norfolk, Virginia, issued a situational information report that warned of violence and "war" ahead of the deadly riots and storming of the Capitol building in Washington, DC, on January 6. At least five individuals died and dozens were injured.

"As of 5 January 2021, FBI Norfolk received information indicating calls for violence in response to 'unlawful lockdowns' to begin on 6 January 2021 in Washington, D.C.," the document read, [according to the WaPo](#). "An online thread discussed specific calls for violence to include stating 'Be ready to fight. Congress needs to hear glass breaking, doors being kicked in, and blood from their BLM and Pantifa slave soldiers being spilled. Get violent. Stop calling this a march, or rally, or a protest. Go there ready for war. We get our President or we die. NOTHING else will achieve this goal.'"

The outlet interpreted "BLM" to stand for Black Lives Matter and "Pantifa" as a derogatory term for "antifa, a far-left anti-fascist movement whose adherents sometimes engage in violent clashes with right-wing extremists."

Citing an FBI official familiar with the report, WaPo detailed that the document was drawn up and shared "within 45 minutes" of the Norfolk FBI office learning of the

"Individuals/Organizations named in this [situational information report] have been identified as participating in activities that are protected by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution," the document reportedly read. "Their inclusion here is not intended to associate the protected activity with criminality or a threat to national security, or to infer that such protected activity itself violates federal law.

It went on to detail that "based on known intelligence and/or specific historical observations, it is possible the protected activity could invite a violent reaction towards the subject individual or others in retaliation or with the goal of stopping the protected activity from occurring in the first instance. In the event no violent reaction occurs, FBI policy and federal law dictates that no further record to be made of the protected activity."

According to the document, an online comment suggested that "if Antifa or BLM get violent, leave them dead in the street." Meanwhile, another individual said those participating need "people on standby to provide supplies, including water and medical, to the front lines. The individual also discussed the need to evacuate noncombatants and wounded to medical care."

This comes contrary to the Friday [briefing delivered by D'Antuono](#). Speaking to reporters, the head Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Washington field office argued "there was no indication that there was anything other than First Amendment protected activity."

Furthermore, a senior law enforcement official told NBC News the FBI and New York City Police Department relayed information to US Capitol police regarding the possibility of violence from the January 6 protests. The source also alleged that the FBI "visited more than a dozen extremists already under investigation to urge them not to travel to Washington."

News of these reports come shortly after it was revealed that Anthony Quinn Warner, a 63-year-old Nashville, Tennessee, resident, who was the sole fatality in the Christmas Day detonation of his RV in the city's downtown area, was reported to authorities before his attack. [ABC News reported](#) late last month that Warner's girlfriend contacted Nashville police in 2019 to report that he was assembling bombs. Cops later

"I believe the officers did everything they could legally. Maybe they could have followed up more, hindsight is 20/20," Metro Nashville Police Chief John Drake argued, noting that aside from a 1970s marijuana arrest, Warned had a "squeaky clean" record.

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RPT - Pence Opposes Invoking 25th Amendment, Warns of Setting 'Terrible' Precedent - Letter

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - US Vice President Mike Pence in a letter to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi urged her to refrain from moving forward with legislation to remove President Donald Trump from office due to the risk it could further destabilize the United States. "I urge you and every member of Congress to avoid actions that would further divide and inflame the passions of the moment," Pence said in the letter on Tuesday. "Work with us to lower the temperature and unite our country as we prepare to inaugurate President-elect Joe Biden as the next President of the United States. I pledge to you that I will continue to do my part to work in good faith with the incoming administration to ensure an orderly transition of power."

Pence, in the letter released as the House was debating ahead of the vote, also said it would set a terrible precedent.

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Pence Opposes Invoking 25th Amendment, Warns of Setting 'Terrible' Precedent - Letter

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Pence released the letter as the House was debating ahead of the vote.

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US House Democrats Release Report Supporting Trump Impeachment

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - The Democratic majority of the US House of Representatives Judiciary Committee issued a 76-page compilation of facts and arguments to support an attempt to impeach President Donald Trump on "incitement of insurrection" charges following a flare-up of violence in Washington, DC.

"President Trump committed a high Crime and Misdemeanor against the Nation by inciting an insurrection at the Capitol in an attempt to overturn the results of the 2020 Presidential Election. The facts establish that he is unfit to remain in office a single day longer, and warrant the immediate impeachment of President Trump," the report said on Tuesday.

The Democratic-led House of Representatives is poised to vote Wednesday on Trump's impeachment and pass the case to the Senate for subsequent conviction or acquittal.

"Some have argued that given the little remaining time left in President Trump's term, there is no need to impeach him now. This ignores the precedent this country would set if we refuse to impeach and the remedy of disqualification that the Senate may impose," the panel said.

A week ago, thousands of Trump supporters violently stormed the Capitol building in a bid to prevent Congress from certifying the presidential election results. They attacked police with metal pipes, chemical irritants, and other weapons, and damaged property before seizing the rotunda, inauguration stage and entering the building.

"President Trump committed the impeachable offense of incitement of insurrection by willfully making statements that, in context, encouraged and foreseeably resulted in lawless action at the Capitol," according to the report.

"He set the stage for the Capitol attack in the months leading up to January 6th, and on that date, he exhorted the mob into a frenzy, aimed it like a loaded gun down Pennsylvania Avenue, and pulled the trigger," it said accusing Trump of "falsely asserting he won the 2020 presidential election and repeatedly seeking to overturn" its results.

The attack, which came after Trump urged his supporters to keep fighting to overturn the Joe Biden's win, marked the most significant breach of US Capitol grounds since the British set fire to it in 1814. The incumbent, who condemned violence and committed himself to an orderly transition, denies any wrongdoing.

US Republican leaders have warned that impeaching Trump at this point would further divide the nation.

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US Lawmakers Demand Reinstatement of Voice of America White House Reporter

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - The US House Foreign Affairs Committee chairman and ranking Republican called on Voice of American (VOA) to reinstate the agency's senior White House reporter, who they claim was demoted following an exchange with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo last week.

"We were incredibly frustrated to hear the Voice of America White House senior correspondent Patsy Widakuswara was demoted from her position after questioning Secretary Pompeo about

last week's attack on the Capitol. Absent a legitimate reason for this move, which has not been provided, we believe she should be reinstated," Committee Chair Gregory Meeks and ranking Republican Michael McCaul said in a statement on Tuesday.

The lawmakers warned that Widakuswara's demotion likely violates a firewall established by Congress between top officials at the US Agency for Global Media (USAGM) and Voice of America.

"This is the United States of America - we do not punish our journalists for seeking answers to their questions. A free and fair press is at the core of our Constitution and our democracy," the statement said.

The lawmakers added that both USAGM and the Voice of America failed to respond to a request to explain why the reporter was demoted.

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Three House Republicans Say They Will Vote to Impeach Trump

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - At least three Republican members of Congress have gone on record to say they will vote in favor of impeaching President Donald Trump for inciting the violent mob that stormed the Capitol last week.

The US House introduced impeachment articles on Monday charging Trump with inciting an insurrection on Capitol Hill. The House will vote on the measure on Wednesday before it goes to the Senate. It requires 67 votes in the 100-seater Senate to convict and remove Trump from office. Last year, no Republicans in the House voted in favor of impeaching Trump on two articles of impeachment.

"What we know now is enough," Representative Liz Cheney said in a statement carried by The Hill on Tuesday. "The President of the United States summoned this mob, assembled the mob, and lit the flame of this attack. Everything that followed was his doing. None of this would have happened without the President. The President could have immediately and forcefully intervened to stop the violence. He did not. ...I will vote to impeach the President."

Cheney, the daughter of former Vice President Dick Cheney and the number three Republican in the House of Representatives, said on Tuesday she now plans to vote to impeach the president. She was the first member of the Republican House leadership to do so, defying House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy.

Another Republican congress member, Representative John Katko from New York, said in a Twitter message that he too would vote for impeachment.

"To allow the President of the United States to incite without consequence is a direct threat to the future of our democracy. For this reason, I cannot sit by without taking action. I will vote to impeach this president," he said.

It could not be ignored that Trump had encouraged the insurrection ahead of time both on social media and in a speech, suggesting that the election was stolen, Katko added.

Congressman Adam Kinzinger also said in a statement on Tuesday that he will vote to impeach. McCarthy has warned that impeaching Trump at this point will only divide the nation further.

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US Sets Up Strike Force to Address Assaults on Media During Capitol Unrest - Attorney

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - The US government has established a strike force that will focus on assault on the journalists during last week's unrest at the US Capitol, Acting US Attorney for Washington, DC Michael Sherwin told reporters.

"We set up a strike force to focus on assaults on the media," Sherwin said during a press conference on Tuesday.

On January 6, a group of supporters of the US President Donald Trump stormed Capitol Hill in protest of legislators certifying elector slates given that they consider the slates from key battleground states invalid. The protesters clashed with police and damaged property during the unrest.

Sherwin said some protesters specifically targeted members of the media and assaulted them. In response to Wednesday's unrest, congressional Democrats are trying to remove Trump from office by urging Vice President Mike Pence to invoke the 25th amendment, which states a sitting president can be removed if he is incapacitated to perform his duties. The Democrats also introduced articles of impeachment should Pence fail to act.

On Monday, Trump declared a state of emergency in Washington, DC ahead of Biden's inauguration planned for January 20, after the FBI warned that armed protests might occur in the US capital and the to state capitals.

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US Requires Negative COVID-19 Test for All Air Passengers Starting on January 26 - CDC

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - All air passengers will be required to get a negative coronavirus test prior to boarding their flight to the United States beginning on January 26, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced.

"Air passengers are required to get a viral test (a test for current infection) within the 3 days before their flight to the US departs, and provide written documentation of their laboratory test result (paper or electronic copy) to the airline or provide documentation of having recovered from COVID-19," the CDC said on Tuesday.

On January 12, the CDC Director signed the order requiring a negative coronavirus test that will go in effect on January 26. Airlines must confirm the negative test result for all passengers or documentation of recovery before they board the aircraft.

"If a passenger does not provide documentation of a negative test or recovery, or chooses not to take a test, the airline must deny boarding to the passenger," the CDC also said.

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US Capitol Police to Screen Lawmakers for Guns When Entering House - Sergeant at Arms

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - Lawmakers entering the House floor will be required to pass through airport-style security in a bid to keep the chamber gun free under upgraded security measures following last week's violent takeover of the Capitol by protesters, acting Sergeant at Arms Timothy Blodgett said.

"Effective immediately, all persons, including Members, are required to undergo security screening when entering the House chamber," Blodgett said in a notice on Tuesday. The notice said magnetometers are deployed at chamber entrances to help enforce a longstanding policy prohibiting guns on the floor, although members will still be allowed to have firearms in their offices.

The move to upgrade security follows last week's takeover of the Capitol by hundreds of protesters who believe unsubstantiated claims that massive fraud prevented President Donald Trump's re-election. Police confiscated guns from at least six protesters, while discovering caches of Molotov cocktails and other incendiary devices when securing the Capitol. Blodgett took charge of security for the House following the resignation of House Sergeant-at-Arms Paul Irving on Monday amid outrage over lax security that left the Capitol lightly guarded. Blodgett's notice also warned lawmakers that facemasks are required for admission to the House chamber and that members inside the chamber without facemasks would be removed.

Dozens of members have so-called concealed carry permits, which allow them to carry guns in public as long as the weapons are out of sight, according to media reports.

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US Congresswoman Omar Urges Biden Administration to Cancel Arms Sale to Saudi Arabia

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - The incoming Biden administration should cancel President Donald Trump's arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates after it takes power on January 20, Democratic House Representative Ilhan Omar said at a virtual forum hosted by the Stimson Center.

Earlier this year, President Donald Trump declared a national emergency to bypass congressional approval on a \$8 billion arms sale to Saudi Arabia and the UAE. In November, the US State Department approved a \$23 billion weapons sale to UAE. The administration of President Barack Obama, whom Joe Biden served as vice president, offered the Saudis more than \$100 billion in arms sales.

"The Biden administration still has a chance to cancel those sales [of arms to Saudi Arabia] and I think they should," Omar said. on Tuesday. "Senate Democrats have to continue to push for that as well."

US policymakers had divorced issues of supporting allies maintaining human rights values and as a result had increasingly isolated their own country in the world, Omar said.

"We have a responsibility to respond to terrorism, but we often do so in a highly militarized way without regard for human rights and this approach has not made us safer," she told the conference.

Omar said the incoming Biden administration should set red lines on arms sales and that Congress should insist on an active oversight role on all arms sales to foreign nations and insert itself into foreign policy decision making on such issues.

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Trump Must Call on Supporters to Refrain From Violence - US Senator

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - President Donald Trump needs to call on his supporters to refrain from any acts of violence and ensure a peaceful transition of power to the incoming Biden administration, US Senator Rob Portman of Ohio said in a statement.

"Today, I call on President Trump to address the nation and explicitly urge his supporters to remain peaceful and refrain from violence," Portman said on Tuesday. "If our nation experiences additional violence and destruction at the hands of his supporters in Washington, DC and state capitals around the country, and he does not directly and unambiguously speak out now when threats are known, he will bear responsibility."

Portman warned there was a threat of additional violence both in Washington and in state capitals across the United States in the eight days until President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration on January 20,.

"Both in his words before the attack on the Capitol and in his actions afterward, President Trump bears some responsibility for what happened on January 6," Portman said. "[T]he attack on the US Capitol was an attack on democracy itself. Anyone who took part in illegal activities should be held accountable and prosecuted to the full extent of the law."

Portman said he and other lawmakers had received reports from the FBI about the threat of additional violence in Washington, DC and state capitals around the country following Wednesday's unrest on Capitol Hill.

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US Lawmakers Gravely Concerned About Threats to Democracy in Days Ahead - Statement

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - The chairpersons of six US House of Representative Committees called for more action to prevent further attacks by domestic terrorists in the days ahead in light of the siege on the Capitol last week.

Earlier on Tuesday, Committee on Oversight and Reform Chair Carolyn Maloney, Committee on the Judiciary Chair Jerrold Nadler, Committee on Homeland Security Chair Bennie Thompson, Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence Chair Adam Schiff, Committee on Armed Services Chair Adam Smith and Oversight Committee Member Stephen Lynch were among those briefed by the FBI and the DC US Attorney's Office regarding the deadly storming of the US Capitol last Wednesday.

"Based on today's briefing, we have grave concerns about ongoing and violent threats to our democracy," the chairpersons said in a statement on Tuesday. "It is clear that more must be done to preempt, penetrate, and prevent deadly and seditious assaults by domestic violent extremists in the days ahead."

The chairpersons said they were troubled by reports about warnings received by law enforcement before the "attempted coup" and actions taken to respond to them.

The lawmakers reaffirmed that every individual, associated with the attack, and those who entered restricted areas outside and breached the Capitol itself will be prosecuted.

They further called for full accountability for the perpetrators in order to send a signal that similar activity will not be tolerated and met with the "full force of law."

On January 6, a group of supporters of the US President Donald Trump stormed the US Capitol building, clashing with police, damaging property, seizing the inauguration stage and occupying the rotunda. The unrest took place after Trump urged his supporters to protest the legitimizing by Congress of what he claims was a stolen election.

On Monday, Trump declared a state of emergency in Washington ahead of Biden's inauguration planned for January 20, after the FBI warned that armed protests might occur throughout the US.

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Russia's Osipova Appeals US Court Re-Sentencing - Lawyers

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - Russian national Bogdana Osipova appealed a US court decision to re-sentence her to a prison term she has already served, her lawyers said in a notice,

"Ms. Bogdana Mobley... hereby respectfully notifies this Court of her appeal from its Amended Judgment in a Criminal Case to the United States Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit," her lawyers said on Tuesday, referring Osipova's ex-husband's last name.

On January 8, US District Judge Eric Melgren sentenced Osipova to the term she already served.

Melgren also ordered Osipova to urge Russian authorities to allow her children to leave the country. He granted attorneys petition to claim annulling her guardianship over children in Russia. He also called on the Russian government to allow them to enter the US.

Osipova repeatedly said that she can not force Russian government decisions, but the US court found these statements insincere.

In 2014, Osipova left the United States with her child without former husband Mobley's consent while she was pregnant with another child. Osipova was arrested upon returning to the United States in 2017 and sentenced to seven years in prison for child abduction and extortion.

In August, the Kansas Court of Appeals cleared Osipova of the extortion charges and ordered a revision of the verdict. Abduction of a child by one of the parents is punishable by a sentence of three years in prison - the amount of time Osipova already served.

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US Judge Delays Executions of 2 Death Row Inmates With COVID-19 - Order

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - The executions of two convicted multiple murderers will be delayed at least until mid-March because they are both suffering from COVID-19, US District Court Judge Tanya Chutkan ruled.

"The court is deeply concerned that the government intends to execute two prisoners who are suffering from COVID-19 infection," Chutkan said on Tuesday. "Accordingly, for the reasons set forth above, the court will Grant Plaintiffs' motions for a preliminary injunction. The injunction will remain in effect until March 16, 2021."

The judge's decision means that the two executions will not now be scheduled until at least almost two months after President-elect Joe Biden succeeds President Donald Trump on January 20. Biden has pledged to eliminate the death penalty at the federal level.

"[B]ecause the public is greatly served by attempting to ensure that the most serious punishment is imposed in a manner consistent with our Constitution, the court finds that it is in the public interest to issue a preliminary injunction," Chutkan said.

Corey Johnson, 52, was convicted of killing seven people related to his drug trafficking in Virginia, and Dustin Higgs, 48, was found guilty of ordering the murders of three women in Maryland. Both tested positive for the novel coronavirus in December. Lawyers argued that their damaged lung tissue would rupture more quickly after lethal doses of pentobarbital were given to them.

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Over 170 Cases Open After Capitol Unrest, 70 Charged - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - US authorities have opened over 170 cases after Capitol unrest, charged more than 70 of them and expect "hundreds" more, Acting Attorney for DC Michael Sherwin told reporters.

"As we sit here now literally days after this event happened, we have already opened more than 170 subject files meaning these individuals have been identified as potential persons that committed crime on the Capitol grounds inside and outside," Sherwin said during a press briefing on Tuesday. "We have already charged over 70 cases."

Sherwin predicted the numbers are going to "geometrically increase" and grow "to the hundreds" in the coming weeks.

"Hour upon hour prosecutors in our office presented felony cases, significant felony cases, related to civil disorder, related to the possession of destructive devices, related to the possession of semi-automatic weapons that are illegal to possess in the District," he said. Sherwin explained that investigators often start with "most simple" charges, like trespassing or mail theft, that can be "filed as soon as possible" while looking for evidence of more serious misconduct.

"FBI working with the US attorney offices across the country. We are looking at the significant felony cases tie to sedition and conspiracy," FBI official Steven D'Antuono said during the briefing.

D'Antuono, who is in charge of the Washington Field Office, confirmed that over 160 case files were opened in six days after the flare-up and called it "just a tip of the iceberg." He said that agents are processing more than 100 thousand pieces of digital media, but keep asking the public for more.

On January 6, thousands of Trump supporters violently stormed the Capitol building in a bid to prevent Congress from certifying the presidential election results. They attacked police with metal pipes, chemical irritants, and other weapons, and damaged property before seizing the rotunda, inauguration stage and entering the building. The attack, which came after Trump urged his supporters to keep fighting to overturn Joe Biden's victory, marked the most significant breach of US Capitol grounds since the British set fire to it in 1814.

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US Senate Majority Leader McConnell Pleaded Trump May Be Impeached Again - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - US Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell believes that President Donald Trump committed impeachable offenses and hopes a congressional trial will facilitate purging him from the Republican party, the New York Times reported.

According to the publication, which cites people "familiar with his thinking," McConnell told associates that he is pleased the Democrats are moving to impeach Trump and pass the case to the Senate for conviction or acquittal.

The Democratic-led House of Representatives plans to vote Wednesday on Trump's impeachment for "incitement of insurrection."

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US Arrests Man for Threatening Attacks During Biden Inauguration - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - Authorities arrested a man who threatened to kill any Democrat seen at the White House after President-elect Joe Biden is sworn in next week, the US Justice Department said in a press release.

"LOUIS CAPRIOTTI, 45, of Chicago Heights, Ill., is charged with transmitting a threat in interstate commerce, according to a criminal complaint filed in U.S. District Court in Chicago," the release said on Tuesday.

Capriotti was arrested near his home Tuesday morning and was scheduled to make an initial court appearance in the afternoon, the release added.

The charge stems from a December 29, 2020 voice message to a member of Congress in which Capriotti said that opponents would surround the White House on inauguration day and "kill any [expletive] Democrat that steps on the [expletive] lawn."

Capriotti has a history of leaving profane voicemails for members of Congress, according to the release.

Following last week's unrest on Capitol Hill, authorities in the nation's capital have significantly tightened security ahead of the January 20 inauguration, including deploying more than 6,000 National Guard troops and imposing a six-day lockdown of the downtown Washington, DC area.

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Trump Says Tidal Wave of Illegal Immigration to Ensue if His Policies Reversed

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump said on Tuesday that a tidal wave of illegal immigration will ensue if the immigration policies carried out by his administration are reversed.

"If our border security measures are reversed, it will trigger a tidal wave of illegal immigration, a wave like you'd never seen before," Trump said on Tuesday. "I can tell that already waves are starting to come up from 2,000 and 1,000 and 500 miles away."

Trump issued the remarks during a visit to the border wall in the US state of Texas.

In December, US President-Elect Joe Biden said he expects to lift within six months many of the existing immigration and asylum-related policies imposed by the Trump administration.

Biden said during the first 100 days in office he would reverse the Trump's administration's policies that deter asylum-seeking migrants seeking refuge in the United States, end prolonged detention of migrants in the United States and end Trump's National Emergency on the border that justified the use of funds allotted for the Defense Department to build the border wall.

In addition, Biden promised to surge humanitarian aid to the southern US border, offer deportation protections for migrants brought to the United States illegally as children - also known as Dreamers - and an end to the travel and refugee bans on Muslim-majority countries.

Finally, Biden said he wants Congress to pass legislation to clear the path to citizenship for nearly 11 million illegal aliens living in the United States and form visa programs for temporary migrant workers in certain industries.

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US Gov't Looking at Felony Cases From Capitol Hill Unrest That Tie to Sedition - Attorney

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - The US government is looking at significant felony cases that tie to sedition and conspiracy during last week's unrest at the US Capitol, Acting US Attorney for Washington, DC Michael Sherwin told reporters.

"The FBI is working with the US Attorney offices across the country. We are looking at the significant felony cases tie to sedition and conspiracy," Sherwin said during a press conference on Tuesday evening.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) -

NEW US COUNTERTERRORISM SANCTIONS

* The United States has imposed counterterrorism sanctions on five individuals from Iraq, Morocco and Saudi Arabia, the US Treasury Department said in a statement on Tuesday.

* US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced sanctions against two allegedly Iran-based leaders of al-Qaeda terror group (banned in Russia) and three commanders of al-Qaeda Kurdish battalions.

* Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif said Pompeo's allegations about Iran's ties with al-Qaeda are false.

TRUMP RESPONDS TO IMPEACHMENT, SOCIAL MEDIA BAN

* US President Donald Trump told reporters on Tuesday that moves aimed to possibly impeach him are causing great anger and declined to answer whether he would resign if impeached.

* Trump said he is not worried about being removed via the 25 Amendment, saying the amendment is of "zero-risk" to him.

* Trump said social media platforms, including Twitter and Facebook, have made a "big mistake" in banning him and warned of a "counter move."

ANTONOV ON US-RUSSIA ARMS CONTROL

* Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said on Tuesday that there are still chances to reach common ground on extending the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) before the accord expires next month.

* Moscow and Washington could discuss including new participants in arms control agreements after the extension of the New START Treaty, Antonov said.

* Further arms control talks between the United States and Russia would include missile defense, global strike systems, hypersonic and space weapons, Antonov said.

COVID-19 DEVELOPMENTS

* All identified mutations of the coronavirus affect only 0.1 percent of its genome, so they will affect neither diagnostics nor vaccination, Russian consumer rights watchdog Rospotrebnadzor told Sputnik on Tuesday.

* The efficacy of the coronavirus vaccine developed by the Chinese Sinovac biopharmaceutical company has shown 50.38 percent in a late-stage trial in Brazil, the biological research center Butantan Institute said.

* US Representative Brad Schneider said in a statement he has tested positive for the novel coronavirus after being forced to spend hours in a confined space with other members of Congress during Wednesday's unrest on Capitol Hill.

LAW ENFORCEMENT ON US CAPITOL UNREST

* The US authorities have opened more than 170 cases after the unrest at the Capitol building and charged more than 70 of them, Acting US Attorney for Washington, DC Michael Sherwin told reporters on Tuesday.

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PREVIEW - US House to Vote on Impeaching Trump Over Capitol Hill 'Insurrection'

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - The Democratic-controlled US House of Representatives is expected to vote on Wednesday to impeach President Donald Trump over last week's violence on Capitol Hill, although chances are likely slim the Senate will decide to convict and remove him from office.

INSURRECTION CHARGES

While overall proceedings have little chance of being wrapped up before Joe Biden's inauguration on January 20, the impeachment - which is akin to an indictment - if successful, may bar Trump from holding public office ever again, including running for president in 2024. Articles of impeachment introduced by the House Democrats on Monday accuse Trump of "high Crimes and Misdemeanors by inciting violence against the Government of the United States," including at the rally on January 6, immediately before his loyalists' attacked the Capitol in a bid to thwart the Congressional certification of Biden's win.

"Thus incited by President Trump, members of the crowd he had addressed... unlawfully breached and vandalized the Capitol, injured and killed law enforcement personnel, menaced

Members of the Congress, the Vice President, and Congressional personnel, and engaged in other violent, deadly, destructive, and seditious acts," the resolution said.

Some Republican leaders, however, have warned that impeaching Trump with just over a week before his term ends will only further divide the country.

Five people - four protesters and a police officer - were killed in the riots. The last time the Capitol was stormed was when British troops marched into Washington and set fire to the building in 1814.

The storming of the Capitol came immediately after Trump, in a fiery speech near the White House, urged his followers to fight and not allow the election to be "stolen."

Though Trump condemned the violence and committed himself to an orderly transition, there are fears of new flare-ups that prompted authorities to impose since Wednesday a security lockdown in downtown Washington, DC, and authorize the deployment of up to 15,000 National Guard servicemen.

Articles of impeachment also allege that in the months preceding the certification Trump repeatedly issued false statements asserting that the presidential election results were the product of widespread fraud and should not be accepted by the American people. The text mentions the incumbent's recent call to Georgia officials asking them to find enough votes for overturning his defeat.

US election security officials and the Justice Department have refuted Trump's claims of large-scale vote fraud.

Before launching impeachment proceedings, Democrats are urging Vice President Mike Pence to exercise his 25th amendment rights and together with other high-ranking executive officials strip Trump of his powers.

Their hopes were quashed when the White House announced that Pence and Trump met on Monday and pledged to work together for the rest of their term. The meeting reportedly marked the first time the duo talked since the riots.

The House of Representatives charges an official of the federal government by approving in a simple majority vote articles of impeachment. The Senate's subsequent role is to sit as a High Court of Impeachment - considering evidence, hearing witnesses, and finally voting to acquit or convict the impeached official. The Constitution requires for conviction a two-thirds vote of the Senate. In some cases, the Senate has also disqualified such officials from holding public offices in the future.

ODDS SLIM, BUT REPUBLICAN RESISTANCE LESS FIERCE

In December 2019, Trump was impeached by the House of Representatives on the abuse of power and obstruction of Congress charges - over alleged attempts to force Ukraine into probing Biden's son. But the Senate, where the Republican Party enjoyed a majority, acquitted him in February 2020.

Though this time the impeachment may be held in the Democratic-led Senate, the 100-seat chamber is still unlikely to produce enough votes for finding Trump guilty. In the coming days, after all new Senate members are sworn in, Democrats will secure 50 seats with the Republicans retaining the other 50 and new Vice President Kamala Harris, also a Democrat, entitled to cast a decisive vote.

"They need enough support to get to 67 Senators, which would be 17 Republicans. That's a lot, and I don't think they have that much," Kermit Roosevelt, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania Law School, told Sputnik.

However, The New York Times reported on Tuesday that some Republican are not actively lobbying colleagues to vote against impeachment in the same way they did last year. Republican leaders and Trump's lawyers warn that impeaching the incumbent days before or even after his term ends is not appropriate. Their opponents insist that there is strong historical evidence for "late impeachability" and it would set a dangerous precedent to declare misconduct unimpeachable if it's committed late enough in the term.

Some scholars entertain a possibility of slapping Trump with disqualification from future offices, which, as they claim, may require a simple majority vote at the Senate instead of a supermajority needed for a full-fledged impeachment.

Biden urged lawmakers to find time during impeachment proceedings to deal with his administration agenda. He supported an idea of dividing each day in half with evenings allocated to Trump's trial and mornings to Cabinet appointments or stimulus package deliberations.

On Tuesday, Trump told reporters that his possible impeachment is a "continuation of the greatest witch hunt in the history of politics."

"I think it's causing tremendous anger," he added.

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Mutant Coronavirus Strain Hits State of Maryland Bordering US Capital - Governor

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - The state of Maryland, adjacent to Washington, DC, confirmed two cases caused by the highly contagious mutation of the novel coronavirus, Governor Larry Hogan said in a press release on Tuesday.

"Our state health officials are closely monitoring the emergence of the B-117 strain of SARS-CoV-2 in the state," Hogan said. "We encourage Marylanders to practice caution to limit the additional risk of transmission associated with this strain."

The two cases involved residents in Baltimore, the city about 30 miles north of Washington. Both individuals are under the age of 65, live in the same household and one recently traveled overseas. Neither individuals required hospitalization, the release said.

The B-117 strain, which first emerged in the United Kingdom in late 2020, is considered more contagious than the other strains of the virus, but not more deadly, the release also said.

Existing vaccines are also believed to be effective against the new strain, the release added. Contact tracing revealed no additional infections in the state, according to the release.

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Over 170 Cases Open After Capitol Unrest, 70 Charged - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - US authorities opened over 170 cases after Capitol unrest and charged over 70 of them, Acting US Attorney for DC Michael Sherwin told reporters on Tuesday.

"As we sit here now literally days after this event happened, we have already opened more than 170 subject files meaning these individuals have been identified as potential persons that committed crime on the Capitol grounds inside and outside," Sherwin said during a press briefing. "We have already charged over 70 cases."

Sherwin predicted the numbers are going "to geometrically increase."

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US House Republican Leaders Not Lobbying Members Against Trump Impeachment - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - Republican leaders in the US House of Representatives are not actively withholding members of their party from voting to impeach President Donald Trump, The New York Times reported on Tuesday.

House Republican leaders are making a tacit break with Trump ahead of Wednesday's vote to charge him with inciting insurrection over last week's riots on Capitol Hill, the report added. Trump, who in 2019, became the first president ever to be impeached for inviting foreign interference in US elections, is facing the prospect for a second time on grounds of inciting his supporters to attack the Capitol last week to prevent Congress from certifying the election win of his rival Joe Biden.

While the president was acquitted by the Republican-controlled Senate after his first impeachment by the House, he might not have such an opportunity if impeached again when the next Senate, which will effectively have a Democrat majority, is in session.

While Republican and House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, has said that he will "personally" oppose impeachment and sought to steer Republicans in a different direction, he had not officially leaned on lawmakers to vote against the move, the Times reported.

In the current Senate, Republican and Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has also conspicuously declined to defend Trump while some senate Republicans had already called upon the president to resign.

If all senators were voting, 17 Republicans would have to join Democrats to convict Trump of high crimes and misdemeanors, and if they did so, a majority would be required to disqualify him from ever holding public office again.

Five people, including a policeman on duty and a female air force veteran who supported Trump, died during Wednesday's attack on the Capitol by a pro-Trump mob. The president has been under pressure since to resign before his term ends on January 20, or face impeachment for a second time since he came to office in 2016.

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US Senate Minority Leader Calls for Putting Capitol Rioters on 'No Fly' Lists

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - All the identified rioters who stormed the Capitol last week should immediately be put on federal No Fly Lists, Senator Chuck Schumer said on Tuesday.

"These insurrectionists should not be able to hop on planes," Schumer said in a press briefing.

"Any of those who were inside the Capitol should be placed on the no fly list.... There are concerns about these people getting back on airplanes doing more violence."

Schumer said he had spoken with the heads of the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Transportation Security Authority (TSA) about putting all those identified individuals on the No Fly List immediately.

The Department of Justice and the FBI had embarked on a nationwide manhunt against dozens of protestors who had stormed the Capitol and the No Fly list action was needed to make the skies and the upcoming inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden on Wednesday, January 20 safe, Schumer said.

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Trump Says 25th Amendment of 'Zero-Risk' to Him

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump on Tuesday said he is not worried about being removed from office through the 25 Amendment in the wake of the deadly storming by his supporters of the US Capitol last week.

"The 25th amendment is of zero-risk to me," Trump said during his visit to the US-Mexico border wall in Texas.

Later on Tuesday the House will vote on a resolution urging Vice President Mike Pence to invoke the 25th amendment which authorizes the removal of a president over inability to discharge duties. The resolution comes after last week's riots on Capitol Hill that Democrats say were fueled by Trump. On Monday, Trump and Pence met at the White House where they agreed to work together for the rest of their term, an administration official said in a statement.

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US Capitol Riots Result of Homegrown Violent Extremism - Counterintelligence Chief

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - The attack on the US Capitol during the riot last week is directly related to homegrown extremism, Director of the National Counterintelligence and Security Center William Evanina said on Tuesday.

"This is really homegrown, and this is extremism. Their mindset to be able to storm the US Capitol," Evanina said during a virtual conversation with the The Washington Post.

Evanina said that one can "draw a logical parallel to homegrown violent extremism," from the actions of those who rioted on Capitol Hill last week.

Extremists could have any political orientation or race, Evanina added.

On January 6, Trump supporters stormed Capitol Hill in an unsuccessful bid to prevent Congress from certifying Biden's election victory. The riots came immediately after Trump in a speech near the White House called on his followers to keep fighting to prevent the election from being "stolen."

Democrats in Congress are trying to remove Trump from office over these developments by urging Vice President Mike Pence to invoke the 25th amendment, which would allow him to take over citing the president's inability to discharge his duties. The Democrats also introduced articles of impeachment should Pence fail to act.

On Monday, Trump declared a state of emergency in Washington ahead of Biden's inauguration planned for January 20, after the FBI warned that armed protests might occur throughout the US.

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Canada's Ontario Imposes New Lockdown as COVID-19 Cases Double - Premier's Office

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - Ontario declared a provincial emergency over a doubling of COVID-19 cases in the past two weeks, the premier's office said on Tuesday.

"In response to a doubling in COVID-19 cases over the past two weeks, the real and looming threat of the collapse of the province's hospital system and alarming risks posed to long-term care homes as a result of high COVID-19 transmission rates, the Ontario government, in consultation with the Chief Medical Officer of Health and other health experts, is immediately declaring a second provincial emergency," the office said in a statement.

Effective Thursday, January 14, a stay-at-home order will require everyone to remain at home with exceptions for essential purposes, such as going to the grocery store or pharmacy, accessing health care services, for exercise or for essential work, the release said.

More than 400 beds now filled in intensive care units and projections show the number could reach 1,000 by early February, overwhelming hospitals, the release said.

The declaration adds new restrictions to a province-wide shutdown just two weeks ago, also in response to a surge in COVID-19 cases, the release added.

Police are now authorized to ticket people caught outside their homes while not performing essential tasks such as buying food and to issue citations to those not wearing facemasks indoors. In addition, police are authorized to close facilities and disperse groups of more than five people congregating outdoors, according to the release.

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Brent Oil Price Seen Rising \$4 To \$53 Per Barrel in 2021 - US Energy Agency

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - Brent crude is expected to fetch \$53 per barrel on the average this year and next, the US Energy Information Administration said on Tuesday, raising by \$4 its reading for the global oil benchmark from a previous forecast of \$49 in December. "EIA forecasts Brent crude oil spot prices to average \$53 per barrel in both 2021 and 2022, compared with an average of \$42/b in 2020," the agency said in its Short-Term Energy Outlook for January.

Brent hovered at \$56 per barrel on Tuesday, versus its 2020 close of \$51.80.

The EIA also said it expected the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, oil's powerful cartel often known by its acronym OPEC, to pump more crude this year despite output cuts recently announced by the group's chair Saudi Arabia.

The EIA said it expected OPEC to produce 27.2 million barrels per day this year, up from the 25.6 million it estimated for 2020.

Saudi Arabia surprised oil traders last week by announcing that it will cut an additional 1.0 million barrels per day from its output in February and March, on top of reductions the kingdom had already committed to under an OPEC agreement aimed at shoring up crude prices.

Notwithstanding the Saudi reductions, the 13-member OPEC and its 10 allies, including Russia, agreed to add 500,000 barrels to their joint output from January, effectively trimming production cuts carried out an OPEC agreement since April.

The EIA said in making its forecast for 2021, it had considered the additional Saudi cuts for February and March. But it offset them against higher production expected from Libya, which has been pumping crude almost without restraint since the end of a civil war last year that previously blocked shipments from the North African country.

For 2022, the EIA forecast that OPEC production will rise by 1.1 million barrels per day.

"[The] forecast growth in output reflects OPEC's announced increases to production targets and continuing rise in Libya's production," it said.

For US crude alone, the agency forecast that production will fall to 11.1 million barrels per day this year before rising to 11.5 million in 2022. In 2020, US crude production fell to 11.3 million barrels per day from a record of 12.2 million in 2019.

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Pro-Trump Extremists Using Telegram to Plan Inauguration Day Attacks

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - Far right extremist supporters of US President Donald Trump have been exchanging information over the Telegram App to plan violent attacks targeting government officials on Inauguration Day, NBC News reported on Tuesday. On Monday, the FBI in a bulletin warned that Trump supporters were planning armed protests in all 50 state capitols ahead of President-elect Joe Biden's January 20 inauguration. The developments come in the wake of January 5

These right-wing extremists via Telegram chats have shared details on how to make, conceal and use homemade guns and bombs, the report said, citing experts who have seen the data. The number of exchanges has risen since last week's Capitol Hill riots that Democrats have accused Trump of fueling, the report added.

On January 6, Trump supporters stormed Capitol Hill in an unsuccessful bid to prevent Congress from certifying Biden's election victory. The riots came immediately after Trump in a speech near the White House called on his followers to keep fighting to prevent the election from being "stolen."

Democrats in Congress are trying to remove Trump from office by urging Vice President Mike Pence to invoke the 25th amendment, which would allow him to take over citing the president's inability to discharge his duties. The Democrats also introduced articles of impeachment should Pence fail to act.

On Monday, Trump declared a state of emergency in Washington ahead of Biden's inauguration planned for January 20, after the FBI warned that armed protests might occur throughout the US.

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US Fines Drone Maker \$25Mln For Submitting False Pricing Data to Military - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - Drone maker Insitu will pay \$25 million to settle charges that the company overcharged the Navy and US Special Operations Command (SOCOM) for drones by submitting false data on costs, the Justice Department said in a press release on Tuesday.

"The settlement resolves allegations that Insitu knowingly induced the government to award it these seven, noncompetitively bid contracts at inflated prices by proposing cost and pricing data for new parts [while] using less expensive recycled, refurbished, reconditioned, and/or reconfigured parts to perform the contracts," the release said.

The settlement follows a lawsuit by a former Insitu executive DR O'Hara under whistleblower provisions in the False Claims Act, the release said.

O'Hara will receive \$4.6 million of the settlement as a reward for his efforts, according to the release.

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Trump Orders Development of New Small Nuclear Reactors for Space Travel - White House

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - President Donald Trump has ordered the US military to build a transportable demonstration small nuclear reactor of potential use in space travel, the White House announced in a statement on Tuesday.

"At President Trump's direction, the Department of Defense will establish and implement a plan to demonstrate the energy flexibility and cost effectiveness of a small modular reactor at a domestic military installation, and will pilot a transportable small modular reactor for a mission other than naval propulsion for the first time in half a century," the statement said.

Trump issued an Executive Order to promote the development of small modular reactors for national defense and space exploration, the White House said. The move will revitalize the US nuclear energy sector and reinvigorate its space exploration program, it added.

"The sustainable exploration of the Moon, Mars, and other locations will be enhanced by small modular reactors deployed from Earth for operations across the solar system. NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration] will explore the use of nuclear energy systems for human and robotic exploration missions through 2040," the statement said.

Small modular reactors also have the potential to enhance energy flexibility and energy security at domestic military installations in remote locations and are essential to deep space exploration, where solar power is not practical, the White House added.

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UN Discusses With WHO Putin's Free Vaccine Offer for All Employees - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, January 12 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is still evaluating and discussing with the World Health Organization (WHO) the offer by Russian President Vladimir Putin to provide the Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine free of charge for all UN employees, spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Tuesday.

"It is still being studied, and we are also in discussions with the WHO," Dujarric said when asked about the United Nations' stance regarding Putin's proposal.

Last week, Dujarric said UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres will rely on the local health authorities in New York City for UN employees to receive the coronavirus vaccine.

During a speech at the UN General Assembly in September, Russian President Vladimir Putin offered all UN employees to receive the Sputnik V vaccine free of charge.

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US to Require COVID-19 Tests for All International Visitors - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - All International travelers coming into the United States will have negative tests for coronavirus, The Wall Street Journal reported on Tuesday.

The US government is expected to require all international airline travelers to show proof of a negative test before boarding flights to the United States, the report said citing people familiar with the matter.

The newspaper also revealed that the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is set to issue this order today, and it will go into effect on January 26.

With over 22 million COVID-19 cases and some 376,000 deaths, the US remains the world's most affected country.

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Lockheed-Martin Subcontract to Arm F-35s With Electronic Warfare Weapon - Northrop Grumman

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - Lockheed-Martin, the primary contractor for the F-35 aircraft, issued a subcontract to equip the fifth generation jet with a suite of electronic warfare countermeasures, Northrop Grumman said in a press release on Tuesday.

"Northrop Grumman's design allows the simultaneous operation of multiple critical functions while greatly reducing size, weight and power demands on the advanced F-35 fighter. These functions include Identification Friend or Foe (IFF), automatic acquisition of fly-to points, and various voice and data communications such as the Multifunction Advanced Data Link," the release said.

Northrop Grumman's AN/ASQ-242 Integrated Communications, Navigation and Identification (ICNI) will be integrated with the AN/ASQ-239 Electronic Warfare/Countermeasures by defense contractor BAE Systems in a collaboration with Lockheed Martin, the release added.

Plans call for installation of an upgraded version of the ICNI beginning in 2025, according to the release.

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US State Dept. Cancels All Planned Travel This Week Due to Transition - Statement

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - The US Department of State is canceling all planned travel this week, including Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's trip to Europe, due to the presidential transition, spokesperson Morgan Ortagus said in a statement on Tuesday.

"We are expecting shortly a plan from the incoming administration identifying the career officials who will remain in positions of responsibility on an acting basis until the Senate confirmation process is complete for incoming officials," Ortagus said. "As a result, we are canceling all planned travel this week, including the Secretary's trip to Europe."

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Antonov Says Chances Still Exist to Reach Understanding on New START With US by February 5

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said on Tuesday that there are still opportunities to reach common ground on the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) before the accord expires next month.

"For its part, Russia is open to a substantive discussion of technical arrangements of prolonging the New START," Antonov said. "There are still chances to reach an understanding before February 5, 2021, when the treaty expires. Hopefully, the new team in White House will demonstrate proper commitment and political will."

The Russian envoy also highlighted that further talks between Russia and the United States on arms control would include missile defense, global strike systems, hypersonic and space weapons.

"It is also equally important that we could use the time gained as a result of New START prolongation to hold comprehensive bilateral talks on the future of nuclear and missile arms control," he said at an event organized by the Arms Control Negotiation Academy. "In these discussions the sides would consider all the factors affecting strategic stability. Namely - missile defense, shorter- and intermediate-range ground-based missiles, Global Strike systems, hypersonic delivery vehicles, future space weapons, etc."

Antonov suggested that Moscow and Washington could discuss the possibility of including new participants into arms control agreements after the extension of the New START.

"After the New START extension, we could also discuss how to possibly involve new participants into arms control agreements," Antonov said. "At the same time, Russia considers unjustified any attempts to put international pressure on countries in order to force them to participate in an arms control regime."

The arms control system is in "serious crisis", the ambassador noted. He reminded that just over the last 2 years the INF Treaty has ceased to exist, the Open Skies Treaty suffered a heavy blow, the fate of the New START Treaty is hanging by a thread.

"In these circumstances the role of Russia and the United States in maintaining international peace and security is becoming increasingly important - particularly as permanent members of the UN Security Council and the largest nuclear powers," he said.

Moscow continuing its efforts to revive the dialogue with the US, and a number of bilateral discussions took place in 2020, Antonov noted.

"One positive outcome was that the discussions were unbiased and substantive. The sides were aiming to better understand each other's approaches and 'red lines.' They expressed interest in identifying the areas where it was possible to achieve progress," he added.

Speaking of the New START Treaty, Antonov stressed Moscow's openness to a substantive discussion of technical arrangements of its prolongation. He expressed hope that the upcoming US administration will demonstrate proper commitment and political will.

"Russia's further efforts in pursuing arms control with the US will be based on parity and mutual respect for each other's interests and concerns," Antonov said. He urged both parties to find common ground and expressed necessity of restoring mutual trust, particularly in resuming professional dialogue between military officials.

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Russia, US May Discuss New Parties to Arms Control Deals After New START Extended - Envoy

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - Moscow and Washington could talk about including new participants into arms control agreements after the extension of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START), Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said on Tuesday.

"After the New START extension, we could also discuss how to possibly involve new participants into arms control agreements," Antonov said. "At the same time, Russia considers unjustified any attempts to put international pressure on countries in order to force them to participate in an arms control regime."

Antonov emphasized that any talks about including additional participants must be conducted on a free and voluntary basis and be mindful of the parties' legitimate interests.

"The Russian position on this issue is well known. We give priority to including France and the United Kingdom in the dialogue," Antonov said. "These countries possess nuclear arsenals comparable to the Chinese one. They also closely coordinate their nuclear policies with Washington within NATO."

Antonov also said Russia's further efforts to pursue arms control with the United States will be based on parity and mutual respect for each other's interests.

"Finding common ground on the issues of strategic stability is in the interests of both our two countries and global security and stability," he said. "As you can see, we keep our cards open. All our proposals are on the table. Now the ball is in US court. The US-Russia fruitful cooperation in the field of arms control and strategic stability meets the interests of the entire international community."

Antonov underscored the importance of restoring trust together and of resuming professional dialogue between the military officials of the two countries.

The New START, set to expire on February 5, is the last major arms control treaty between the United States and Russia that caps their nuclear warheads and delivery systems stockpiles. US State Department canceling all planned travel this week, including Pompeo's trip to Europe, due to transition - spokesperson told Sputnik.

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Pompeo Accuses Iran of Harboring Al-Qaeda, Confirms Death of Group's Second-in-Command

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Tuesday accused Iran of harboring al-Qaeda (a terrorist organization banned in Russia) and for the first time publicly confirmed the death of the group's high-ranking member Abu Muhammad al-Masri in Tehran.

"Al-Qaeda has a new home base - it is the Islamic Republic of Iran," Pompeo said speaking at the National Press Club. "We ignored this Iran-al-Qaeda nexus at our own peril. We need to acknowledge it, we must confront it, indeed, we must defeat it."

He confirmed media reports of al-Masri's death in Tehran on August 7, but provided no additional details. The second-highest al-Qaeda operative was linked to terror attacks that claimed about 200 lives, including the 1998 bombings of US diplomatic missions in Kenya and Tanzania. The New York Times said that al-Masri was killed by Israeli agents.

According to Pompeo, al-Qaeda operatives found a refuge in Iran following the 9/11 terrorist attacks which prompted the US to start chasing them globally, but were initially put under "virtual house arrest."

"Indeed, everything changed in 2015, the same year that the Obama administration and the E-3, France, Germany, Britain, were in the middle of finalizing the JCPOA [Iranian nuclear deal]," Pompeo said. "Iran decided to allow al-Qaeda to establish a new operational headquarters on the condition that al-Qaeda operatives abide by the regime's rules, governing al-Qaeda's stay inside the country."

Pompeo alleged that since 2015, Iran has given al-Qaeda leadership greater freedom of movement.

"The Iranian Ministry of Intelligence and Security and the IRGC have provided safe havens and logistical support, things like travel documents, ID cards, passports, that enable al-Qaeda activity," he added. "As a result of assistance al-Qaeda has centralized its leadership inside of Tehran."

He announced sanctions against two allegedly Iran-based al-Qaeda leaders, Muhammad Abbatay (also known as Abd al-Rahman al-Maghrebi) and Sultan Yusuf Hasan al-'Arif, as well as Isma'il Fu'ad Rasul Ahmed, Fuad Ahmad Nuri Ali al-Shakhan, and Niamat Hama Rahim Hama Sharif, three commanders of al-Qaeda Kurdish Battalions" that operate on a border between Iran and Iraq.

Pompeo also offered a reward of up to \$7 million under the State Department's 'Rewards for Justice' Program for information that leads to location or identification of Al-Maghrebi.

Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif responded via Twitter that Pompeo "is pathetically ending his disastrous career with more warmongering lies." He mocked the outgoing Secretary of State as Mr. "we lie, cheat, steal."

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Trump Says Social Media Banning Him 'Big Mistake,' Warns of Counter Move

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump said on Tuesday that social media platforms, including Twitter and Facebook, have made a "big mistake" in banning him and warned of a "counter move."

"Big mistake. They shouldn't be doing it," Trump was quoted as saying by CNBC.

Trump said such actions cause "a lot of problems and a lot of danger."

"There's always a counter move when they do that. I've never seen such anger as I see right now and that's a terrible thing," Trump added.

Twitter, Facebook and other social media platforms suspended Trump after a group of his supporters stormed the US Capitol last Wednesday to protest the lawmakers' affirmation of the Electoral College vote for his rival Democrat Joe Biden. The group clashed with police and caused material damage. Six people, including a policeman on duty and a female Air Force veteran Trump supporter died during the unrest.

Since, Democrats and some Republicans in Congress have called on Trump to resign before his term ends on January 20, or face impeachment by Congress for a second time since he assumed office in 2016.

On Monday, Twitter also suspended more than 70,000 accounts associated with the QAnon movement, which claims Trump was battling a network of pedophiles in the Democratic Party and the US establishment at large.

In addition, the big technology companies, including Microsoft, Facebook and Google, announced on Monday that they were pulling the plug on all political party donations following the unrest on Capitol Hill.

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Third Member of US Congress Tests Positive for COVID-19 After Capitol Riots - Statement

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - US Representative Brad Schneider has tested positive for COVID-19 after being forced to spend hours in a confined space with other members of Congress taking refuge from the rioters who stormed the US Capitol on January 6, according to his statement on Tuesday.

"Unfortunately, I received a positive COVID-19 test this morning following being tested yesterday on the advice of the House Attending Physician," Schneider said. "Last Wednesday, after narrowly escaping a violent mob incited by the President of the United States to attack the Capitol and its occupants, I was forced to spend several hours in a secure but confined location with dozens of other Members of Congress."

Schneider said several Republican lawmakers in the room "adamantly" refused to wear a mask. "Today, I am now in strict isolation, worried that I have risked my wife's health and angry at the selfishness and arrogance of the anti-maskers who put their own contempt and disregard for decency ahead of the health and safety of their colleagues and our staff. I am at least the third Member from that room paying the price," Schneider said.

Two other members of Congress who had tested positive for the coronavirus since being confined in the same room were Congresswomen Pramila Jayapal and Bonnie Watson Coleman, Schneider added.

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Russia, US May Discuss New Parties to Arms Control Deals After New START Extended - Envoy

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US-Russia Arms Control Would Include Missile Defense, Global Strike Systems - Antonov

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - Further arms control talks between the United States and Russia would include missile defense, global strike systems, hypersonic and space weapons, Russian ambassador in Washington Anatoly Antonov said on Tuesday.

"It is also equally important that we could use the time gained as a result of New START prolongation to hold comprehensive bilateral talks on the future of nuclear and missile arms control," Antonov said. "In these discussions the sides would consider all the factors affecting strategic stability. Namely - missile defense, shorter- and intermediate-range ground-based missiles, Global Strike systems, hypersonic delivery vehicles, future space weapons, etc."

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Several Republican lawmakers in the room "adamantly" refused to wear a mask, he added.

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Iran Rejects Pompeo's Accusations on Ties Between Al-Qaeda, Tehran as 'Lies' - Zarif

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif said in a statement on Tuesday that US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's allegations of Iran's ties with the al-Qaeda terror group (banned in Russia) are false.

Earlier in the day, Pompeo accused Iran of harboring al-Qaeda and becoming the group's "new home base."

"From designating Cuba to fictitious Iran "declassifications" and [al-Qaeda] claims, Mr. "we lie, cheat, steal" is pathetically ending his disastrous career with more warmongering lies," Zarif said via Twitter. "No one is fooled. All 9/11 terrorists came from [Pompeo's] favorite destinations; none from Iran."

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Antonov Says Chances Still Exist to Reach Understanding on New START With US By February 5

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said on Tuesday that there are still opportunities to reach common ground on the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) before the accord expires next month.

"For its part, Russia is open to a substantive discussion of technical arrangements of prolonging the New START," Antonov said. "There are still chances to reach an understanding before February 5, 2021, when the treaty expires. Hopefully, the new team in White House will demonstrate proper commitment and political will."

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US Attorney Seeks Tips on Threats to Journalists Covering Capitol Riots - Statement

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - The US government is inviting members of the media to report any threats to them over their coverage of the storming of the US Capitol building on January 6, US Attorney for Washington, DC Michael Sherwin said in a statement on Tuesday. "The US Attorney's Office invites members of the press to report any instances where a reporter, journalist, photographer, videographer, or other member of the press or broadcast media was the victim of an assault, threat, or property damage during the events of January 6 at the United States Capitol," the statement said.

Such information, including video and photographic evidence, can be emailed to the US Department of Justice, the statement added. A prosecutor or law enforcement agent may follow up for further information, it said.

"The US Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia ...is aware of reports of violence, including assaults, threats, and property damage, against members of the press while they were engaged in covering events unfolding at the United States Capitol on January 6. Such violence will not be tolerated," Sherwin said.

The federal government remained committed to prosecuting and holding accountable anyone who threatened the use of violence against the media, endangering First Amendment rights, Sherwin added.

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US Attorney Condemns Violence Threats at Media Covering Capitol Attack - Statement

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - Threats of violence against the media that covered the storming of the US Capitol last week are condemned and will not be tolerated, acting US Attorney for Washington, DC Michael Sherwin said in a statement on Tuesday.

"The US Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia ... is aware of reports of violence, including assaults, threats, and property damage, against members of the press while they were engaged in covering events unfolding at the United States Capitol on January 6. Such violence will not be tolerated," the statement said.

Sherwin said the US federal government remained committed to prosecuting and holding accountable anyone who threatened the use of violence against the media, endangering First Amendment rights, the statement said.

"We are resolutely committed to upholding the freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment, including speech, peaceful assembly, and press, and we will investigate, prosecute, and hold accountable anyone who attempts to obstruct or curtail these freedoms through violence or intimidation," the statement said.

The US Attorney's Office was inviting members of the press to report any instances where a reporter, journalist, photographer, videographer, or other member of the press or broadcast media was the victim of an assault, threat, or property damage during the events of January 6, the statement added.

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US Imposes Sanctions Against Iran-Based Al-Qaeda Leaders - Pompeo

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced on Tuesday sanctions against two allegedly Iran-based leaders of al-Qaeda terror group (banned in Russia) and three commanders of al-Qaeda Kurdish battalions.

"Today, we will announce sanctions on Iran-based al-Qaeda leaders, Sultan Youssef Hassan Al-Arik and Muhammad Abate. He is also known as Abd Al-Rahman Al-Maghrebi," Pompeo said speaking at the National Press Club. "I am also announcing designations of three leaders of al-Qaeda Kurdish battalions, an al-Qaeda-linked group that operates on a border between Iran and Iraq."

Pompeo also announced a reward of up to \$7 million under the State Department's "Rewards for Justice" Program for information that leads to location or identification of Al-Maghrebi. "We want to bring him home to America for justice," he said.

In his speech, Pompeo accused Iran of harboring al-Qaeda.

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Trump Says Social Media Banning Him 'Big Mistake,' Warns of Counter Move

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump said on Tuesday that social media platforms, including Twitter and Facebook, have made a "big mistake" in banning him and warned of a "counter move."

"Big mistake. They shouldn't be doing it," Trump was quoted as saying by CNBC.

Trump said such actions cause "a lot of problems and a lot of danger."

"There's always a counter move when they do that. I've never seen such anger as I see right now and that's a terrible thing," Trump added.

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Pompeo Says Can Confirm Al-Qaeda No.2 Al-Masri Was Killed in Iran

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Tuesday that he can confirm the death of Al-Qaeda's high-ranking member Abu Muhammad al-Masri in Iran, which has become the organization's new home base.

"The New York Times reported in November that al-Masri was shot to death on the streets of Tehran. Today, I can confirm for the first time his death on August 7 of last year," Pompeo said. "Al-Qaeda has a new home base - it is the Islamic Republic of Iran."

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US Targets 5 Individuals From Iraq, Morocco With Counterterror Sanctions - Treasury Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) -The United States has imposed counterterrorism sanctions through the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) on five individuals from Iraq, Morocco and Saudi Arabia, the US Department of the Treasury announced in a statement on Tuesday.

The five individuals are Muhammad Abbatay born in Morocco, Isma'il Fu'ad Rasul Ahmed from Iraq, Sultan Yusuf Hasan al-Arif from Saudi Arabia, Fuad Ahmad Nuri Ali al-Shakhan from Saudi Arabia and Niamat Hama Rahim Hama Sharif, originally from Iraq, the statement said.

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Trump Says Moves Toward Possible Impeachment Causing Tremendous Anger

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump told reporters on Tuesday that moves aimed to possibly impeach him are causing great anger and declined to answer whether he would resign if impeached.

Trump called his possible impeachment a "continuation of the greatest witch hunt in the history of politics"

"I think it's causing tremendous anger," he added.

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US Releases Entire COVID-19 Vaccine Stockpile, Makes Available to All Seniors - Azar

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - The US government announced plans to distribute the nation's entire inventory of coronavirus vaccines, with plans to make shots available to everyone age 65 and over as well as to younger folks with underlying medical conditions, Health Secretary Alex Azar said in an interview on Tuesday.

"We had been holding back second doses as a safety stop. We now believe our manufacturing is predictable enough that we can ensure second doses are available for people from ongoing production. So everything is now available," Azar told ABC News.

Azar added that the Trump administration is calling on states to begin vaccinating everyone age 65 and over, adding that vaccines distributed so far exceed the number of healthcare workers and nursing home residents.

On Monday, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said nearly 9 million Americans had been vaccinated from 25 million doses that had been distributed so far.

Azar also said the Trump administration would deploy teams to distribute vaccines to pharmacies, community health centers and other readily available locations.

"We've already distributed more vaccine than we have health care workers and people in nursing homes," he said, adding that distribution in many states has thus far been limited to hospitals.

Azar did not elaborate on expanded distribution plans in the final days of the Trump administration.

However, President-elect Joe Biden is discussing plans to deploy National Guard units to expand vaccine availability, according to media reports.

Biden has set a goal of vaccinating 100 million Americans during the first 100 days following his January 20 inauguration.

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Billionaire US Republican Donor Sheldon Adelson Dies at Age 87 – Company Statement

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) – Casino magnate and billionaire Republican donor Sheldon Adelson died at the age of 87, his company Las Vegas Sands Corporation said in a statement on Tuesday.

"Our founder and visionary leader, Sheldon G. Adelson, passed away last night at the age of 87 from complications related to treatment for non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma," the statement said. Adelson was born to the family of immigrants in Boston, starting his career at age 12 by selling newspapers on the street. He rose to become a successful luxury resort developer and was the founder, chairman and CEO of Las Vegas Sands Corporation. He owned the Israeli newspapers Israel Hayom, Makor Rishon and US daily the Las Vegas Review Journal.

The businessman was a prominent supporter of conservative politicians in both Israel and the US, and was a leading donor to the Republican party. In 2017, he made the largest-ever single contribution to a US presidential inauguration with a \$5 million check to help fund President Donald Trump's swearing-in ceremony.

Adelson's funeral will be held in Israel, while a memorial service will take in Las Vegas at a later date, the statement said.

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RPT: REVIEW - Dems Take Steps to Remove Trump as US Authorities Brace for Nationwide Armed Protests

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - US House Democrats took steps to remove President Donald Trump from office over last week's riots on Capitol Hill just as US authorities warned that his supporters are planning armed protests in all fifty states.

On January 6, after a fiery speech by the president, Trump supporters stormed Capitol Hill as Congress was certifying Joe Biden's presidential election victory. At least five died, including a police officer, and more than 100 were arrested in connection with the riots.

HOUSE SEEKS REMOVAL OF TRUMP

House Democrats took steps on two fronts to remove Trump: urging Vice President Mike Pence to invoke emergency powers in addition to passing articles of impeachment. House Republicans early on Monday blocked an attempt by Democrats to unanimously approve a measure urging Pence to invoke the 25th amendment which calls for the vice president to take power if a president is deemed unable to discharge his duties.

The House will consider a resolution on Tuesday for a full vote. If Pence fails to act the Democrats said they are preparing to take an alternative route.

On Monday, House Democrats formally introduced an article of impeachment against the incumbent, accusing him of inciting an insurrection on Capitol Hill last week. The document said on January 6 Trump during a speech near the White House reiterated false claims that the election was stolen and told his supporters "if you don't fight like hell you're not going to have a country anymore."

These statements, according to the article, "foreseeably resulted" in lawless action at the Capitol as a Joint Session of Congress was assembled to count the votes of the Electoral College.

"Thus incited by President Trump," the document said, members of the crowd interfered with the Joint Session, unlawfully breached and vandalized the Capitol and injured and killed a law enforcement officer. The article said Trump's supporters engaged in other "violent, deadly, destructive and seditious acts."

Democratic hopes that Pence would invoke the 25th amendment, however, were quashed when the White House announced that Pence and Trump met on Monday and pledged to work together for the rest of their term. The meeting reportedly marked the first time Trump and Pence talked since the riots.

Trump and Pence reiterated that the protesters that stormed the US Capitol building do not represent the 75 million Americans that voted for them in the 2020 US election, an official said in a statement after the meeting in the Oval Office.

Republican leaders including House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy and Senator Lindsey Graham have warned that impeaching Trump with less than two weeks before his term ends was not appropriate. McCarthy in a letter to colleagues on Monday said that impeaching Trump "would have the opposite effect of bringing our country together."

FEARS OF UNREST

The timing of the efforts to remove the president might be poorly-timed given US federal and state authorities are preparing for possible violent nationwide protests by pro-Trump supporters leading up to Biden's inauguration on January 20.

"Armed protests are being planned at all 50 state capitols from 16 January through at least 20 January, and at the US Capitol from 17 January through 20 January," the FBI said in a bulletin as quoted by multiple media outlets on Monday.

The FBI said it is gathering information to identify potential threats and sharing that information with its partners.

"Our focus is not on peaceful protesters, but on those threatening their safety and the safety of other citizens with violence and destruction of property," the FBI told Sputnik.

Defense Department spokesman Chris Mitchell told Sputnik up to 15,000 National Guard troops will be deployed in Washington, DC to boost security. Earlier the National Guard said it was meeting requests from the Secret Service, Capitol Police, and Park Police ahead of the inauguration.

In addition, Trump himself even declared an emergency to mobilize resources ahead of the events.

"Today, President Donald J. Trump declared that an emergency exists in the District of Columbia and ordered Federal assistance to supplement the District's response efforts due to the emergency conditions resulting from the 59th Presidential Inauguration from January 11 to January 24, 2021," the White House said in a statement on Monday.

Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers' office in a press release said he has activated the National Guard to help protect the state Capitol building ahead of a potential armed protest. Several other states said they are boosting security at their respective capitols as well.

Despite the alarms, the situation near the US Capitol was calm on Monday with only tourists and a few film crews in the vicinity, a Sputnik correspondent reported. Some national guard were positioned on the periphery, albeit unarmed, while no Trump supporters were seen. Meanwhile, people carried flowers to posters with the name of the policeman who died during the riots - a kind of memorial in front of the Capitol.

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RPT - Situation Remains Calm Near US Capitol Building, Yet People Remember January 6 Riots

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - The situation near the building that houses both chambers of US Congress in Washington, DC remains calm in the wake of last week's riots with only tourists and a few film crews in the vicinity, a Sputnik correspondent reports.

Preparations for the inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden, scheduled for January 20, continue. However, the FBI is warning that armed protests are being planned in all 50 US state capitols in the final days up to Biden's inauguration, ABC News reported on Monday, citing a bulletin sent out by the agency.

National Guard officers stand behind a metal fence that was put up here after the riots in the Congress building last week. They are all unarmed. Passers-by sometimes stop to have a few words with them.

There are several police cars not far from the Capitol, but there are no personnel on the streets.

Meanwhile, people are carrying more and more flowers to the posters with the name of the policeman who died during the riots - a kind of memorial in front of the Capitol.

"Officer Sicknick, thank you!" along with "Rest in Peace, Defender of the US Capitol and Democracy," the captions on posters read. At the same time, posters with the names of four deceased protesters at the congress have disappeared.

On Monday, there are no supporters of outgoing US President Donald Trump near the Capitol. But there is a supporter of impeachment to Trump, who introduced himself as Bill Zouaki from Oregon. He is holding a sign that says "Impeachment."

"He [Trump] should have been impeached within 24 hours after what happened here," says Bill. In his opinion, Trump is to blame for inciting rebellion.

Last week, Twitter warned that it has seen plans for future armed protests circulating on and off its platform, including a second attack on the US Capitol and state capitol buildings on January 17.

On Wednesday, a large group of President Donald Trump's supporters stormed the Capitol building in a bid to prevent lawmakers from certifying the presidential election results. Trump supporters - some of which were armed with metal pipes, chemical irritants, and other weapons - clashed with police and damaged property before seizing the rotunda and inauguration stage. The event was the most significant breach of the US Capitol grounds since the British set fire to it in 1814. Following the unrest, Trump has been blocked on all major social media platforms. Congressional Democrats on Monday took the first steps to try to remove Trump from office immediately. The House of Representatives is expected to pass a resolution this week urging Vice President Mike Pence to invoke the 25th Amendment to remove Trump from power. However, if that fails then House Democrats will pursue impeachment charges against the president for allegedly inciting an insurrection at the US Capitol.

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RPT - FBI Supporting Local Law Enforcement Ahead of Possible Armed Protests in US - Statement

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - The FBI is providing support to state, local and federal law enforcement agencies ahead of possible armed protests that may soon occur throughout the United States, the FBI said in a statement to Sputnik.

Earlier on Monday, media reported that the FBI is warning that armed protests are being planned in all 50 US state capitals in the final days leading up to President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration on January 20.

"The FBI is supporting our state, local, and federal law enforcement partners with maintaining public safety in the communities we serve," the statement said on Monday. "Our focus is not on peaceful protesters, but on those threatening their safety and the safety of other citizens with violence and destruction of property."

The FBI said it is gathering information to identify potential threats and sharing that information with its partners.

On January 6, a group of Trump's supporters stormed the US Capitol building, clashing with police, damaging property, seizing the inauguration stage and occupying the rotunda. The unrest took place after Trump urged his supporters to protest the legitimizing by Congress of what he claims was a stolen election.