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Indiana Legislature Introduces Bill to Ban 'Harmful and Detrimental' Conversion Therapy by [Mary F.](#)

Conversion therapy is a practice that attempts to change a person's sexual or gender identity. The practice, which targets LGBTQ youth, has been "rejected by every mainstream medical and mental health organization for decades," according to the Human Rights Campaign.

Indiana legislators this week introduced [Senate Bill 32](#), which would ban [conversion therapy](#) for minors. The bill was authored by JD Ford, a member of the Indiana Senate and the first openly gay lawmaker in the state. Therapists who violate the order by practicing conversion therapy would face disciplinary action and risk losing their licenses, according to the bill.

"Putting a stop to this harmful and detrimental practice can save the lives of countless LGBTQ Hoosiers. Our state has the chance to end this harmful and detrimental practice this year. A person's sexual orientation or gender identity is not a disease that needs cured. In fact, every major medical and mental health organization in our country has condemned the use of 'conversion therapy,'" [Ford said in a recent statement](#). "There is no financial risk to our state government for approving this legislation, so why not do this?"

Passing the ban in Indiana would set a standard for other states, Drew Anderson, a board member of the Indiana Stonewall Democrats, [told NBC News](#).

"We can set a standard for other states that people view as Republican about being successful on LGBTQ issues," he noted.

In addition, such a ban would distance Indiana from the anti-LGBTQ reputation it acquired under US Vice President Mike Pence, who was governor of the state from 2013 to 2017 and represented Indiana in the US House of Representatives from 2001 to 2013. During Pence's time as vice president, the Trump administration has weakened nondiscrimination protections for LGBTQ people, banned transgender people from military service and even allowed child welfare agencies to reject same-sex prospective parents, [NBC noted](#).

Conversion therapy, also referred to as reparative therapy, has involved techniques such as ice-pick lobotomies, chemical castration and aversive conditioning treatments such as applying electric shocks to the genitals. More recent techniques used in the US include counseling, visualization, psychoanalytic therapy and spiritual interventions.

The dangerous practice has been widely discredited by many health care organizations, including the American Medical Association, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the World Health Organization.

According to the [Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation \(GLAAD\)](#), LGBTQ Americans subjected to conversion therapy are nearly 6 times more likely to have high levels of depression and 8 times more likely to have attempted suicide.

Last month, more 370 international spiritual leaders [called for a global ban on conversion therapy](#) by signing a declaration spearheaded by the Global Interfaith Commission on LGBT+ Lives.

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Facebook Reportedly Tracks Surge of Violent Rhetoric Tied to Presidential Inauguration by [Mary F.](#)

US President Donald Trump supporters stormed the Capitol building in Washington, DC, on January 6 to protest against the certification of the Electoral College, attempting to prevent Joe Biden from being confirmed as the winner of the 2020 presidential election. Five people died as a result of the incident.

According to an exclusive report by [Reuters](#), Facebook has seen a surge in signals suggesting that acts of violence connected to efforts to contest the result of the US presidential election may occur in the future.

An unidentified Facebook spokesperson who spoke to Reuters on the matter said that the storming of the US Capitol by Trump supporters appears to be inspiring efforts to organize gatherings across the country around the time of Biden's January 20 inauguration.

Some of the indicators Facebook has been tracking include digital flyers promoting such events. Some of the flyers feature "calls to arms or the insignia of militias or hate groups," Reuters reported, citing the spokesperson.

Following the unrest, several tech companies have taken steps in an attempt to prevent anything like the January 6 riot from occurring again. Both Twitter and Facebook have banned Trump's accounts over fears that his rhetoric may incite additional violence, and Amazon Web Services and major mobile app stores, such as those belonging to Apple and Google, have cut off service to Parler, an alternative social media platform with a largely right-wing user base. In the wake of the Capitol riot, Parler drew scrutiny due to some users' promotion of illegal activity, such as violence, on the platform.

On Monday, Facebook also banned all content promoting the phrase "stop the steal," which has become a common slogan at pro-Trump protests, such as the one that preceded the riot in Washington, DC. The Facebook spokesperson told Reuters that the platform is also blocking searches for "storm the Capitol" and flagging any posts that include those phrases.

In an internal bulletin obtained by [ABC News](#), the FBI warned this week that it is receiving warnings of "armed protests" in all 50 state capitols and the US Capitol in Washington, DC, next week.

"The FBI received information about an identified armed group intending to travel to Washington, DC on 16 January," the bulletin reads. "They have warned that if Congress attempts to remove POTUS via the 25th Amendment, a huge uprising will occur."

"While our standard practice is to not comment on specific intelligence products, the FBI is supporting our state, local and federal law enforcement partners with maintaining public safety in the communities we serve," the bureau noted in a [statement obtained by the Associated](#)

[Press](#). “Our efforts are focused on identifying, investigating, and disrupting individuals that are inciting violence and engaging in criminal activity.”

As a result, federal law enforcement officials have urged police agencies to devote more resources to security at statehouses across the US.

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Trump Stalwarts Seek Ouster of Liz Cheney From GOP Leadership Post Over Impeachment Vote

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Despite growing sentiment that US President Donald Trump has become a political liability for the Republican Party in the wake of the January 6 attempted putsch by his supporters, polls show sizable support for him among the party base.

After throwing her support behind the impeachment of Trump earlier this week, Rep. Liz Cheney (R-WY) is facing down another rebellion - this time by Trump loyalists in the House, who are demanding her resignation from her post as chair of the House Republican Conference.

Three Republican lawmakers rallied against Cheney, the GOP’s third most powerful member in the House, after [she voted on Wednesday to charge Trump](#) with inciting the insurrection by his supporters on January 6 at the US Capitol.

“I think she’s totally wrong,” [Rep. Jim Jordan \(R-OH\) told reporters](#). “I think there should be a conference and have a second vote on [her leadership post].” He claimed to speak for the majority in the House Freedom Caucus, the secretive, populist grouping of Republicans descended from the Tea Party movement that subsequently became a base of support for Trump.

[Trump announced on Monday that Jordan](#) would receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom for his various conservative crusades against liberal initiatives, including defending Trump during his first impeachment in 2019-2020. Most recently, Jordan voted against certifying the results of the November 2020 election even after the process was interrupted by the deadly insurrection by Trump supporters, [sending lawmakers scrambling for safety](#).

The other two lawmakers to call for Cheney’s resignation were Reps. Matt Rosendale (R-MT) and Andy Biggs (R-AZ), the latter of whom chairs the Freedom Caucus.

A resolution being circulated among Republicans notes that Cheney’s vote “does not reflect that of the majority of the Republican Conference and has brought the Conference into disrepute and produced discord.”

“I’m not going anywhere. This is a vote of conscience,” [Cheney told Politico](#). “It’s one where there are different views in our conference. But our nation is facing an unprecedented, since the civil war, constitutional crisis. That’s what we need to be focused on. That’s where our efforts and attention need to be.”

However, Cheney wasn’t the only representative from Trump’s own party to vote for the impeachment article that could remove him from office: [nine others in the House also backed](#)

[the move](#). Still, 93% of House Republicans voted against impeachment, and two-thirds still voted not to certify the election results.

The GOP: Still Trump's Party?

The move against Cheney by some Republicans comes even as others relish in the opportunity to be rid of Trump, whose [sudden conservative streak in the 2016 election](#) campaign and crass anti-establishment populism [have never entirely been welcomed](#) by older party leaders. In the run up to the 2020 election, a powerful group of "[never Trump](#)" Republicans formed the [Lincoln Project](#), a political action committee that expressed conservative support for Joe Biden, who won and is now the US president-elect.

On Wednesday, Rep. Nancy Mace (R-SC), a first-term lawmaker, [told Fox News Trump had no future in the GOP](#), whose platform he had "tarnished." However, Mace voted against impeachment, saying she thought the effort was rushed.

Senate Republicans are also more disposed to convicting Trump than they were a year ago, when he was impeached for abuse of power and obstructing Congress in relation to a scandal involving US military aid to Ukraine. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY), who leads Republicans in the Senate, [has reportedly let it be known he supports impeachment](#) and hopes it gets Trump kicked out of his adopted Republican Party completely. However, the GOP senator is in [no rush to convene the trial before January 20](#), when Trump is legally required to leave office and Biden is sworn in as the new chief executive.

Trump has claimed Biden's election victory is fraudulent and that he is the true victor, despite several recounts and much-delayed result certifications by hotly contested states. The insurrection at the Capitol, which aimed to block certification of those results, came immediately after Trump hosted a "Stop the Steal" rally at the White House. After the putsch was crushed, thousands of [National Guard troops were deployed to Washington, DC](#), to ensure a peaceful transition of power, and federal prosecutors are pursuing sedition and conspiracy charges against the rioters.

Despite the feelings of Mace and McConnell, [an Axios-Ipsos poll taken earlier this week](#) noted that 64% of Republicans support Trump's "recent" behavior, 57% said Trump should be the party's 2024 candidate, and only 17% support removing him from office. Of the Republicans polled, 56% called themselves "traditional Republicans," while 36% identified themselves as "Trump Republicans."

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Associated Press Casts Doubt on Beijing's Cooperation as WHO's COVID-19 Origins Probe Begins

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

After months without a significant number of COVID-19 cases, several dozen new cases in just a few days have sent millions in China back into lockdown, threatening to cancel Spring Festival celebrations for a second year in a row.

A recent story by the Associated Press on the international World Health Organization (WHO) team that has traveled to the Chinese city of Wuhan to ascertain the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic appeared to present a heavily distorted view of the issue, forwarding a narrative concocted by Western governments that seeks to demonize Beijing and undermine the country's reputation.

Building A Narrative

"A global team of researchers arrived Thursday in the Chinese city where the coronavirus pandemic was first detected to conduct a politically sensitive investigation into its origins amid uncertainty about whether Beijing might try to prevent embarrassing discoveries," [reads the opening paragraph of AP's Thursday story](#). It also served as a text of a tweet of the story, although a typo yielding "uncertainly" provided Liu Xin, a news anchor on China Global Television Network (CGTN) with fodder for a witty reply pointing out the story's bias.

"'Uncertainly'? There's certainty @AP is NOT doing a professional job trying to tell us what to think," she wrote on Thursday.

The angle of the story is essentially that Beijing has long attempted to frustrate an investigation by the WHO and is likely to continue to do so over fears that China will be proven to be the origin of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, and that the Chinese government failed to take adequate measures to contain it.

The team arrived on Thursday and includes 15 scientists from the US, Australia, Germany, Japan, Britain, Russia, the Netherlands, Qatar and Vietnam, who have taken COVID-19 tests and entered a two-week quarantine period in Wuhan. Two were asked to return to Singapore because they tested positive for COVID-19 antibodies.

The Hong Kong-based [South China Morning Post noted](#) that the trip will give the international team a chance to access data collected by Chinese researchers that has not yet been publicly shared. According to the paper, that will include searching medical records for evidence of earlier cases missed by Chinese doctors, testing stored medical samples for traces of the virus and [a probing of the sources for the Huanan wet market](#) in Wuhan that became the epicenter for the city's outbreak in late 2019 and early 2020.

Aside from AP's suggestive wording, there hasn't been anything to indicate the group will encounter any kind of resistance or lack of cooperation from Chinese authorities - in fact, they have welcomed the team.

Pioneering Chinese Scientists

"Scientists suspect the virus that has killed more than 1.9 million people since late 2019 jumped to humans from bats or other animals, most likely in China's southwest. The ruling Communist Party, stung by complaints it allowed the disease to spread, has suggested the virus came from abroad, possibly on imported seafood, but international scientists reject that," the AP story says. What AP fails to mention is that the "scientists" cited in the first sentence are also Chinese. Shi Zhengli, director of the Center for Emerging Infectious Diseases at the Wuhan Institute of Virology, [is so well known for her research](#) on the relationship between bats and various members of the coronavirus family that she's known as "Batwoman."

[Shi told the BBC last month](#) she would "personally welcome any form of visit, based on an open, transparent, trusting, reliable and reasonable dialogue."

Frozen COVID?

Another passage in the AP story says, “The Chinese government has tried to stir confusion about the virus’s origin. It has promoted theories, with little evidence, that the outbreak might have started with imports of tainted seafood, a notion rejected by international scientists and agencies.”

In fact, the theory has more than a little scientific backing, although it’s worth noting that it’s only been floated as a potential vector for SARS-CoV-2 that was proposed after several new infection hotspots seemingly spontaneously [arose in several countries in August](#), and Chinese scientists have made no firm claims about it being to blame for the disease entering the country. In October, a group of scientists at China’s Xi’an Jiaotong University and Lanzhou University [published a study in Environmental Chemistry Letters](#) describing how SARS-CoV-2 can survive temperatures as low as negative 80 degrees Celsius for as long as 21 days. The paper theorizes a contamination of the food by handlers with COVID-19, not of the animals themselves, but notes that “data are lacking on long-term survival and infectivity under these conditions” and advises more research into this area.

That advice is essentially the same [as that given to AP by Timothy Newsome](#), a virologist at the University of Sydney, for a November 24 story purporting to debunk the claim.

“It is possible and may represent some risk, but it’s certainly at the lower end of risk for transmission,” Newsome told AP at the time, noting that it’s possible for viral traces detected to be either infectious or non-infectious. “We know low temperatures do stabilize the virus. Nonetheless, I think things which have been transported and surface transmission - there’s a low risk of it.”

[An August fact sheet by the WHO](#) - from before the report on SARS-CoV-2’s cold tolerance - dismisses the notion that food can be a vector for COVID-19, although it makes no specific mention of frozen food and does note that contamination by workers handling food and packaging is still possible.

AP Floats Lab Escape Theory

However, after wrongly casting doubt on several Chinese claims, AP then presents an outright conspiracy theory as a viable candidate for SARS-CoV-2’s genesis: that it escaped from a Wuhan Institute of Virology research laboratory.

The notion was given wide currency by US President [Donald Trump, who leveled the claim in May](#) as US deaths from COVID-19 skyrocketed, even though earlier rumblings about a “pandemic” or an artificial origin for the virus were being [disproven by scientists as early as March 2020](#), when its complete genome had been sequenced, revealing a natural origin. The suggestion was further dismissed by Trump’s own Office of the Director of National Intelligence, which [issued a rare statement on April 30 last year](#), noting, “The Intelligence Community also concurs with the wide scientific consensus that the COVID-19 virus was not man-made or genetically modified.”

Nonetheless, AP presents this as a valid theory with almost none of the pushback given to Chinese theories, and cites Scottish epidemiologist Mark Woolhouse, [who pushed the now-discredited “Swedish model”](#) of dealing with COVID-19 on the British government last autumn, as saying such an audit of the virology lab would be a “routine activity.”

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Several US Domestic Air Carriers Ban Checked Firearms on DC Flights Ahead of Biden Inauguration
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Washington, DC, Mayor Muriel Bowser has asked the federal government to cancel all protest permits for the inauguration, and the US National Mall complex will be closed to the public during the transfer of power, all in a bid to avoid a repeat of the violence seen on January 6. On Thursday, several airlines servicing airports in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area announced they would not allow passengers to transport firearms in their checked baggage until after the presidential inauguration on January 20.

Ed Bastian, the CEO of Delta Air Lines, [told CNBC on Thursday the new policy](#) would last through the entire week of Inauguration Day. Later, American, United and Alaska airlines all gave similar announcements.

“We’re all on high alert based on the events over the last couple of weeks in Washington,” Bastian said. The ban includes Baltimore/Washington International Airport, Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport and Dulles International Airport. United’s ban also includes Richmond International Airport.

In addition, [the Federal Aviation Administration implemented](#) a “zero tolerance” policy for unruly travelers beginning on Thursday and could fine them as much as \$35,000.

The policy has been paralleled by a grassroots movement to convince area hotels not to rent out rooms during inauguration week. [On Wednesday, booking service Airbnb announced](#) it would cancel all existing bookings in the DC area, refund the customers and block new reservations.

The drive to make travel to the US capital as frustrating as possible comes in the aftermath of the January 6 insurrection in Washington, DC, in which supporters of US President Donald Trump stormed the US Capitol building in an attempt to overturn an election Trump claimed was fraudulent. Five people died in the assault, and federal prosecutors are pursuing hundreds of cases that include charges of sedition and conspiracy.

The insurrectionists reportedly traveled to DC from across the country, many arriving by plane in the days prior, and some [traveled with firearms and explosives](#) and even brought them into the national legislature. However, the new policy still won’t prevent [insurrectionists who travel by private plane](#) from bringing along weapons.

Bastian said that law enforcement officials were exempt from the ban, [but according to The Appeal](#), at least 29 police officers have been identified as taking part in the attempted putsch. While the putsch failed and the election was certified after the mobs were evicted and Congress reconvened, [the FBI has warned that radical militia groups](#) are planning further armed protests, including at the inauguration itself. The Pentagon has [deployed 20,000 National Guard troops to DC](#) to ensure a peaceful transition of power to US President-elect Joe Biden.

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Photos: DPRK Unveils New Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missile, Short-Range Weapon in Military Parade
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

During the recent congress of the Workers' Party of Korea, chairperson Kim Jong Un noted the country's need to improve its nuclear forces in order to guarantee an effective deterrent to attack.

At a massive military parade in Pyongyang on Thursday, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) unveiled a new submarine-launched ballistic missile and a new short-range missile (SLBM).

[Korean Central News Agency \(KCNA\) reported](#) on Friday that a military parade celebrating the end of the [historic Eighth Party Congress](#) featured some new advanced hardware, including two never-before-seen missiles.

One weapon is identified by KCNA as a submarine-launched ballistic missile - "the world's most powerful weapon." Indeed, the ability to fire a missile carrying a nuclear warhead from anywhere on the globe, undetected, has provided a handful of nations with an effective nuclear deterrent for decades.

Defense analysts noted the new SLBM was unknown to them. Following the pattern of Korean People's Army names, the missile would presumably be called the Pukguksong-5, although no designation was supplied by KCNA.

In October 2019, the DPRK showed off its Pukguksong-4 SLBM, which analysts noted is shorter than the new missile and which has a slightly different shape. However, Pyongyang has not performed an SLBM test since then, presenting another mystery about the new weapon.

Seoul-based [Yonhap News Agency reported](#) that the South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff issued a simple statement saying they were analyzing the military items seen in the parade.

In November, South Korea's National Intelligence Service briefed lawmakers on North Korean plans for two new submarines, one of which could carry SLBMs.

"One is a modified Romeo Class and the other is a new medium-large size one," Ha Tae Keung, a lawmaker from the opposition party in parliament, [told Reuters after the briefing](#). "Romeo" is the NATO designation for the Soviet Union's Project 633 diesel-electric attack submarines.

Pyongyang is purported to have 20 Project 633s in service. The class has been modified to fire anti-ship missiles, but never ballistic missiles.

A second new weapon spotted during the parade was identified by analysts to be a short-range solid-fueled missile. Like many of the DPRK's other short-range missiles, this one was also mounted on a wheeled mobile launch track.

"It resembles a KN24, but on a KN23-style" transporter, erector and launcher (TEL), Ankit Panda, a researcher and nonproliferation expert at the Carnegie Endowment on International Peace, [tweeted on Thursday](#).

“The sheer diversity of new short-range solid-fuel missiles we’ve seen over the last few years in North Korea is pretty amazing. KN23/KN24/KN25 and now this. And that’s on top of the older liquid-fueled Scuds and the Toksa,” he added.

That would make the weapon similar to [those tested several times over the Sea of Japan](#) since May 2019, which were also identified as short-range ballistic missiles. While they aroused anger due to Pyongyang’s pledge to halt long-range missile tests, US President Donald Trump, then in denuclearization negotiations with Kim, [noted in July 2019 that the agreement didn’t include](#) short-range weapons.

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Former Michigan Governor Charged With Willful Neglect of Duty Over Flint Water Crisis
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

A previous investigation into the Flint water crisis brought charges against several state officials in 2017; however, prosecutors eventually dropped the charges in 2019 when it was determined that the initial probe was mishandled. A new investigation was subsequently initiated.

Former Michigan Governor Rick Snyder, who was in office during the height of the Flint water scandal that led to a deadly outbreak of Legionnaires’ disease, was charged on Thursday with two misdemeanor counts of willful neglect of duty.

Snyder pleaded not guilty to both charges, and his bond was set at \$10,000 for each count.

While the former official was not ordered to hand over his passport, he was told he could not leave the Great Lakes State without permission from the court, [according to Detroit News](#).

Echoing past remarks, Brian Lennon, Snyder’s lawyer, [issued a statement](#) following the development and noted that the two charges “are wholly without merit and this entire situation is puzzling.”

“Today’s charges do nothing to bring justice to the people of Flint,” Lennon continued. “These unjustified allegations do nothing to resolve a painful chapter in the history of our state. Today’s actions merely perpetrate an outrageous political persecution.”

Snyder’s next court appearance is scheduled for Tuesday.

[The Associated Press reported](#) that Snyder’s charges make him the first governor or former governor of Michigan to ever be charged for actions taken during his time in office.

However, the Thursday announcement by the Michigan attorney general’s office also revealed dozens of charges against eight other former state and city officials, including Snyder’s former aide Richard Baird, former state health director Nick Lyon and Eden Wells, who served as the state’s medical executive.

Baird, who was in charge of the recovery efforts in Flint, was charged with perjury, extortion, misconduct in office and obstruction of justice. If convicted on all counts, Baird faces up to 45 years in prison and a fine of roughly \$30,000. At present, it’s unclear whether prison sentences for Baird’s charges will be served concurrently.

The ex-aide has pleaded not guilty to all charges, with his lawyer, Randall Levine, reiterating that the allegations against his client are “baseless,” and that he is “being unfairly prosecuted by the state’s Democratic attorney general.”

As for Lyon and Wells, who were both previously charged under the state’s earlier investigation into the water crisis, the pair of ex-officials were each hit with nine counts of involuntary manslaughter over the Legionnaires’ disease outbreak that killed 12 people. Lyon was also hit with one count of willful neglect, whereas Wells was also charged with two counts of misconduct in office and one count of willful neglect of duty.

Others charged in the investigation are Jarrod Agen, Snyder’s former chief of staff and US Vice President Mike Pence’s former communications director; former Flint finance director Darnell Earley; former state-appointed emergency manager Gerald Ambrose; former Flint Public Works Director Howard Croft; and Nancy Peeler, who worked under the state’s Department of Health and Human Services.

According to Detroit News, Peeler, while serving as the director of Michigan’s Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting program, allegedly “buried” an internal report from 2015 that included details on blood lead levels detected in children living within the majority-Black community of Flint.

In total, 42 counts related to the water crisis were issued, of which 34 were felony charges.

"There are no velvet ropes in our criminal justice system," Fadwa Hammoud, a special prosecutor with the state attorney general’s office, said at a conference. "Nobody, no matter how powerful and how well connected, is above accountability when they commit a crime."

[Reports emerged earlier this week](#) that charges would be forthcoming after several ex-officials were informed of prosecutors’ intentions.

The water crisis began in early 2014 when city officials decided to switch Flint’s water source from Lake Huron to the Flint River as a cost-saving measure while a regional pipeline was under construction; however, almost immediately, Flint residents noted something was off with the water, since it appeared cloudy and emitted a foul smell.

According to [local station WDIV](#), despite complaints, significant action by the Snyder administration wasn’t taken until medical professionals reported spiked levels of lead in young children. It was ultimately determined the crisis was caused by a failure to apply corrosion inhibitors to the city’s water pipes when the source was changed.

While the massive misstep exposed tens of thousands of Flint residents to toxic levels of lead, the water switch was also blamed for the Legionnaires’ disease outbreak that affected at least 90 individuals and killed 12.

The crisis, which saw thousands of residents lining up for bottled water, seeking medical assistance over lead-caused health complications, became the nationwide symbol for governmental mismanagement.

Reports surfaced in November that a proposed settlement of a lawsuit on behalf of the Flint residents had reached some \$641 million. A preliminary approval of the settlement is expected to be issued by a court by January 21.

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US Slams 14 of MS-13's 'Highest-Ranking' Leaders With Terrorism Charges, 3 At-Large
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

MS-13, otherwise known as Mara Salvatrucha, is an international criminal organization considered one of the most notorious street gangs within the Western Hemisphere. The group originated in Los Angeles, California, in the 1970s and gained notoriety over the decades for its ruthlessness as its reach extended across the US and Central America.

US federal prosecutors unsealed an indictment on Thursday that charged 14 high-ranking MS-13 leaders with various counts of terrorism, three of whom are not presently in custody and are the subjects of federal manhunts.

A [release by the US Justice Department](#) (DoJ) identifies the individuals as the gang's "board of directors" and notes that the targeted leaders "directed MS-13's violence and criminal activity around the world for almost two decades."

The agency explains that the defendants make up the Ranfla Nacional, which comprises the highest level of the gang's leadership. Among the defendants is Borromeo Enrique Henriquez, whom the DoJ describes as the "most powerful member" of the leadership body.

The charges announced by the department are conspiracy to provide and conceal material support to terrorists, conspiracy to commit acts of terrorism transcending national boundaries, conspiracy to finance terrorism and narco-terrorism conspiracy in connection with the defendants' leadership of the transnational criminal organization.

The three individuals still at large are [Fredy Ivan Jandres-Parada](#), [Cesar Humberto Lopez-Larios](#) and [Hugo Armando Quinteros-Mineros](#). Officials are offering a \$20,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of each of the wanted men.

The indictment, which was filed by the US Attorney's Office in the Eastern District of New York, highlights how the Ranfla Nacional began holding military-style training sessions and raised funds to purchase firearms in an attempt to exercise its power over the government of El Salvador after a so-called "truce" between the pair was broken in 2015 and prompted stricter measures against imprisoned gang members.

"The indictment announced today is the highest-reaching and most sweeping indictment targeting MS-13 and its command and control structure in US history," acting US Attorney General Jeffrey Rosen said in a statement accompanying the release.

"By working side-by-side with our US law enforcement partners and with our partners in El Salvador, we have charged MS-13's highest-ranking leaders with operating a transnational criminal organization that utilizes terror to impose their will on neighborhoods, businesses and innocent civilians across the United States and Central America."

Acting US Attorney Seth D. DuCharme added in a statement that even when members of the Ranfla Nacional were incarcerated, they continued to manage the group's operations and orchestrate crimes while working to recruit new members. The gang is estimated to have tens of thousands of members across much of Central America and the US.

Officials indicated that if defendants are convicted, they face a maximum sentence of life in prison; however, as MS-13's hierarchy allows operations to continue even when leaders are imprisoned, it's uncertain how law enforcement officials intend to halt the gang's operations. Early on in his administration, US President Donald Trump [called for stiff measures to be implemented](#) to stop MS-13's actions in the US, with the Justice Department eventually launching [Joint Task Force Vulcan](#) to dismantle the violent organization. [According to the DoJ](#), the gang has managed to steadily grow its presence in Long Island, New York, as well as in

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North Carolina and California. Old Habits Die Hard - Political Cartoon

With an overwhelming amount of lawmakers in favor of impeaching US President Donald Trump in the wake of the Capitol riot, the president is quickly seeing his inner circle shrink right before his eyes, as he attempts to make the most of his last few days in office.

Since the January 6 insurrection, many of Trump's allies have jumped ship on their own; however, when it comes to the president's personal lawyer, former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, that's not the case.

Reports surfaced on Thursday that Trump had instructed White House aides to not pay Giuliani's legal fees, and that moving forward, the commander-in-chief would be personally approving any financial reimbursements that the lawyer was owed for travels.

Citing two sources with knowledge of the development, [the Washington Post reported](#) Trump's relationship with Giuliani has splintered since the latest impeachment efforts took off, and that the president wasn't exactly thrilled with a \$20,000 bill Giuliani sent his way.

Incidentally, Trump's alleged demands would seem to fit with past reports that he isn't exactly known for paying bills. An [analysis by the USA Today Network](#) determined Trump or his companies failed to pay a variety of contractors, including plumbers, painters, waiters, bartenders, a dishwasher and a glass company, among others.

Some habits are just too hard to break, eh?

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FBI Chief: Bureau Monitoring 'Extensive' Online Chatter About Potential Inauguration Threats by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Since the January 6 insurrection, federal authorities have issued multiple warnings that potential armed protests could erupt in the days ahead of US President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration after US President Donald Trump indicated he would not be attending the event.

FBI Director Christopher Wray revealed on Thursday that the agency was monitoring a multitude of online posts hinting at the possibility of an armed protest being held on Inauguration Day.

During a briefing with US Vice President Mike Pence at the Federal Emergency Management Agency headquarters in Washington, DC, [Wray informed officials](#) the bureau was “seeing an extensive amount of concerning online chatter” about potentially violent events.

“Right now, we’re tracking calls for potential armed protests and activity leading up to the inauguration,” Wray said. He later explained that “the reason I use the word potential is because one of the real challenges in this space is trying to distinguish what’s aspirational versus what’s intentional.” “We’re concerned about the potential for violence at multiple protests and rallies planned here in DC and at state capitol buildings around the country in the days to come that could bring armed individuals within close proximity to government buildings and officials,” he stressed.

The [FBI director further indicated](#) that the bureau was “looking at individuals who may have an eye towards repeating that same kind of violence that we saw last week,” and has called on local law enforcement to strengthen their security measures at government buildings.

In a bid to better monitor threats and distribute necessary intelligence, federal authorities will be actively working nonstop at the FBI headquarters and its 56 field offices across the nation. “Our posture is aggressive, and it’s going to stay that way through the inauguration,” Wray added. Earlier this week, Wray [called on local authorities](#) to “overshare intelligence” as officials have grown concerned about the possibility of “extremist violence” unfolding. In fact, the [FBI previously issued a bulletin](#) that stated armed protests were being planned at all 50 state capitols, as well as the [since-shuttered US Capitol](#). Additionally, congressional lawmakers were reportedly [briefed on three planned attacks](#) against the Capitol, White House and the Supreme Court.

Although Trump has brushed off any responsibility for last week’s deadly attack on the Capitol, the president has doubled down and called for “[no violence, no lawbreaking and no vandalism of any kind](#)” amid reports of possible armed unrest.

Prior to Trump’s suspension from Twitter, he indicated he would [not be attending the inauguration ceremony](#). Reports suggest Trump [may be leaving the capital on Tuesday](#) to relocate to Florida for his post-presidency days, a move [unlikely to be warmly accepted](#) by some residents of the Sunshine State.

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Nikki Haley Fuels Rumors of 2024 Presidential Bid With Political Action Committee Rollout by [Evan Craighead](#)

While former US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley has reportedly slammed US President Donald Trump's post-election remarks behind closed doors, she has publicly come to 45's defense regarding Twitter's decision to ban him from the platform, calling the move something that "happens in China, not our country."

Haley fueled rumors of a possible 2024 presidential bid on Wednesday after issuing supporters an email announcement about her new political action committee (PAC), dubbed "Stand for America" - the same name as her [501\(c\)\(4\) issue advocacy group](#).

Addressing her "fellow patriot," Haley began her email recounting her final days as UN ambassador.

"When I sat in the Oval Office before my last press conference as UN Ambassador, I made a promise to keep standing for America," the 48-year-old wrote. "I [renewed that promise last fall at the Republican National Convention](#)."

"I am not done, not by a long shot," Haley emphasized.

Rumors of Haley's potential campaign for the Republican presidential nomination in 2024 have continued to spread, and the former ambassador recently defended the US president regarding his ban from Twitter.

Silencing people, not to mention the President of the US, is what happens in China not our country. [#Unbelievable](#)

— Nikki Haley (@NikkiHaley) [January 8, 2021](#)

At the same time, [Politico reported last week](#) that Haley privately rebuked the US president's conduct ahead of the deadly riots and storming of the Capitol building in Washington, DC, on January 6.

"President Trump has not always chosen the right words," Haley reportedly said on January 7 during a closed-door event at the RNC's winter meeting in Florida, according to a source Politico said was "familiar" with her comments. "He was wrong with his words in Charlottesville, and I told him so at the time. He was badly wrong with his words yesterday. And it wasn't just his words. His actions since Election Day will be judged harshly by history."

The reports of the private condemnation have sparked conversations about Haley possibly setting herself up to possibly take on Trump for the Republican nomination in the 2024 presidential election.

However, Haley's email shied away from mentioning the 2024 presidential race. It was also free of any mention of the US president.

Instead, the former US ambassador's Stand for America PAC will be "laser-focused on the 2022 midterms and electing a conservative force to the House of Representatives and US Senate to serve as a bulwark against the liberal agendas of Joe Biden, Kamala Harris, Chuck Schumer and Nancy Pelosi," the email said, [according to The Hill](#).

Haley went on to invite supporters to assist with "recruiting, advising, training, and financially supporting strong conservatives to run in key House and Senate races to take back control of both [legislative] chambers."

She also called on GOP allies to defend Republican incumbents "who are being targeted for defeat" - particularly those who are first-time officeholders and/or live in swing-states.

"Sitting on the sidelines and waiting to get involved is akin to doing nothing at all," Haley argued. "And given the stakes, that's not an option for us."

Following the two Democratic victories in Georgia's Senate runoff races, Democrats will soon hold control of the US House of Representatives and the Senate. While both parties have 50 lawmakers in the Senate, the tie-breaking vote will be given to Vice President-elect Kamala Harris, a Democrat.

Chaney Denton, a spokesperson for the former US ambassador, also shot down 2024 campaign rumors in relation to the Stand for America PAC.

"There's nothing to read into that," the [spokesperson told Axios](#). "Amb. Haley frequently and proudly mentions her work alongside President Trump in speeches and writings. The purpose of SFA PAC is to support Republicans in the 2022 midterm elections."

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Ivanka Trump, Jared Kushner Spent Over \$100,000 So Secret Service Wouldn't Use Their Toilet - Report
by [Evan Craighead](#)

A recent real estate purchase has signaled that Ivanka Trump, adviser to US President Donald Trump, and senior presidential adviser Jared Kushner may soon move from their \$15,000-per-month rental home in the Kalorama neighborhood of Washington, DC, and head to Florida, where 45 has his primary, non-governmental residence.

Citing neighbors and law enforcement officials, [The Washington Post reported Thursday](#) that, since September 2017, Kushner and Trump have spent more than \$100,000 in taxpayers funds on a studio basement rental that primarily served as the on-the-job restroom for their assigned Secret Service detail.

According to said law enforcement officials, the married couple - who have three children - barred Secret Service agents from using any of the 6.5 bathrooms in their Kalorama rental home and initially purchased portable restrooms, or port-a-potty units, for the agents. Naturally, the porta-a-potties did not go over well with the atmosphere of the neighborhood and quickly brought displeasure from their new neighbors.

"They sort of came in with the attitude, like, 'We are royalty,'" Dianne Bruce, a former neighbor who lived across the street, told The Post. "When they put the porta-potty right outside on the sidewalk we weren't allowed to walk on, that was when people in the neighborhood said, 'That's really not acceptable.'"

Before Kushner and Trump decided on the \$3,000-a-month studio basement, agents were forced to use bathrooms in the nearby home of President Barack Obama, a "not-so-nearby" house belonging to Mike Pence and various businesses around the area.

General Services Administration records viewed by the outlet note that the lease of the 820-square-foot basement began on September 27, 2017 and is set to expire on September 26 of this year. At the end of agreement, some \$144,000 in taxpayer funds will have been spent on the unit.

The home in question belongs to Kay Kendall, chairwoman of the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities, and was fully rented out to former Connecticut congressman Anthony "Toby" Moffett Jr. That is, until the former lawmaker suggested that Kendall split the home into two units and, of course, offer him a reduced rental price.

"I think it was very clear that they just needed a place to take a shower, take a break, use the facilities, have lunch," Kendall explained, speaking of the Secret Service detail.

"It's been no big deal," Moffett said of the experience. "They have been very nice to our grandchildren."

As their neighbors talk to the press, Kushner and Trump seem to be making their own plans to leave Kalorama after the end of Trump's presidency later this month.

[Sputnik reported last month](#) that the married couple were reportedly in talks to close a \$31.8 million real estate purchase on a waterfront plot on "Billionaire Bunker," a swanky, high-security island enclave off the coast of Miami, Florida.

If the exclusive island enclave does become their new residence, Kushner and Trump would become neighbors to the likes of billionaire Eddie Lampert, the former CEO and chairman of Sears Holdings; Hotels.com co-founder Bob Diener; and businessman Carl Icahn, who [presently owns the once-bankrupt Trump Entertainment Resorts](#).

Furthermore, considering the [1.8-acre lot](#) is an empty waterfront plot, Kushner and Trump would have to find interim lodging while the new home is constructed.

Charges in Michigan Water Crisis Long Overdue as Dying, Suffering Continues - Activists WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - Charges being filed against former state authorities responsible for the lethal water pollution crisis in Flint, Michigan is a long overdue development considering residents are still dying while the impact of the poisoning is more devastating than officially recognized, local activists told Sputnik.

On Thursday, Michigan prosecutors indicted nine former officials and employees in connection with the Flint water crisis. Most notably, former Health Director Nicolas Lyon and Chief Medical Executive Eden Wells were charged with manslaughter and former Governor Rick Snyder with willful neglect of duty.

While serving as governor in 2014, Snyder authorized switching Flint's source of water from Lake Huron to the Flint River. Soon after, residents began complaining about the water's foul taste and color but authorities stonewalled for a year before being forced to admit that there was a problem. Experts say the contaminated water led to the outbreak of Legionnaires' disease, a severe form of pneumonia caused by bacteria that thrive in warm water, which killed 12 people. The residents of Flint, a majority-Black city of just under 100,000 in Genesee County, have struggled for more than six years to recover from the crisis, relying on bottled water while property values have plummeted.

Activist Arthur Woodson, a Flint native and resident, is elated that Snyder is finally being held responsible for his actions but said the crisis is not over.

"We have people dying here. Genesee County has the highest rate of cancers in state. And inside, Flint also has the highest rate," Woodson said. "There's more than just lead in the water. They dictated a narrative to make us think that it was only lead in the water but there is P5, E-coli, PTHM, all different types of things running through the pipes."

Although unsure if and how he's been affected, Woodson said troubling symptoms have been detected.

"Doctors said I have nodules on my lungs and it's showing up in other people," he said.

LaTricia "Trickey" Adams, founder of BlackMillennials4Flint, said more than a few Flint residents are skeptical that Snyder would be charged.

"It's really heartbreaking that it's been this long and there are still so many questions left unanswered. There are a lot of layers," Adams said. "They're almost done replacing pipes - but

there are still issues... like indoor plumbing, shower and appliances. None of those things were taken into consideration. There's quite a lot of concern about inside systems still having lead." Although Governor Gretchen Whitmer last month authorized \$641 million in settlement funds for victims of the crisis, Woodson said the money will not go far enough or take care of the myriad needs of children whose health has been compromised by the presence of lead in their bodies. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, even marginal lead exposure can cause behavioral and cognitive problems, including an increased tendency to exhibit violent behavior. Children affected by lead poisoning are seven times more likely to end up as a high school dropout and six times more likely to become involved in the juvenile justice system. And the impact of lead exposure is irreversible.

Woodson said there are "serious mental frustrations," as a result of this travesty.

"We have been affected financially, mentally and emotionally," he concluded.

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Top US Diplomat Urges Biden Administration to Focus on Africa in Counterterrorism Efforts

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - US State Department Coordinator for Counterterrorism Nathan Sales recommended his successors in the incoming Joe Biden administration to focus on fighting radical groups in Africa and keeping pressure on Iran.

"First, we need to focus on Africa. As ISIS [a terrorist organization banned in Russia] has lost its territory and power in Iraq and Syria, it works to strengthen its global reaches, including in places like the Sahel and Mozambique. AQ's [Al Qaeda, a terrorist organization banned in Russia] affiliates likewise remain resilient," Sales said during a virtual event hosted by the American Enterprise Institute on Thursday.

He warned that these groups are exploiting undergoverned spaces, conflict zones, security gaps and called for vigilance "to stop them from plotting external operations."

"The de-ISIS coalition needs to play a leadership role here, albeit in the civilian capacity rather than a military one," Sales said.

Another priority should be keeping up a pressure on Iran and its proxies, he added. Sales suggested continued drive to ban or designate globally Hezbollah, a pro-Iranian Lebanese movement, "in its entirety" - without making distinctions between political and military wings.

"We need to make sure that CT [counterterrorism activities] remains an urgent priority. We have entered the era of great power competition in which China and other state rivals will consume the lion's share of policy-makers attention. But counter terrorism and great power competition are not mutually exclusive," he said.

Sales called CT a comparative advantage for the United States, which wants to be "the security partner of choice" for foreign countries.

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US Tightens Sanctions Against HASM Terror Group Active in Egypt - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - The United States designated Harakat Sawa'd Misr (HASM) as a foreign terrorist organization, a classification that boosts penalties on the previously sanctioned Islamic group that is blamed for bombings and assassinations in Egypt, the State Department said in a press release.

"Among other consequences of designations, all of HASM's ... property and interests that are within the United States or that come within the United States or that come within the possession or control of US persons, are blocked, and US persons are generally prohibited from engaging in any transactions with them," the release said on Thursday.

As a designated foreign terrorist organization, it is a federal crime to knowingly provide, or attempt or conspire to provide, material support or resources to HASM.

Previously, HASM was subjected to a less severe terrorist designation, although the release offered no explanation of differences between the two classifications, the release said.

Formed in 2015, HASM claimed responsibility for the assassination of Egyptian National Security Agency officer Ibrahim Azzazy and a September 30, 2017 attack on Myanmar's embassy in Cairo, the release also said.

In August 2019, HASM was responsible for a powerful car-bomb that exploded outside of a hospital in Cairo, killing at least 20 people and injuring dozens, the release added.

Earlier on Thursday, the Treasury Department added two leaders of the group - Yahya al-Sayyid Ibrahim Musa and Alaa Ali Ali Mohammed al-Samahi - the list of as Specially Designated Global Terrorists.

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Biden Unveils \$1.9Trln Rescue Plan That Includes \$400Bln to Combat COVID-19 - Statement

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - President-elect Joe Biden's transition team issued a press release in which it unveiled a \$1.9 trillion plan to revive the US economy and combat the novel coronavirus.

"President-elect Biden's \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan is ambitious, but achievable, and will rescue the American economy and start beating the virus," the release said on Thursday.

"Congress should act expeditiously to help working families, communities, and small businesses persevere through the pandemic."

The Biden plan asks Congress to approve up to \$400 billion to combat the novel coronavirus so it can establish community vaccination sites across the United States and boost testing and tracing, the release said. The plan also proposes providing eligible individuals with \$1,4000 in stimulus payments.

In addition, the plan seeks to provide \$130 billion to help US schools safely reopen within the first 100 days of Biden's presidency, the release said.

The Biden plan also requests Congress to approve \$9 billion to upgrade the US information technology infrastructure and address the recent breach of federal government data systems, the release added.

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L3Harris Tech Wins \$121Mln Hypersonic Space Sensor Tracking Contract - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - L3Harris Technologies has won a more than \$121 million Missile Defense Agency contract to provide the agency's Hypersonic and Ballistic Tracking Space Sensor program with an on-orbit prototype, including launch and early orbit testing, the US Department of Defense said in a press release.

"L3Harris Technologies [of] Fort Wayne, Indiana is being awarded a ...prototype award with a total value of \$121,634,954 through the Missile Defense Agency's authority," the release stated on Thursday.

The Defense Department explained the prototype award was competitively solicited among awardees of the Hypersonic and Ballistic Tracking Space Sensor Phase IIa effort.

"Under this award, the performer will provide the Missile Defense Agency's Hypersonic and Ballistic Tracking Space Sensor program with an on-orbit prototype demonstration, culminating with launch and early orbit testing," the release said.

The Defense Department said work on the contract will be performed in Fort Wayne in the US state of Indiana over the next two and a half years with an estimated completion date of July 14, 2023.

The Missile Defense Agency at Schriever Air Force Base in the US state of Colorado is the contracting activity, the release added.

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US, Morocco Sign Cultural Property Protection Agreement - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - The US government and the Kingdom of Morocco have signed a cultural property agreement. the Department of State announced in a media note.

"Today, US Ambassador to the Kingdom of Morocco David T. Fischer and Morocco's Minister of Culture Othmane El Ferdaous signed a bilateral Memorandum of Understanding that protects Moroccan cultural property," the note said on Thursday.

The agreement was part of US and Moroccan efforts to combat cultural property trafficking and to preserve heritage items by allowing the United States to establish import restrictions on certain categories of Morocco's cultural property, the State Department said.

"The agreement also gives US law enforcement the ability to repatriate trafficked cultural objects back to Morocco while fostering the interchange of Moroccan cultural heritage with US institutions," the note said.

The cultural property agreement with Morocco was negotiated by the State Department under the US law implementing the 1970 "Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property," the note also said.

The cultural property agreement with Morocco was negotiated by the State Department under the US law implementing the 1970 "Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property," the note added.

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Some 7,000 National Guards Already Deployed to Washington for Inauguration - General

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - The US National Guard already deployed about 7,000 members in order to support security during upcoming Joseph Biden and inauguration on January 20 and plans to triple this number closer to the event, the National Guard General Daniel Hokanson said.

"Right now we have approximately around 7,000 National Guard soldiers on the ground in support of federal lead agencies, and we are building to 21,000 for the upcoming inauguration," Hokanson during a security briefing with US Vice President Mike Pence on Thursday. National Guard members are armed and equipped commensurate with the missions they were asked to do, he said.

Hokanson ensured that the National Guard members will provide security, communications, logistics, and coordination with all agencies.

On January 6, a group of President Donald Trump's supporters entered the Capitol to protest lawmakers certifying election slates from several US states the president claims are invalid and robbed him of election victory. The Trump supporters clashed with police and the incident resulted in five deaths, including that of a Capitol police officer and an Air Force veteran who was shot dead by police.

The inauguration takes place on a stage in front of the Capitol's West Front, allowing spectators to gather on an open mall that extends beyond the Washington monument.

Authorities expect Wednesday's crowd to be relatively small compared with past inaugurations due to the coronavirus pandemic.

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US Issues Travel Warning on Central African Republic Due to Violence Risks - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - The US government has renewed its warning advising citizens not to visit the Central African Republic because of concerns over COVID-19, crime, kidnapping and civil unrest there, the Department of State said in a media note.

"The Department of State renewed its Travel Advisory for the Central African Republic on January 14, 2021," the note said on Thursday. "The Department continues to advise travelers to reconsider travel to the Central African Republic."

The warning replaces the previous Travel Advisory issued on November 23, 2020, the State Department said.

"Do not travel to the Central African Republic due to COVID-19, Embassy Bangui's limited capacity to provide support to US citizens, crime, civil unrest, kidnapping, and elections," the note said.

The State Department said the Level 4 warning not to travel to the Central African Republic remained in place. Violent crime, such as armed robbery, aggravated battery, and homicide remained common and armed groups controlled large areas of the country, regularly kidnapping and killing civilians, the note added.

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Canada's Vaccine Distribution Czar Anticipates Scarcity of Doses in First Quarter of 2021

TORONTO, January 14 (Sputnik) – Canada will likely experience a shortage of coronavirus vaccine doses through to the end of the first quarter of 2021, the country's vaccine distribution czar Maj. Gen. Dany Fortin said during a press conference.

"We have a scarcity of vaccines in the first quarter," Fortin said on Thursday.

The latest data shows the Canadian authorities are continuing to lag behind the vaccination regimes of other nations with barely 1 percent of the population having been immunized against the coronavirus to date.

Some jurisdictions, including the provinces of Alberta and Ontario, have expressed concern with dwindling vaccine stocks, and some healthcare providers have begun canceling inoculation appointments.

Fortin did note that authorities are anticipating deliveries of 1 million doses on weekly basis by April.

Canadian officials project that they will receive six million doses of the coronavirus vaccine doses from Pfizer and Moderna between January and the end of March, with the ultimate goal of completing the vaccination campaign by September.

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Massachusetts Institute of Technology Professor Charged on China Ties - US Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - Federal prosecutors have charged a professor and researcher at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) for failing to disclose contracts, appointments and awards from entities in China to the US Department of Energy, the Department of Justice said in a press release.

"Gang Chen, 56, was charged by criminal complaint with wire fraud, failing to file a foreign bank account report (FBAR) and making a false statement in a tax return," the release said on Thursday.

According to charging documents, Chen a naturalized US citizen who was born in China, is a professor and researcher at MIT where he serves as Director of the MIT Pappalardo Micro/Nano Engineering Laboratory and Director of the Solid-State Solar Thermal Energy Conversion Center (S3TEC), the release said.

"Since approximately 2013, Chen's research at MIT has been funded by more than \$19 million in grants awarded by various US federal agencies. Since 2012, Chen has allegedly held various appointments with [China] designed to promote [Beijing's] technological and scientific development," the release added.

Chen's activities includes acting as an "overseas expert" for the Beijing government at the request of the Chinese Consulate Office in New York and serving as a member of at least two Chinese Talent Programs, according to the release.

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US Jails Uzbek Citizen to 12.5 Years For Aiding Islamic State - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - A US District Court Judge has sentenced a citizen of Uzbekistan to twelve and a half years in prison for conspiring to aid the Islamic State terror group (outlawed in Russia), the Department of Justice announced in a press release.

"Earlier today ...in Brooklyn, Azizjon Rakhmatov, a citizen of Uzbekistan and a resident of New Haven, Connecticut, was sentenced to twelve and a half years' imprisonment by US District Judge William Kuntz for conspiring to provide material support to a designated foreign terrorist organization, the Islamic State," the release said on Thursday.

In August 2019, Rakhmatov pleaded guilty to the charge. The US government intends to seek the defendant's removal to Uzbekistan upon completion of his sentence of imprisonment, the release said.

"According to court filings, in 2014, Rakhmatov's co-defendants Abdurasul Juraboev and Akhror Saidakhmetov planned to travel to Syria to fight on behalf of the Islamic State. Rakhmatov and co-defendant Abror Habibov discussed providing their own money to cover Saidakhmetov's travel expenses," the release said.

On the day before Saidakhmetov's scheduled departure, Rakhmatov transferred \$400 into co-defendant Akmal Zakirov's personal bank account to facilitate Saidakhmetov's travel to and expenses in Syria, the release added.

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Three More Individuals Charged in Connection to Capitol Riot - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - Three more individuals have been charged for allegedly participating in the siege of the Capitol building on January 6, the US Justice Department said in a press release on Thursday.

"Kevin Seefried and Hunter Seefried were charged today in federal court in the District of Columbia in connection with the riots at the US Capitol on Wednesday, Jan. 6, 2021," the release said.

Both men each face three counts including unlawfully entering restricted grounds and depredation of government property.

The Justice Department in a separate press release announced that a retired firefighter from the state of Pennsylvania has been charged in connection to the Capitol riot. Robert Sandford, 55, is facing charges for illegal activity on Capitol grounds and for hitting three Capitol police officers with a fire extinguisher.

The authorities have opened more than 170 cases in connection with the incident and have charged 40 individuals as of Thursday afternoon. The individuals facing charges came to the Capitol from across the country, including Virginia, New York, Florida, Idaho, Wisconsin, Ohio, Texas, Tennessee, Hawaii, Iowa, Alabama, Arizona, Pennsylvania, Arkansas, Maryland, Illinois, Colorado, West Virginia and Washington, DC.

On January 6, a group of Trump supporters stormed the Capitol building in a bid to protest the lawmakers for certifying electoral slates from several US states that the president claims robbed him of election victory. The supporters clashed with police before seizing the rotunda and inauguration stage. Five people died in the incident, including an Air Force veteran who was shot dead by police and a Capitol police officer.

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Executive Order Extends Tariff Protections on US-Manufactured Home Washers - Trump

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - The US government has expanded existing tariffs to protect domestic manufacturers of residential washers from foreign imports, President Donald Trump said in an Executive Order.

"I have determined that the action continues to be necessary to prevent or remedy the serious injury to the domestic washers industry and there is evidence that the domestic washers industry is making a positive adjustment to import competition, and I have further determined to extend the safeguard measure," Trump said on Thursday.

The US president said he was extending his tariff-rate quota on imports of washers and washer parts for an additional period of two years.

"This safeguard measure shall apply to imports from all countries, except for products of Canada," his proclamation said.

Trump originally imposed his import restrictions on washers and their parts in January 2018, the proclamation noted.

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More Than 100 Arrested Over US Capitol Violence - FBI Chief

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - US law enforcement agencies have arrested more than 100 suspects in the aftermath of last week's attack on the Capitol by loyalists of President Donald Trump, Federal Bureau of Investigation Director Christopher Wray said during security briefing.

"Our posture is aggressive and it will stay that way through [Joe Biden's] inauguration. In that vein, we and our partners have arrested more than 100 individuals for their criminal activities in last week's siege of the Capitol and continue to pursue countless other related investigations," Wray said during a briefing with Vice President Mike Pence.

He added that from January 6, the day of the Capitol riot, investigators have identified more than 200 suspects.

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FBI Chief Says Concerned About Potential Violence During Biden Inauguration

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - The FBI is concerned about potential violence in the US capital as well as state capitol buildings during the inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden, FBI Director Christopher Wray said during a briefing on inauguration security.

"We are seeing an extensive amount of concerning online chatter about a number of events surrounding the inauguration," Wray said on Thursday. "We're concerned about the potential for violence at multiple protests and rallies planned right here in DC and at state capitol buildings around the country in the days to come that could bring armed individuals in close proximity to government buildings and officials."

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US Announces Closure of Capitol Building, Grounds on Inauguration Day - Police

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - The US Capitol building and grounds will be closed to the public on Inauguration Day, the Capitol police announced in a press release.

"Be advised that the US Capitol complex is closed to the public, and the Capitol grounds will not be accessible to the public on January 20, 2021," the release said on Thursday. "Anyone attempting to unlawfully gain access to the Capitol grounds by climbing a fence or any other unlawful means will be subject to an appropriate use of force and arrest."

On Wednesday, a group of President Donald Trump's supporters entered the Capitol to protest lawmakers certifying election slates from several US states the US president claims are invalid and robbed him of election victory. The Trump supporters clashed with police and the incident resulted in five deaths, including that of a Capitol police officer and an Air Force veteran who was shot dead by police.

As a result, the authorities deployed some 6,500 National Guard troops to aid the police federal law enforcement agencies in guarding the Capitol, the release said.

The inauguration takes place on a stage in front of the Capitol's West Front, allowing spectators to gather on an open mall that extends beyond the Washington monument.

Authorities expect Wednesday's crowd to be relatively small compared with past inaugurations due to the coronavirus pandemic.

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Trudeau, Macron Discuss China-Related Issues - Readout

TORONTO, January 14 (Sputnik) - Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and French President Emmanuel Macron discussed China-related challenges, a readout of the conversation from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) revealed.

"The leaders discussed relations with China, with Prime Minister Trudeau expressing concern about the human rights situation in Xinjiang and recent arrests in Hong Kong," the readout said on Thursday.

Last week, Canada joined other so-called Five Eyes intelligence-sharing allies - United States, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom - in expressing concern about the recent arrest of dissidents in Hong Kong. Additionally, Canada has introduced restrictions on imports from China's Xinjiang province, where Western nations allege the Chinese authorities have perpetrated systematic human rights abuses against the Uyghurs there.

Sino-Canadian relations soured after the Canadian authorities detained Huawei CFO Meng Wanzhou in 2018 at the request of the United States to which China is alleged to have responded by the arrests of two Canadian nationals on charges of espionage in China. The tense relationship has been further exacerbated by Canada's condemnation of the Chinese law on national security in Hong Kong.

Chinese officials have claimed that Ottawa's deference to US foreign policy served as a catalyst for the growing diplomatic rift.

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Justice Dept. Pushed Separation of Migrant Families Despite Knowing US Unprepared - IG

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - The US Justice Department went forward with zero tolerance immigration prosecutions knowing full well they were unprepared to deal with the consequences of splitting 3,000 children from their families, the inspector general's office said in a report.

"Department leadership... failed to effectively prepare for, or manage, the implementation of the zero tolerance policy," the report said Thursday. "[Attorney General Jeff] Sessions and a small number of other DOJ [Department of Justice] officials understood that... prosecution of these family unit adults would result in children being separated from them."

Sessions' office, the report added, advocated for the stricter border policy changes and was the driving force to begin referring family unit adults for prosecution.

In 2018, Sessions announced the US had adopted a "zero tolerance policy" for immigration offenses that required prosecution of all illegal entry referrals at the southwest border including misdemeanors and regardless if the adult was with a family unit.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) -

NEW US RESTRICTONS ON RUSSIA, CHINA, OTHER COUNTRIES

* The United States has introduced new strict controls on exports of military technology to Russia, China, Cuba and Venezuela, the Commerce Department announced on Thursday.

* The United States has placed the China National Overseas Oil Corporation, Beijing's largest offshore oil and gas producer, and Chinese company Skeyrizon on its economic blacklist of designated military end-users, the US Commerce Department said.

TWITTER RESTRICTIONS ON SPUTNIK V ACCOUNT

* Access to the Russian coronavirus vaccine Sputnik V's account on Twitter has been restricted and the reasons for this are being studied, the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) said.

* Twitter said it lifted the restriction on access to account of Russian coronavirus vaccine Sputnik V and the restriction alert no longer appears on the vaccine's Twitter page.

* Twitter explained restrictions on access to Russian vaccine Sputnik V's account by attempt of unauthorized access to it from the United States.

US TRANSFER OF POWER

- * US Deputy Defense Secretary David Norquist will temporarily serve as Secretary of Defense under the incoming administration of President-elect Joe Biden, media reported on Thursday.
- * NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said he was hoping for a peaceful transfer of power in the United States and looking forward to working with Biden.

COVID-19 DEVELOPMENTS

- * Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was vaccinated against the coronavirus in Ankara on Thursday, local broadcaster reported.
- * Russia plans to submit its Sputnik V vaccine against the coronavirus for approval in the European Union next month, CEO of the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) Kirill Dmitriev said.
- * Experts continue monitoring the health condition of volunteers engaged in post-registration trials of Russia's coronavirus vaccine Sputnik V, and no new adverse reactions have been registered so far, the head of the Gamaleya research institute that developed the vaccine told Sputnik.

REACTIONS TO US DESIGNATING YEMEN'S HOUTHIS

- * Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia on Thursday called on the United States to review its decision to designate the rebel Houthi movement as terrorist organization before it comes into effect on January 19.
- * The United States' decision to designate the rebel Houthi movement as a terrorist organization would contribute to Yemen sliding in famine and should be revoked as soon as possible, UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths said.
- * World Food Program Executive Director David Beasley told a UN Security Council meeting that the United States needs to reverse its decision label the rebel Houthi movement as terrorist.

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Trudeau Downplays Idea of Introducing COVID-19 Vaccine Passports in Canada

TORONTO, January 14 (Sputnik) - Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau downplayed the idea of introducing COVID-19 vaccine passports during a speech at the Reuters Next virtual conference on Thursday.

"I'm worried about creating knock-on, undesirable effects in our community. I think the indications that the vast majority of Canadians are looking to get vaccinated will get us to a good place without having to take more extreme measures that could have real divisive impacts on community and country," Trudeau said.

Some Canadian officials, including Ontario Health Minister Christine Elliot, have mused about introducing vaccine passports, however, experts have suggested that talk of such measures is premature. Recent polls have revealed that support for mandatory vaccination is low.

Trudeau also addressed calls to publicly receive a coronavirus vaccine in order to shore up support for immunization efforts. He said he might take vaccine publicly earlier than anticipated

if vaccine hesitancy among residents grows. Trudeau has vowed to receive the vaccine in accordance with the vaccination schedule produced by public health officials.

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Facebook Sues 2 Hackers in Europe for Theft of Personal Data From User Browsers

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - Facebook sued two hackers in Europe who created a browser extension that secretly collected user personal data, the social media giant said on Thursday.

"We are seeking a permanent injunction against defendants and demanding that they delete all Facebook data in their possession," Facebook said in a statement.

The hackers developed browser extensions and made them available on the Chrome store. They then misled users into installing the extensions with a privacy policy that claimed they did not collect any personal information, the release said.

At least four of the extensions featured hidden code that functioned like spyware, not only collecting personal data from Facebook but also from the browsers on infected computers, the release added.

The lawsuit filed in Portugal accuses the two defendants - not identified other than with the code names Oink and Stuff - of violating terms of that nation's Database Protection Law, according to the release.

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Trudeau Says Looks Forward to 'Number of Years of Serving Canadians' Amid Election Talk

TORONTO, January 14 (Sputnik) - Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Thursday he is looking forward to a number of years of public service amid speculation that an election may be held later in 2021.

"I've still got a lot to do in terms of serving this country, so I'm looking forward to a number of more years of serving Canadians," Trudeau said during the Reuters Next virtual conference. When asked if he sees Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland as his heir apparent, Trudeau declined to speculate on what he said was eventuality "years down the road."

The prime minister's statement follows a cabinet shuffle that has reignited rumors of an election sometime later this year.

The cabinet shuffle was spurred by the revelation that former Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry Navdeep Bains would be retiring from politics after the next election; former Foreign Minister Francois-Philippe Champagne was moved to Bains' file, while ex-Transport Minister Marc Garneau assumed control over the foreign affairs portfolio.

Canada was pushed to the brink of an election twice last fall, after the opposition Conservative and Bloc Quebecois parties objected to Trudeau's economic recovery plan and after a failed Tory push to establish an anti-corruption committee to look into Trudeau's controversial relationship with the WE Charity.

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Nearly 3 in 4 Americans Fear US Failing to Win 'War Against COVID-19' -Poll

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - Nearly three quarters of US adults worry that the battle against the coronavirus is either stalemated or headed toward defeat, a Rasmussen Reports poll said on Thursday.

"Only 28% of American Adults say America is winning the war against COVID-19. Fifty-three percent (53%) say the US is not winning against the coronavirus and 19% are not sure," a press release summarizing the poll said.

As with nearly every poll, partisanship colors the results, with 46 percent of Republicans saying the US is winning while 65 percent of Democrats worry the nation is not, the release added.

Health experts are optimistic that two approved COVID-19 vaccines have the potential to halt the pandemic, however, they now admit progress vaccinating the nation's adult population has been disappointingly slow.

The Centers for Disease Control reported on Thursday that 11 million Americans had received the first of two vaccine doses needed to confer an immunity in contrast to predictions by US health officials that up to 50 million people could be inoculated by the end of January.

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US Charges 14 Top MS-13 Gang Leaders With Terrorism - Justice Department

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - The US government charged 14 leaders of the MS-13 criminal organization as terrorists, the Department of Justice announced in a press release on Thursday.

"Earlier today, an indictment was unsealed in Central Islip, New York charging 14 of the world's highest-ranking MS-13 leaders who are known today as the Ranfla Nacional, which operated as the Organization's Board of Directors, and directed MS-13's violence and criminal activity around the world for almost two decades," the release stated.

The indictment charges the defendants with conspiracy to provide and conceal material support to terrorists, conspiracy to commit acts of terrorism transcending national boundaries, and conspiracy to finance terrorism and narco-terrorism over the past two decades from El Salvador, the United States, Mexico and elsewhere, the release said.

Defendant Borrromeo Enrique Henriquez, also known as "Diablito de Hollywood," is widely recognized as the most powerful member of the Ranfla Nacional. He and 10 other defendants are in custody in El Salvador. The United States will explore options for their extradition to the United States with the Government of El Salvador, the release noted.

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Two Men in US State of Delaware Charged in Connection to Capitol Riot - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - Two men in the state of Delaware have been charged for allegedly participating in the siege at the Capitol building on January 6, the Justice Department said in a press release on Thursday.

"Kevin Seefried and Hunter Seefried were charged today in federal court in the District of Columbia in connection with the riots at the US Capitol on Wednesday, Jan. 6, 2021," the release said.

Both men each face three counts including unlawfully entering restricted grounds and depredation of government property.

Dozens of other individuals from across the country have been charged in connection to the riot, including from Virginia, New York, Florida, Idaho, Wisconsin, Ohio, Texas, Tennessee, Hawaii, Iowa, Alabama, Arizona, Pennsylvania, Arkansas, Maryland, Illinois, Colorado, West Virginia, and Washington, DC.

On January 6, protesters stormed Capitol Hill in a bid to prevent Congress from certifying the presidential election victory after President Donald Trump urged them to not allow the election to be stolen. Five died and more than 170 cases have been open by police in connection with the riots. On Wednesday, the US House impeached Trump for inciting the riots.

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NASA's Orion Spacecraft Ready for Artemis I Mission to Moon - Lockheed Martin

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - The NASA Orion spacecraft is now ready for its first unmanned mission to the Moon in the Artemis program, Lockheed Martin announced in a news release on Thursday.

"NASA's Orion spacecraft is ready for its mission to the Moon," the release stated. "Lockheed Martin has completed assembly and testing of the Orion Artemis I spacecraft and has transferred possession to NASA's Exploration Ground Systems (EGS) team today."

The EGS team will perform its final preparations on the spacecraft at the Kennedy Space Center in the US state of Florida for its mission to the Moon later this year, Lockheed Martin said.

"The Artemis I mission will be the first launch of the Orion spacecraft aboard NASA's Space Launch System rocket. Over the course of three weeks, the uncrewed Orion capsule will fly out and orbit the Moon and return to Earth. This test mission will validate the spacecraft, rocket and ground systems for future crewed missions," the release said.

Orion is NASA's new human-rated exploration-class spaceship that will take astronauts into deep space including the Moon and Mars. Lockheed Martin built the crew module, crew module adapter and launch abort system and the European Space Agency provides the European Service Module for the spacecraft, the release added.

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OHCHR Concerned by Venezuela's Continuous Attacks on Civil Society, Media - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, January 14 (Sputnik) - The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) expressed concern about Venezuela attacking humanitarian, human rights and media organizations, and urged the country's authorities to end such violations against civil society, OHCHR spokesperson Marta Hurtado said in a statement on Thursday.

"We are deeply concerned by continuous and increasing attacks in Venezuela against civil society organizations, human rights defenders and journalists," Hurtado said.

In the latest incident on January 12, six members of Azul Positivo - a non-governmental organization (NGO) supporting vulnerable communities through workshops on reproductive health - were detained following a raid by military counter-intelligence and law enforcement officers in Zulia state, Hurtado said.

According to OHCHR, the incident was the second time in the last two months that the office of a humanitarian NGO in Venezuela has been searched and staff questioned due to receiving funding from abroad.

Moreover, on January 8, public servants reportedly seized equipment and intimidated staff of at least three media outlets.

"We urge the authorities to stop targeting people for performing legitimate work, be it in the humanitarian or human rights sector or in the media," Hurtado said.

She also expressed concern over reports that journalists censor themselves out of fear amid statements issued by public officials delegitimizing the media.

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US Adds Nine More Chinese Companies to Military Blacklist - Defense Department
WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - The US government blacklisted another nine major corporations with ties to China's military, the Department of Defense announced on Thursday. "Today, the Department of Defense released the names of additional 'Communist Chinese military companies' operating directly or indirectly in the United States in accordance with the

statutory requirement of Section 1237 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1999, as amended," the announcement said.

The companies were: Luokong Technology Corporation (LKCO), Xiaomi Corporation, Beijing Zhongguancun Development Investment Center, Grand China Air Company (GCAC), Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China (COMAC), Global Tone Communication Technology (GTCOM), the Defense Department said.

The other companies on the list were Advanced Micro-Fabrication Equipment (AMEC), China National Aviation Holding Company (CNAH) and the GOWIN Semiconductor Corporation, the announcement added.

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Trudeau Says Canada, Allies Expect Re-Engaged US on Global Stage Under Biden Leadership

TORONTO, January 14 (Sputnik) - Canada and the traditional allies expect a globally re-engaged United States under the leadership of incoming US President Joe Biden, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said during a virtual conference on Thursday.

"One of the things that a lot of the traditional allies and friends of the United States are looking forward to is a re-engagement on some of the big themes, whether it's freer trade, climate change, protecting democracy or coordinating against some of the rise of authoritarianism we're seeing around the world," Trudeau said.

Trudeau noted that he has engaged with the President-elect on various issues, including the detention of two Canadian nationals - former diplomat Michael Kovrig and businessman Michael Spavor - on charges of espionage in China.

Trudeau and sitting US President Donald Trump have endured a complicated relationship during the latter's four years in office, with the two often expressing a divergent view on hot-button issues and the relationship reportedly souring after Trudeau was caught on a hot mic mocking Trump during a NATO summit.

Canada's Prime Minister has previously expressed his disappointment with the US President's inward turn and focus on domestic issues, often calling for more US engagement on the world stage.

Biden will be sworn in as the United States' 46th president on January 20.

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Federal Reserve Chairman Says 'No Time Soon' to US Interest Rates Increase

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - The Federal Reserve is in no rush to raise US interest rates that have been lowered at near-zero for almost a year since the start of the novel coronavirus outbreak, Chairman Jay Powell said on Thursday.

"What we're really saying is we're no longer going to raise interest rates just because for example, if unemployment were to be well below our current estimates of the natural rate of unemployment," Powell said. "That wouldn't be a reason to raise interest rates, unless we see troubling inflation or other imbalances that could threaten achievement or our mandate, and there's a significant change."

The Federal Reserve has held the interest rates in a range of between zero and 0.25 percentage points to provide relief to the economy since the coronavirus outbreak was declared a pandemic last March.

Powell said there was "plenty of slack" in the labor market and it was unlikely wage pressures would reach levels that could create or support higher inflation.

"Also, the other factor to look at is the world shortage of demand. In lots of large advanced economies, in countries around the world which began this crisis, there are deeply negative interest rates and little policy space for interest rate hikes. All that is going to hang around for a while, and you know, the US economy is strongly integrated with the rest of the world. That's going to matter," Powell said.

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Pentagon to Crack Down on Service Member Activity in Domestic Extremist Groups - Official

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - The US Defense Department is currently conducting a review of its policies concerning service members in domestic extremist groups so that it can more effectively address the issue, a senior Pentagon official said during a conference call on Thursday.

Several former military service members took part in the deadly January 6 siege of the US Capitol building that sought to stop Congress from verifying the Electoral College vote, claiming that the election was stolen from President Donald Trump.

"At the direction of acting Secretary [Christopher] Miller, the department is currently conducting a review of all these policies, laws and regulations concerning active participation by service members... this review will result in a report of recommendations concerning any initiatives we could put forward to more effectively prohibit extremist or hate group activity," the defense official said.

The defense official did not have information available about the number of recruits disqualified from joining the military due to ties to domestic extremism.

Moreover, the defense official did not have information available about the number of current or former service members that have been detected in domestic extremist groups.

On Wednesday, the House of Representatives impeached Trump on a charge of inciting the insurrection at the Capitol. The Senate has not announced when it plans to begin the impeachment trial.

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US Government Schedules Convicted Murderer Cory Johnson's Execution for Thursday Night

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - The US government has scheduled the execution of convicted murderer Cory Johnson to take place on Thursday night, a Bureau of Prisons spokesperson told Sputnik.

"Tentatively scheduled for 6:00 p.m.," the spokesperson said on Thursday.

In June 1993, a US court sentenced Johnson to death for murdering seven people.

The Bureau of Prisons said that Johnson and several co-conspirators were partners in a large drug-trafficking conspiracy based in Richmond, Virginia, between 1989 and July 1992.

"In early 1992, Johnson went on a killing spree, shooting and killing each of the seven victims for perceived slights or rivalry in the drug trade," the Bureau of Prisons said.

In December, Johnson was diagnosed with COVID-19 and sought a stay of his execution, court documents revealed.

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Guterres Supports Call by UN Officials for US to Reverse Houthi Designation - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, January 14 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres supports the call made earlier by three senior UN officials appealing to the United States to reverse the decision to designate Yemen's Houthi movement as a terrorist organization, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Thursday.

Earlier in the day, UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock and World Food Program Executive Director David Beasley urged the United States to revoke its plans to designate the Houthis, fearing that the decision would have catastrophic humanitarian consequences for Yemen's population.

"Of course," Dujarric said when asked whether Guterres supports the UN officials urging for the reversal of Washington's decision. "They speak on his behalf on Yemen, on issues of humanitarian, on political issues."

Late on Sunday, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced that the State Department intended to notify Congress of its plans to designate the Houthi movement as a terrorist organization and brand three of its leaders - Abdul Malik al-Houthi, Abd al-Khaliq Badr al-Din al-Houthi and Abdullah Yahya al Hakim - as Specially Designated Global Terrorists.

Lowcock said the move by the United States will likely result in a 400 percent increase in the cost of food throughout Yemen because the availability of food in the country mostly depends on imports that will be restricted under the US designation.

WFP's Beasley warned that if the US designation comes into force on January 19, some 80 percent of Yemen's population, or 24 million people, will immediately start moving into the

agency's Level Three crisis classification, encompassing the world's most severe humanitarian emergencies.

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Two Former Michigan Health Officials Charged With Manslaughter in Flint Water Crisis

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - Former Michigan Health Director Nicolas Lyon and former Michigan Chief Medical Executive Eden Wells have been charged with nine counts of manslaughter in Flint water crisis, Solicitor General Fadwa Hammoud announced on Thursday. "Nicolas Lyon, former Director of MDHHS (Michigan Department of Health and Human Services) is charged with nine counts of involuntary manslaughter for each a 15 year felony and one count of willful neglect of duty, a one year misdemeanor, for his failures and grossly negligent performance of his legal duties while Director of MDHHS to protect the health of citizens of Michigan in accordance with the Public Health Code," Hammoud said. Former Chief Medical Executive Eden Wells has also been charged with nine counts of involuntary manslaughter, each a 15 year felony and one count of willful neglect of duty, a one year misdemeanor, Hammond said.

In addition, Wells is charged with two separate counts of misconduct in office, each a five year felony for two separate instances of preventing or attempting to prevent the distribution of public health information about Legionnaires' disease in Genesee County, she added.

Hammoud went on to say that Nancy Peeler, former manager of the early childhood house section at MDHHS, is charged with two counts of misconduct in office, each a five year felony for concealing and later misrepresenting related to elevated blood lead levels of children in the city of Flint, as well as one count of willful neglect of duty, a one year misdemeanor for her failure to act upon information of those elevated blood lead levels.

Charges have also been announced against former emergency managers Gerald Ambrose, Darnell Earley, former Flint Department of Public Works Director Howard Croft and former Governor Rick Snyder.

Moreover, charges have been unveiled against Jarrod Agen, Snyder's former chief of staff, and Richard Baird who served as transformation manager in Snyder's executive office.

Hammoud pointed out that all defendants turned themselves in and have been processed.

The Flint water crisis began in 2014 when the city's drinking water source got contaminated with lead. The water supply source change was believed to have possibly caused an outbreak of Legionnaires' disease that killed 12 people.

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Toyota to Pay \$180Mln for Violating Clean Air Act - US Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) -The Toyota Motor Company has agreed to pay the maximum \$180 million penalty to settle its decade-long dispute with the US government over noncompliance with Clean Air Act reporting requirements, the Justice Department said on Thursday.

"The US Department of Justice and US Environment and Protection Agency (EPA) announced today that the United States has filed and simultaneously settled a civil lawsuit against Toyota Motor Corporation," the department said in a statement. "The \$180 million penalty is the largest civil penalty for violation of EPA's emission-reporting requirements."

The lawsuit also included a settlement with Toyota Motor North America, Toyota Motor Sales USA and Toyota Motor Engineering & Manufacturing North America for systematic, longstanding violations of Clean Air Act reporting requirements that require manufacturers to report potential defects and recalls necessary vehicle components, it explained.

"For a decade, Toyota systematically violated regulations that provide EPA with a critical compliance tool to ensure that vehicles on the road comply with federal emissions standards," Acting US Attorney for the Southern District of New York Audrey Strauss said in the release. The injunctive provisions require Toyota to follow compliance and reporting practices designed to ensure timely investigation of emission-related defects and timely reporting to the EPA, and it includes training, communication, and oversight requirements, the release explained.

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US Issues Rule to Secure Communications Supply Chain, Calls Russia, China 'Adversaries'

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - The US government has announced a new interim rule to ensure the security of the supply chain for Information and Communications Technology and Services (ICTS) by naming Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, Cuba and President Nicolas Maduro of Venezuela as adversaries, the Commerce Department announced in a release on Thursday.

"Today US Department of Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross issued an interim final rule to address the national security, economic security, and public health and safety concerns related to ICTS Transactions," the release said. "The rule ... identifies six foreign governments or foreign non-government persons as foreign adversaries: the People's Republic of China, the Russian Federation, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Republic of Cuba and Venezuelan politician Nicolas Maduro."

The new rule allows the Commerce Department to promulgate regulations to create the processes and procedures that the Secretary of Commerce will use to identify, assess, and address certain transactions, the release explained.

"Today's rule will be effective 60 days from publication, and Commerce is committed to issuing a subsequent final rule in which the Department will consider and respond to additional comments received," the release said.

In addition, the Commerce Department will implement procedures for a licensing process 120 days from publication, it added.

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Video of Gory White House Displayed on Trump Hotel in Washington - Artist

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - Russian-born artist Andrei Molodkin told Sputnik on Thursday that his video of the White House being gradually filled with Americans' blood was projected onto a wall of the Trump Hotel in Washington, DC.

The performance held on Wednesday amid heavy security used an acrylic model of the White House and some 0.9 gallons of real blood donated by 26 people. The performance took place a week after a riot at the US Capitol by a group of Trump supporters and coincided with the impeachment of the president.

"The White House always sheds rivers of blood, but for some reason it is called 'white,' which implies being clean," Molodkin said, adding that the work conveys his attitude toward Trump and US politics in general.

Another gory installation - the words "Blood" and "Now" - was projected early on Thursday on the Abraham Lincoln Memorial.

Molodkin said he is not afraid of possible accusations of desecrating historical landmarks.

"It looks great as art... On the contrary, it brings it back to life. Lincoln cannot exist without blood, he needs a little," Molodkin said.

The Russian-born artist lives in France and is known for politically-charged works and for using uncommon materials such as blood and oil.

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New York City Police Face Lawsuit for Injuries in Recent Protests - State Attorney General

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - New York state sued the New York City Police Department (NYPD) and Mayor Bill de Blasio on Thursday, claiming officers used excessive force and unjustified arrests to quell recent protests against racial injustice, state Attorney General Letitia James announced in a press release on Thursday.

"The lawsuit specifically charges the NYPD, the City of New York, Mayor Bill de Blasio, NYPD Commissioner Dermot Shea, and NYPD Chief of Department Terence Monahan with failing to address this longstanding pattern of abuse by not properly training, supervising, and disciplining officers to prevent misconduct, despite knowledge and public admission that it violated the rights of New Yorkers," the release said.

The lawsuit cites dozens of examples of police brutality and other misconduct dating back to May 2020 that injured peaceful protesters, the release said.

Police tactics included "indiscriminate, unjustified, and repeated use of batons, pepper spray, bicycles, and a crowd-control tactic known as 'kettling.' Ketting describes a tactic of corralling protesters without allowing them to disperse, and thereafter making mass arrests without probable cause, the release added.

An investigation by James' office found that police struck protesters with blunt instruments at least 50 times, unlawfully deployed pepper spray in at least 30 incidents and used unreasonable force at least 75 times. The incidents cited followed a June 1 emergency declaration by de Blasio, according to the release.

The lawsuit seeks injunctive relief including installation of an independent observer to monitor police behavior.

Nationwide protests gripped US cities through the summer of 2020 in response to multiple incidents, in which unarmed African-American suspects died while in police custody.

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UN Rights Experts Urge Israel to Ensure Equal Access to COVID-19 Vaccines for Palestinians UNITED NATIONS, January 14 (Sputnik) - UN human rights experts issued a statement on Thursday calling on Israel to ensure that the Palestinian people under occupation receive equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines.

"Israel's roll-out of its vaccination program against the COVID-19 pandemic for its citizens has been impressive," the expert said. "However, Israel has not ensured that Palestinians under occupation in the West Bank and Gaza will have any near-future access to the available vaccines."

The experts noted that while Israel's vaccination program has delivered doses to a higher percentage of its citizens than any other country, available data indicates that vaccines may not be delivered en masse to the West Bank and Gaza for many weeks.

As the result, more than 4.5 million Palestinians will remain exposed to COVID-19, the experts added.

Israel, as the occupying power, is required under the Fourth Geneva Convention to maintain health services in the occupied territory, the experts pointed out. Moreover, if the protected population is inadequately supplied, the occupying power is required to facilitate relief schemes by all means available.

The UN experts also called on the Palestinian Authority and the Hamas in Gaza to cooperate on the implementation of the vaccination program for the Palestinians.

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Economist Illarionov No longer Works at US Think Tank After Post About Capitol Riots

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - Former adviser to the Russian president on economics Andrei Illarionov, who questioned the results of the US elections in his personal blog and called the riots in Washington a provocation, no longer works at the Cato Institute, according to the organization's website.

Illarionov, who was an adviser to the Russian president in the early 2000s, in a post on his LiveJournal blog claimed the January 6 riots on Capitol Hill were the result of a special operation "trap."

Illarionov's name has disappeared from the think tank's list of experts while his profile page on the website says, "Andrei Illarionov was a senior fellow at the Cato Institute's Center for Global Liberty and Prosperity from 2006 to 2021."

Sputnik does not yet have a comment from the institute.

Earlier it was reported that the Cato Institute launched an investigation after Illarionov's published the comments on the riots on his personal blog.

Cato Institute spokeswoman Corie Whalen said earlier that Illarionov's comments were being discussed by the senior management and directly with him. The institute and its head called the events at the Capitol "a direct attack on the Constitution of the United States."

On January 6, pro-Trump protesters stormed Capitol Hill in a bid to prevent Congress from certifying the presidential election victory after Trump urged them to not allow the election to be stolen. Five died and more than 170 cases have been open by police in connection with the riots.

The US House of Representatives impeached Trump on Wednesday for inciting the riot.

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Biden Taps Deputy Defense Secretary Norquist to Temporarily Lead Pentagon - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - US Deputy Defense Secretary David Norquist will temporarily serve as Secretary of Defense under the incoming administration of President-elect Joe Biden, Politico reported on Thursday.

Norquist will serve as Acting Secretary of Defense starting January 20 as retired US Army Gen. Lloyd Austin, Biden's nominee for the position, awaits confirmation in Congress, the report said.

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UN Special Envoy for Yemen Says US Designation of Houthis Should be Revoked Immediately

UNITED NATIONS, January 14 (Sputnik) - The United States' decision to designate the rebel Houthi movement as a terrorist organization would contribute to Yemen sliding into famine and should be revoked as soon as possible, UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths said on Thursday.

"I strongly associate myself with his view that the decision would contribute to famine in Yemen and thus should be revoked based on humanitarian grounds at the earliest opportunity," Griffiths told a UN Security Council meeting.

Late on Sunday, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced that the state department intended to notify Congress of its plans to designate the Houthi movement as a terrorist organization and brand three of its leaders - Abdul Malik al-Houthi, Abd al-Khaliq Badr al-Din al-Houthi and Abdullah Yahya al Hakim - as Specially Designated Global Terrorists. The UN, in turn, raised concerns over the decision since it may have a detrimental impact on efforts to resume the political process in Yemen.

World Food Program Executive Director David Beasley said that Washington needs to reverse its decision as it might bring catastrophic humanitarian impact and become a "death sentence" for hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of innocent people in Yemen.

"This designation, it needs to be reassessed, it needs to be re-evaluated and, quite frankly, it needs to be reversed," Beasley said.

US Deputy Representative to the United Nations Richard Mills at the same Security Council meeting said that Washington stands ready to put in place measures that would help mitigate the impact of the designation on certain humanitarian activities and commercial imports in Yemen.

"We will simultaneously with the implementation of the designations on January 19 have the Department of Treasury be prepared to provide licenses," Mills said.

However, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock said that licenses and exemptions for humanitarian agencies will not solve the problem because 90 percent of food in Yemen is imported and arrives through commercial channels, not through humanitarian agencies.

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US Imposing Visa Restrictions on Individuals Over Militarization of S. China Sea - Pompeo

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - The United States is imposing visa restrictions on Chinese individuals, including Chinese Communist Party (CCP) officials, over the militarization of the South China Sea outposts, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement on Thursday.

"The Department of State is imposing visa restrictions on People's Republic of China (PRC) individuals, including executives of state-owned enterprises and officials of the Chinese Communist Party and People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy, responsible for, or complicit in, either the large-scale reclamation, construction, or militarization of disputed outposts in the South China Sea," Pompeo said.

Pompeo did not provide a list of which Chinese individuals have been designated, but noted that the immediate family members of Chinese individuals may be subject to visa restrictions as well. Beijing claims the South China Sea is its sovereign territory and has built military bases on artificially created islands. The United States views the South China Sea as an international waterway and sends warships to routinely patrol the waterways in so-called freedom of navigation exercises.

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US, Georgia Sign Memorandum to Strengthen Cooperation on 5G Security - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - The United States and Georgia signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to strengthen cooperation on ensuring security of the fifth generation communication networks, the US State Department said in a statement on Thursday.

"Taking into account that secure fifth generation wireless communications networks (5G) will be vital to both future prosperity and national security, the United States and Georgia declare their desire to strengthen cooperation on 5G," the statement said.

Both countries emphasized the importance of participation of reliable and trustworthy network hardware and software suppliers in 5G markets, the statement said.

They also underscored that 5G suppliers should provide products and services that enable innovation and promote efficiency, the statement also said.

"To promote a vibrant and robust 5G ecosystem, a rigorous evaluation of suppliers should take into account the rule of law, the security environment; ethical supplier practices; and a supplier's compliance with secure standards and industry best practices," the statement added.

Washington and Tbilisi will evaluate whether network hardware and software suppliers are subject to control by a foreign government as well as the transparency of their financing, according to the statement.

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US Prepares Battle Command System Hardware for Poland Missile Defense - Northrop Grumman

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - Hardware featuring US technology needed for an upgraded missile defense system in Poland is being installed in six shelters that will serve as control centers, Northrop Grumman said in a Thursday press release.

"Receiving these shelters and kicking off production marks a critical milestone on the Wisla program and gets us one step closer to fielding this capability in Poland," Northrop Grumman Vice President for Combat Systems Kenn Todorov said in the release.

The nondescript shelters, about the size of a backyard garden shed, will serve as command posts for Poland's future Integrated Air and Missile Defense Battle Command System (IBCS), the release said.

IBCS is the centerpiece of the US Army's modernization strategy for air and missile defense. The system features multiple sensors and effectors to provide 360 degree protection in an expanded battle space, the added.

The United States agreed to sell Poland ICBS hardware and technology in a 2018 foreign military sales contract valued at \$713 billion, according to a Northrop Grumman.

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US Congressman Espaillat Says Contracted COVID-19, 4th Lawmaker Since Capitol Riot

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - US Congressman Adriano Espaillat said on Thursday that he has contracted the novel coronavirus, making him the fourth lawmaker to be infected after the riot at the Capitol last week that forced numerous people to huddle together.

"I am following guidance from my physician and quarantining at home after having tested positive for COVID-19," Espaillat said via Twitter.

Espaillat explained the infection occurred despite him receiving the two doses of the novel coronavirus vaccine.

"I received the second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine last week and understand the effects take time. I have continued to be tested regularly, wear my mask and follow the recommended guidelines."

Three other lawmakers reported earlier they tested positive for the novel coronavirus since the January 6 riot at the US Capitol by a group of supporters of incumbent President Donald Trump. Many elected representatives, some without masks, entered into cloistered secure rooms during the riot.

Adriano Espaillat is a member of the Democratic party and represents New York's 13th congressional district.

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Russia Urges US to Review Decision to Designate Yemen's Houthis - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, January 14 (Sputnik) - Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia called on the United States on Thursday to review its decision to label the rebel Houthi movement as terrorists before it comes into effect on January 19.

"The US decision to designate the Houthi movement as a terrorist organization risks not only seriously exacerbating the humanitarian situation in the country but also undermining UN efforts to launch negotiations between the warring sides. Given the fact that this decision has not yet entered into force, we would urge the United States to review it," Nebenzia said during a UN Security Council meeting.

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WFP Director Beasley Says US Plan to Designate Yemen's Houthis Needs to Be Reversed

UNITED NATIONS, January 14 (Sputnik) - World Food Program Executive Director David Beasley said in a United Nations Security Council meeting on Thursday that the United States needs to reverse its decision label the rebel Houthi movement as terrorists.

"This designation, it needs to be reassessed, it needs to be re-evaluated and, quite frankly, it needs to be reversed," Beasley said.

Beasley added that the designation would have a catastrophic humanitarian impact on Yemen and become a "death sentence" to hundreds of thousands of innocent people in the country.

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UN Special Envoy for Yemen Says US Designation of Houthis Should be Revoked Immediately

UNITED NATIONS, January 14 (Sputnik) - The United States' decision to designate the rebel Houthi movement as a terrorist organization would contribute to Yemen sliding in famine and should be revoked as soon as possible, UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths said on Thursday.

"I strongly associate myself with his view that the decision would contribute to famine in Yemen and thus should be revoked based on humanitarian grounds at the earliest opportunity," Griffiths told a UN Security Council meeting.

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US Imposes Controls on Military Exports to Russia, China, Cuba, Venezuela - Commerce Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - The United States has introduced new strict controls on exports of military technology to Russia, China, Cuba and Venezuela, the US Commerce Department announced in a release on Thursday.

"Today, the Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) in the Department of Commerce (Commerce) imposed new controls on any US technologies and specific activities of US persons who may be supporting foreign military-intelligence end uses and end users in China, Cuba, Russia, and Venezuela, as well as in terrorist-supporting countries," the release said. "BIS is also enhancing controls to prevent US persons from supporting unauthorized weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs, including weapons delivery systems and production facilities."

The Commerce Department explained the BIS is also expanding the license requirement for exports, re-exports and in-country transfers to military-intelligence end uses and end users in China, Russia and Venezuela beyond enumerated items subject to existing military end-use/end-user controls to apply to all items subject to the Export Administration Regulations (EAR).

"These controls will also apply to terrorist-supporting and embargoed countries," the release said.

The Commerce Department also said that BIS is revising end-use controls related to chemical and biological weapons, rocket systems, and unmanned aerial vehicles, or drones.

"BIS also is establishing a framework for informing exporters, re-exporters and transferors of items subject to the EAR that a license is required for specific transactions intended to

circumvent Entity List-based license requirements, or for specific foreign parties assisting listed entities in circumventing such license requirements," it said.

The Department noted that the actions will go into effect on March 16, and will affect Cuba's Directorate of Military Intelligence and its Directorate of Military Counterintelligence, China's Intelligence Bureau of the Joint Staff Department, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Intelligence Organization and its Artesh Directorate for Intelligence, North Korea's Reconnaissance General Bureau, Russia's Main Intelligence Directorate, Syria's Military Intelligence Service as well as Venezuela's General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence.

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Trump Admin. Antitrust Chief Resigns – Reports

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) – The Justice Department's top antitrust official, Makan Delrahim, submitted his resignation effective January 19, the New York Times reported on Thursday.

"DealBook obtained a copy of the letter, in which he listed the government's antitrust investigations into Big Tech and criminal enforcement actions against no-poaching agreements among his accomplishments," the Times report said.

DealBook is a financial news service offered by the newspaper.

The report offered no reason for Delrahim's resignation, nor did it mention last week's riot on Capitol Hill previously cited in resignations by several administration officials.

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US Adds China National Overseas Oil Corp, Skyrizon to Economic Blacklist - Commerce Dept

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - The United States has placed the China National Overseas Oil Corporation, Beijing's largest offshore oil and gas producer, and Chinese company Skyrizon on its economic blacklist of designated military end-users, the US Commerce Department said in a statement on Thursday.

"Today, the Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) in the Department of Commerce added Chinese National Overseas Oil Corporation to the Entity List and Chinese company Skyrizon to the Military End-User List," the statement said. "Both companies threaten US national security, CNOOC by helping China intimidate neighbors in the South China Sea, and Skyrizon for its capability to develop, produce, or maintain military items, such as military aircraft engines."

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UPDATE - US Weekly Jobless Claims Hit 5-Month High As COVID Struggles Intensify - Labor Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - Some 965,000 Americans filed for jobless benefits last week, up 23 percent from the previous week and the highest in nearly five months, as the US job market's struggle under the coronavirus pandemic intensified into the start of 2021, Labor Department data showed on Thursday.

"In the week ending January 9, the advance figure for seasonally adjusted initial claims was 965,000," the department said in a news release. It said claims rose in the previous week to January 2 to 784,000 from a previously published 787,000. That brought the latest week's claims up by 181,000, or 23 percent. Economists polled by US media forecast 789,000 claims for the week ended January 9.

The 965,000 number was also the highest since the 1,006,000 claims filed during the week ended August 22. That put the latest figure at a near five-month high.

Continuing weekly claims, reported with a one-week lag but sometimes considered a better gauge of the labor market, rose to 5.27 million for the week ended January 9 from a previous 5.07 million. The unemployment rate, meanwhile, was at 3.7 percent, up 0.2 percentage point from the previous week.

Analysts have been warning that a stagnation in weekly claims growth of late could be due to a year-end flux in data gathering, and that the COVID-19 was possibly doing more damage than thought to the job market.

"The data is a worrisome trend," Greg Michalowski, analyst at FX Live.com, said on Thursday.

"It also advances the storyline for the Federal Reserve to be on hold for a while still, and for Congress to pass more stimulus to counteract the impact from the Covid-19 spread."

The Federal Reserve has held interest rates at nearly zero for a year now since the US outbreak of COVID-19 heightened in March 2020, triggering shutdowns that crippled the economy.

President-elect Joe Biden, who takes office on January 20, is scheduled to announce later on Thursday the first of his stimulus efforts, with market expectations being \$2000 in direct payments to individuals, and additional aid to state and local governments and boosts to unemployment benefits.

The US economy shrank 5 percent in the first quarter of last year and 31.4 percent in the subsequent three months before rebounding 33.1 percent in the third quarter. Fourth quarter results have not been published yet.

On the employment front, the United States lost more than 21 million jobs between March and April, at the height of business lockdowns forced by the coronavirus.

A rebound of 2.5 million jobs was logged in May and 4.8 million in June, before the recovery began slowing. For both September and October, less than 700,000 jobs were added each month. In November, there were just 245,000 additions while December saw a loss of 140,000 jobs — the first such decline since April.

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US Weekly Jobless Claims up 23% as Struggle Under COVID-19 Intensifies - Labor Dept.

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RPT - US Senate Unlikely to Convict Trump Despite Republican Desire to Put Him in Past - Experts

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - The US Senate is unlikely to convict President Donald Trump despite Republican hopes to put him in the past, although violence by Make America Great Again followers during President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration could change the situation, analysts told Sputnik.

Earlier on Wednesday, the US House voted 232-197 to impeach Trump on charges of inciting violence against the US government. On January 6, thousands of pro-Trump protesters stormed

Capitol Hill as Congress was certifying Biden's presidential election victory. The riots came after Trump called on his supporters to not allow the election to be stolen.

The Senate impeachment trial will not conclude until after Biden takes over on January 20. It will take 67 votes (two-thirds of the total) to convict Trump, which would require about 17 Republican senators to cross party lines.

"I don't think it's likely, barring some unforeseen future event, that enough senators will vote to impeach Trump," former congressional candidate and FBI Special Counsel Coleen Rowley told Sputnik. "Not only would they be afraid of the power of that political block but also, and very understandably, they should be worried about further inciting dangerous polarization."

Ten Republican members of Congress voted to impeach Trump on Wednesday while reports surfaced that Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell favored impeachment. Meanwhile, Democrat and presumptive Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said if Trump is convicted, the Senate will hold a vote to bar him from ever running for office again.

Financial analyst and political commentator Charles Ortel said Trump's enemies looked unlikely to reach the two-thirds Senate majority needed to convict him, unless more riots changed the equation.

"Should there be escalating violence through the looming inauguration of Joe Biden as 46th president of the United States, it is possible that enough senators might join Democrats and Independents to reach the 67 vote target," Ortel said.

However, if the Democrats and their mainstream Republican allies pressed ahead with impeachment even after Biden took office, this would certainly backfire and only serve to strengthen US nationalism, Ortel warned.

"In the heat of the present, Democrats and establishment Republicans may believe they are close to dancing on political graves of Trumpists. In reality, they are likely ensuring stronger support for respectful nationalism, and rejection of unregulated globalism," he predicted.

On Tuesday, Trump told reporters that the speech he delivered on January 6 before the protesters stormed Capitol Hill was "totally appropriate." He said the impeachment process was the "continuation of the greatest witch hunt in the history of politics."

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RPT - Police Push Anti-Trump Protesters Away From Capitol Building

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - Police pushed away from the Capitol building a group of anti-Trump protesters who demanded the expulsion of lawmakers allied to US President Donald Trump, a Sputnik correspondent reported.

The incidents occurred amid ongoing impeachment proceedings in Congress on Wednesday.

Trump is expected to be impeached today by the Democratic-controlled House for inciting riots on Capitol Hill last week.

The activists left after the police threatened to arrest them in three official warnings.

The protesters wanted to hang banners on the fence surrounding the capitol with the names of 121 members of congress and 12 senators whom they accuse of supporting the outgoing president.

Extra layers of defense have been hastily erected around the US Capitol. In addition to the handguns, the police on the grounds are armed with shotguns and assault rifles.

More than 20,000 soldiers from the US National Guard will be on hand to help secure the inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden next week.

The enhanced security comes a week after thousands of Trump supporters stormed Capitol Hill in a bid to prevent Congress from certifying Biden's victory, marking the most significant breach of the grounds since the British set fire to it in 1814.

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 were being planned in all 50 US states.

At least five people died in connection with the riots that erupted on January 6 after thousands stormed the Capitol including some wielding weapons inside the halls of Congress. The assault came after Trump urged followers to keep fighting and not allow the election to be "stolen."

Trump's allegations of vote fraud have been refuted by US election security and Justice Department officials

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RPT - Google Pauses All Political Ads in Wake of Attack on US Capitol

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - Google suspended all political advertising after last week's attack on the US Capitol to avoid the incitement of more violence, a spokesperson told Sputnik in a statement.

The US House is expected to impeach President Donald Trump later in the day for inciting his supporters to storm Capitol Hill to prevent Congress from certifying the presidential election.

"Given the events of the past week, we will expand our Sensitive Event policy enforcement to temporarily pause all political ads in addition to any ads referencing impeachment, the inauguration, or protests at the US Capitol," the spokesperson said. "We have long-standing policies blocking content that incites violence or promotes hate and we will be extremely vigilant about enforcing on any ads that cross this line."

The spokesperson also said that Google "regularly pause ads over unpredictable, 'sensitive' events when ads can be used to exploit the event or amplify misleading information."

In a separate statement to advertisers, Google said it was planning to keep the policy in place until at least January 21 - a day after the inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden.

Google's decision to pause all political advertising came two days after most American companies suspended all political donations in the aftermath of the attack on the Capitol.

Five people, including a policeman on duty and a female air force veteran who supported Trump, died in the January 6 attack. Social media companies Twitter, Facebook and Google's YouTube have all suspended Trump from their platforms. The president, who leaves office in exactly a week, faced a second impeachment in Congress on Wednesday for inciting the riot,

after his first impeachment in 2019 for inviting foreign interference in US elections. Trump has denied the charges.

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RPT - REVIEW - Trump Impeached by House Again, This Time 10 Republicans Break Ranks

WASHINGTON, January 14 (Sputnik) - President Donald Trump made history by becoming the first US president to be impeached twice, his political future now resting in a Senate trial that will not conclude until after the incoming administration is inaugurated on January 20.

Earlier on Wednesday, the US House voted 232-197 to impeach Trump on charges of inciting violence against the US government. Last week, pro-Trump protesters stormed Capitol Hill as Congress was certifying Democrat Joe Biden's presidential election victory. The riots came after Trump in a speech near the White House called on his supporters to not allow the election to be stolen.

The riots marked the most significant breach of the Capitol since 1814 when the British set fire to it during the war of 1812.

'CLEAR AND PRESENT DANGER'

When the Democratic-controlled House impeached Trump in 2019 over charges of pressing Kiev to probe Biden family business matters, not a single Republican voted in favor of either article of impeachment. Trump was subsequently acquitted by the Republican-majority Senate in February of last year.

However, on Wednesday, ten Republicans, troubled by the way Trump handled the Capitol Hill riots, voted in favor of impeaching him.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi during comments on the floor ahead of the vote, clearly laid out their argument for impeachment.

"We know that the president of the United States incited this insurrection," Pelosi said. "He is a clear and present danger to the nation that we all love... He must go."

The Republican leader in the House, Kevin McCarthy, warned that impeaching Trump would not be appropriate at this time. However, he also said Trump was not blameless.

"I believe impeaching the president in such a short time frame would be a mistake... that doesn't mean the president is free from fault. The president bears responsibility for Wednesday's attack on Congress by mob rioters," McCarthy said on the House floor.

Senator Lindsey Graham warned that supporting the impeachment of Trump could invite further violence at a time the president is calling for calm.

"To my Republican colleagues who legitimize this process, you are doing great damage not only to the country, the future of the presidency, but also to the party," Graham said.

MINOR PROTESTS OUTSIDE CONGRESS

Hundreds of armed National Guard troops were deployed to secure the US Capitol as the impeachment proceedings against Trump commenced on Wednesday.

Extra layers of defense were hastily erected around the US Capitol. In addition to the handguns, the police on the grounds were armed with shotguns and assault rifles. Massive "non-scalable" fences encircled office buildings near the White House.

Police pushed away from the Capitol building a group of anti-Trump protesters who demanded the expulsion of lawmakers allied to Trump, a Sputnik correspondent reported on Wednesday. The protesters wanted to hang banners on the fence surrounding the capitol with the names of 121 members of congress and 12 senators whom they accuse of supporting the outgoing president.

SENATE TRIAL PROSPECTS

US Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell said the Senate will not convene before its current recess ends on January 19, which is a day before Biden's takes office.

"Given the rules, procedures, and Senate precedents that govern presidential impeachment trials, there is simply no chance that a fair or serious trial could conclude before President-elect Biden is sworn in next week," McConnell said on Wednesday.

McConnell also shot down reports that claimed he was in favor of seeing Trump impeached.

"I have not made a final decision on how I will vote and I intend to listen to the legal arguments when they are presented to the Senate," McConnell said in a statement.

It will take 67 votes (two-thirds of the 100-seat Senate) to convict Trump, which would require about 17 Republican senators to cross party lines. This seems unlikely, unless some remarkable developments fuel a mass Republican defection.

"I don't think it's likely, barring some unforeseen future event, that enough senators will vote to impeach Trump," former congressional candidate and FBI Special Counsel Coleen Rowley told Sputnik. "Not only would they be afraid of the power of that political block but also, and very understandably, they should be worried about further inciting dangerous polarization."

Financial analyst and political commentator Charles Ortel said, although it's unlikely, an eruption of more riots could change the dynamics.

"Should there be escalating violence through the looming inauguration of Joe Biden as 46th president of the United States, it is possible that enough senators might join Democrats and Independents to reach the 67 vote target," Ortel told Sputnik.

Presumptive Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, the chamber's top Democrat, in a statement on Wednesday said if Trump is convicted a vote would be held on whether to bar the New York billionaire from ever running for office again.

Trump in a video message after being impeached urged his followers to "ease tensions" amid reports of additional demonstrations ahead of Biden's inauguration. During the five-minute clip, Trump never mentioned the word impeachment.

On Tuesday, Trump told reporters that the speech he delivered on January 6 before the protesters stormed Capitol Hill was "totally appropriate." He also called the impeachment process the "continuation of the greatest witch hunt in the history of politics."