

**01/15/21 Friday**

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Rioters Reportedly Came Dangerously Close to Pence During Capitol Breach  
by [Mary F.](#)

Supporters of US President Donald Trump beached the Capitol building in Washington DC on Wednesday in a failed attempt to protest the certification of the Electoral College vote which cemented Joe Biden as the winner of the 2020 presidential election.

The violent mob of Trump supporters that stormed the US Capitol on January 6 came very close to US Vice President Mike Pence, according to a report by the [Washington Post](#). Pence was not evacuated from the Senate chamber for approximately 14 minutes after Capitol Police first reported that the complex had been breached.

According to the Post, Secret Service officers eventually shuffled Pence, his wife and his daughter, to a room off the Senate floor, after rioters breached the Capitol. Pence and his family had taken refuge in a hideaway moments before the attackers rushed up the stairs to a second-floor landing near the Senate. It is unclear how long it took to evacuate the vice president and his family from his office off the Senate floor to a more secure location in the Capitol complex.

The closeness of the mob to the vice president and the delay in evacuating him from the chamber has raised concerns about why the Secret Service did not move the vice president earlier.

The Secret Service has declined to comment on Pence's evacuation during the Capitol siege and has simply stated that he was "secure" during the breach.

"While the Secret Service does not speak specifically about the means and methods of our protective operations, Vice President Pence was secure at all times on Jan. 6," Secret Service spokesperson Catherine Milhoan said in a [statement obtained](#) by the Post.

Many Trump supporters were angry with Pence for refusing to block the Electoral College count that cemented President-elect Joe Biden's win. Many of those rioters called the vice president a traitor as they poured into the building.

According to the FBI, a Trump supporter who was charged this week with trespassing and disorderly conduct after participating in the breach said in a video obtained by [the Post](#), "Once we found out Pence turned on us and that they had stolen the election, like, officially, the crowd went crazy. I mean, it became a mob."

Another rioter, Jacob A. Chansley of Arizona, who entered the Senate chamber and reached Pence's chair in the Senate chamber, left a note on the vice president's desk that read, in part: "It's only a matter of time, justice is coming."

Chansley, who has been charged with two felonies, including threatening congressional officials, told investigators that he was happy he reached Pence's desk because he believed the vice president was a child-trafficking traitor.

Joshua Matthew Black, another rioter who was charged with trespassing and disorderly conduct, said in a video obtained by the FBI, "Once we found out Pence turned on us and that they had stolen the election, like officially, the crowd went crazy. I mean, it became a mob. We crossed the gate." Black also stated: "We just wanted to get inside the building. I wanted to get inside the building so I could plead(sic) the blood of Jesus over it. That was my goal."

During the riot, a group of rioters began chatting: "Hang Mike Pence!" according to [video footage](#) caught during the breach.

So far, the US Justice Department and the FBI have arrested more than 100 people involved in the deadly January 5 attack which saw five people killed, including a police officer who was beaten to death.

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

The House of Representatives voted by 232 votes (ten Republicans joined the Democratic bloc) to 197 this week to impeach Trump for a second time, on this occasion for "incitement of insurrection".

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Mike Pence Reportedly Offers Kamala Harris Congratulations in Call Ahead of Inauguration by [Mary F.](#)

The inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden will take place on January 20 and will mark the start of a four-year term with Biden as the 46th President of the United States, and Kamala Harris as the Vice President.

Vice President Mike Pence spoke with the vice president-elect, Kamala Harris, on Thursday to provide assistance ahead of the January 20 inauguration, a source familiar with the exchange [told the Hill](#).

During the conversation, Pence reportedly offered his congratulations to his successor, [AP reported](#). One of the people familiar with the conversation described it as a "good call."

The conversation between the two was the first time that the two politicians have spoken since their October 2020 debate and comes more than a week after pro-Trump supporters violently attacked the US capitol building in a failed attempt to prevent the certification of the Electoral College vote.

According to an analysis by the Hill, Pence's most recent move is an example of how the vice president took up many of the duties that a president is ordinarily responsible for in the final days of office. Pence also attended a briefing on inauguration security on Thursday, as well as the funeral of the iconic US test pilot, Chuck Yeager, a US Air Force officer. Pence will also deliver speeches over the weekend in California and New York to offer his administration's military achievements.

Trump, however, has not called Biden or officially conceded the race. For the first time last week, Trump, in a video statement, promised a "smooth, orderly and seamless transition." In

addition, while the vice president will attend the Biden inauguration on Wednesday, Trump will not attend the inauguration and is instead [expected to depart](#) Washington DC on Wednesday inauguration morning.

"A new administration will be inaugurated on Jan. 20. My focus now turns to ensuring a smooth orderly and seamless transition of power. This moment calls for healing and reconciliation," Trump suggested in his tweeted video remarks. The Twitter video came prior to the social media platform's deletion of his account. Trump was permanently banned from the service "[due to the risk of further incitement of violence.](#)"

Much of Washington DC remains under increased security after the deadly January 6 insurrection and attack at the Capitol, with FBI officials [warning of the possibility of more violence](#) ahead of the inauguration.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US Sanctions Cuba's Interior Ministry Under Global Magnitsky Act for Jailing Dissident by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

New economic sanctions on Cuba by the Trump administration and a decline in tourism due to the COVID-19 pandemic have forced financial reforms in the new year, including eliminating the dual currency system, in a bid to encourage national production over imports.

The US Treasury announced on Friday it had imposed new sanctions on Cuba, targeting the country's interior ministry for "serious human rights abuse." The move comes days after the US returned Cuba to the list of state sponsors of terrorism.

According to a [news release](#), the Treasury targeted both the ministry itself and Interior Minister Lazaro Alberto Álvarez Casas under the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act. The Treasury cites the alleged torture and inhumane jailing of Cuban dissident Jose Daniel Ferrer, founder of the dissident umbrella group Patriotic Union of Cuba, which Havana has claimed [receives funding](#) from the US State Department.

The sanctions prevent "all transactions by US persons or within (or transiting) the United States that involve any property or interests in property," including "making of any contribution or provision of funds, goods, or services by, to, or for the benefit of any blocked person or the receipt of any contribution or provision of funds, goods, or services from any such person." In November 2019, the US specifically sanctioned [then-Interior Minister](#) Julio Cesar Gandarilla Bermejo for ostensibly "arbitrarily arresting and detaining thousands of Cuban citizens and unlawfully incarcerating more than 100 political prisoners in Cuba" and claiming the Cuban government supported "gross violations of human rights in Venezuela." The move inhibited Gandarilla's ability to travel. He passed away in November 2020, according to [TeleSUR](#), at which time Álvarez was appointed to replace him.

Returned to State Terror Sponsors List

On Monday, the US State Department added Cuba to its list of [state sponsors](#) of terrorism, from which it had been removed in 2015. "The Castro regime must end its support for international

terrorism and subversion of US justice," Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said, possibly not realizing that the president of Cuba is Miguel Diaz-Canel.

Pompeo asserted that the Cuban government "has fed, housed, and provided medical care for murderers, bombmakers, and hijackers, while many Cubans go hungry, homeless, and without basic medicine," justifying his remarks by claiming that the Cuban government refused to extradite members of the Colombian National Liberation Army (ELN) who traveled to the island in good faith in 2017 for historic [peace negotiations](#) that ended 53 years of armed struggle. The news release also claimed that the Cuban government has long given refuge to Assata Shakur, a former member of the Black Liberation Army who was questionably convicted in 1977 of murdering a police officer and later escaped from prison and now on the FBI's Most Wanted Terrorists List. However, Shakur was also in Cuba when the country was removed from the state sponsors of terrorism list in 2015.

#### An Island Staple of US Politics

US President Donald Trump long courted the [support](#) of the conservative Cuban-American community, much of which is settled in southern Florida, after fleeing the island, helping Trump to win the state in the November 2020 election. With his administration in its final days, it has been in a rush to push through a slew of ["midnight" regulations](#) and changes, which have spanned foreign and domestic policy goals, from economic sanctions to [civil rights](#) rollbacks. The US has maintained an embargo against Cuba since 1960, barring nearly all trade with the socialist country and making travel to and from the island difficult. In 2019, all but a handful of countries at the United Nations [voted to condemn](#) the blockade for its "incalculable humanitarian damages" and calling it "a flagrant, massive and systematic violation of human rights" and noting it "qualifies as an act of genocide under Articles II (b) and (c) of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide." Only the US and Brazil voted against it, while US allies Colombia and Ukraine abstained.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Trump Administration Unexpectedly Declassifies NSC's 2018 Indo-Pacific Strategy Framework by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Last year, the US State Department published a blueprint for a decades-long struggle against China that included reorienting US society, education and culture toward that goal. Now, a formerly secret document shows plans for undermining Chinese society from the inside at the same time.

A key secret strategy document recently declassified by the Trump administration has revealed the private thinking of the National Security Council about the US approach to maintaining dominance in the Indo-Pacific region. Interestingly, the document clearly states it should not be declassified before December 31, 2042, and it contains only minor redactions.

Titled the "US Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific," the [February 2018 document](#) by the National Security Council is distinctly different from the June 2019 Indo-Pacific Strategy Report, which was [released publicly](#) by the Pentagon.

In a [statement issued](#) with the declassified document, the outgoing White House national security adviser, Robert O'Brien, noted that it has "provided overarching strategic guidance for implementing the 2017 National Security Strategy within the world's most populous and economically dynamic region."

A comparison of the private framework, created just weeks after the National Security Strategy, and the [public report](#) published a year and a half later, shows inconsistencies between publicly stated and privately acknowledged priorities by the Trump administration.

Russia: Malign Actor or Marginal Player?

Both documents prioritize China as the primary threat to US hegemony in the region, with the framework noting that "China will circumvent international rules and norms to gain an advantage."

But while the public strategy report lists Russia as a "revitalized malign actor" that "seeks to advance Moscow's strategic interests while undermining US leadership and the rules-based international order," in private, NSC members are telling each other that "Russia will remain a marginal player relative to the United States, China, and India," according to the framework document.

Indeed, the framework lists just three regional national security challenges for the US:

- How to maintain US strategic primacy in the Indo-Pacific region and promote a liberal economic order while preventing China from establishing new, illiberal spheres of influence, and cultivating areas of cooperation to promote regional peace and prosperity?
- How to ensure North Korea does not threaten the United States and its allies, accounting for both the acute present danger and the potential for future changes in the level and type of the threat posed by North Korea?
- How to advance US global economic leadership while promoting fair and reciprocal trade?

Given the frankness of the declassified framework, the few omissions are conspicuous.

For example, under the section outlining the objective to "strengthen the capabilities and will of Japan, the Republic of Korea, and Australia to contribute to the end states of this strategy," the first action on the list is redacted. Further redactions appear in the Actions section, under the objective of "accelerat[ing] India's rise" and under the section on "strengthening the capacity of emerging partners in South Asia."

Defending South China Sea and Taiwan

In the framework's largest section, on countering China, much of the expected posturing against Chinese military capabilities seen elsewhere is laid out, including an ambitious goal to deny China its "sustained air and sea dominance inside the 'first island chain' in a conflict; defending the first-island-chain nations, including Taiwan;" and dominating all domains outside the first island chain." The final part of that bullet point is redacted.

The "first island chain" is a Chinese term referring to the string of islands just off the eastern coast of Asia, stretching from the Kamchatka Peninsula in the north to the Malay Peninsula in the south and including Taiwan and the [South China Sea](#), over both of which Beijing has made territorial claims contested by Washington and other regional allies. China's own [military goals](#) include establishing military dominance over this area and pushing beyond it by denying US forces the ability to [operate safely](#) there.

Over the last few years, the Trump administration has funneled [billions of dollars](#) in weapons to Taiwan, although the US normalization of relations with Beijing includes an agreement with the position of Beijing that Taiwan is a part of mainland China. The US also stepped up its activities in the South China Sea, holding vast [military drills](#) and “freedom of navigation operations” that [flout the disputed Chinese](#) territorial claims.

#### Supporting Chinese Dissidents

Not often seen, however, is a program for undermining Chinese authority by funding and otherwise enabling dissidents.

One objective, “promote US values throughout the region to maintain influence and counterbalance Chinese models of government” calls for the US to “support activists and reformers throughout the region.” Later, in a section on “educating” people, institutions and governments about ‘China’s coercive behavior,’ the framework advises the US to “invest in capabilities [redacted] that promote uncensored communication between Chinese people.”

~~SECRET//NOFORN~~

7

(See: “**U.S. Strategic Framework for Countering China’s Economic Aggression.**”)

- ~~(S//NF)~~ **Objective:** Promote U.S. values throughout the region to maintain influence and counterbalance Chinese models of government.
  - **Actions:** Develop public and private messaging and promote initiatives that show the benefits of democracy and liberty to all countries, including economic, technologic, and societal benefits.
  - Coordinate efforts to protect and promote internationally recognized rights and freedoms with likeminded partners.
  - Engage South Korea, Taiwan, Mongolia, Japan, and other regional democratic partners to demonstrate their own successes and the benefits they have accrued.
  - Support activists and reformers throughout the region.
  - Offer development, technical, and legal assistance to those countries who seek to reform.

#### [US NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL](#)

Excerpt from the US National Security Council's declassified 2018 US Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific, showing a section about supporting activists in the region to promote US values.

This document was written in 2018, before massive protests in Hong Kong saw the imposition of Beijing's new National Security Law in June 2020. [Sputnik reported](#) during the protests on allegations that key groups and leaders of the movement were said to have had extensive contacts and backing from the United States, via the CIA-backed National Endowment for Democracy. Just days after the new security law was passed banning such financial support, the largest and most influential dissident group in Hong Kong, Demosisto, almost [folded its official online presence](#).

US-China Conflict Between ‘Political and Economic Systems’

A secret framework suggests that “strategic competition between the United States and China will persist, owing to the divergent nature and goals of our political and economic systems.” The [National Security Strategy](#) on which the framework is based says, however, that “great power competition” with China has returned because Beijing “seeks to displace the United States in the Indo-Pacific region, expand the reaches of its state-driven economic model, and reorder the region in its favor.” That document was issued by the White House in December 2017 and was [primarily written](#) by the then-deputy national security adviser, Nadia Schadlow, at the behest of the NSC, the government body that wrote the secret framework.

In public, the Pentagon was saying China is a threat to US interests because of the choices of its leadership, but in private, the NSC was frankly stating the conflict was, cold war-style, a showdown between capitalism and socialism that will continue until one or the other is defeated. That conclusion complements another revelation from November 2020, after the US State Department published a blueprint for a decades-long struggle to isolate and undermine China, that [Sputnik reported](#) at the time bore a strong similarity to the “Kennan Long Telegram” that influenced US policy towards the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The document not only called to curb Beijing's attempts to win friends abroad, but also prioritized shifting US institutions, including education, culture, and the civil service, toward inculcating in the US populace and institutions reasons why China must be considered an enemy.

#### DPRK

Most of the section on relations with the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) is redacted, but part of a bullet point in a section about convincing Pyongyang to give up its nuclear weapons says “[redacted] Do this by: (1) helping South Korea and Japan acquire advanced, conventional military capabilities; (2) drawing South Korea and Japan closer to one another; [redacted].”

The time in which the framework was written is key, as, in February 2018, the US relationship with the DPRK was notably hostile. Just months earlier, US President Donald Trump threatened the socialist country with “fire and fury” if it didn’t end its ballistic missile program and thermonuclear weapon tests.

While Pyongyang agreed to a unilateral moratorium on both by the time the Indo-Pacific Framework was written, the historic peace talks with Seoul and denuclearization talks with Washington that followed later in 2018 and 2019 had not yet begun. In those talks, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un displayed a willingness to take [major steps](#) toward ending those weapons programs, in exchange for the US ending its strangling [economic sanctions](#) on the country. The Trump administration refused and the talks quickly stalled.

#### ‘Dissonance’ Over India

The position of India in the two documents is different as well, as, in the public strategy report, India is grouped with smaller regional nations with which the US needs to expand cooperation. However, in the secret 2018 framework, India features much more prominently.

According to [The Diplomat](#), the secret framework shows a “glaring” dissonance with long-standing national strategy outlined by the administration of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who prefers a “multipolar Asia in a multipolar world” instead of merely existing as a gear in Washington’s plan for its own regional dominance.

The final section, on Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands, is heavily redacted, including objectives to promote and support “Burma’s transition to democracy.”

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

New Delhi Approves \$6.5 Billion Deal to Buy 83 'Game Changer' Tejas Fighter Jets  
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Even as it moves to buy locally-designed fighter jets, the Indian military has also bought dozens of French-made Rafale and Russian-made Su-30MKI fighters, as it retires a generation of older jets.

The Indian government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has cleared a \$6.5 billion deal to buy locally-manufactured LCA MK1A Tejas light combat aircraft. It is New Delhi largest-ever purchase of an Indian-made weapon.

"This deal will be a game-changer for self-reliance in Indian defence manufacturing," Indian Defense Minister Rajnath Singh said, according to the [Times of India](#). "It would act as a catalyst for transforming the domestic aerospace ecosystem. The LCA-Tejas is going to be the backbone of the [Indian Air Force] fighter fleet in the years to come."

Singh said that 50% of the Tejas jet is manufactured using Indian parts, but that will soon increase to 60%.

Built by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), the Tejas is a single-engine fourth-generation fighter and strike aircraft intended to replace the Indian Air Force's aging Soviet-era MiG-21s. The new aircraft has reportedly been modified for [carrier operations](#) and has a top speed of Mach 1.6. It will serve as the primary platform for the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile currently in development.

According to the deal, HAL will supply the Indian military with 73 MK1A jets and 10 trainer versions. The deliveries will start in 2024 and be completed by the end of 2028.

The IAF currently has roughly 40 of the earlier Tejas MK-1, deployed in the north during the [tense 2020 showdown](#) with China over the high altitude Ladakh region on their shared border. It [reportedly intends](#) to buy another 110, bringing the total of Tejas jets to 200.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Palestinians to Hold First Elections Since Hamas Victory 15 Years Ago, Abbas Says  
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Earlier this week, Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz made a rare move of approving hundreds of Palestinian building permits as he concurrently approved 800 new Israeli settler construction projects in the West Bank.

On Friday, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas announced that new elections would be held later this year. They would be the first Palestinian elections since 2006, when Hamas, a group

regarded as a terrorist organization by Israel and many Western countries, won the vote in Gaza and established control over the exclave.

Abbas said in a statement that it was “necessary to expedite the holding of a comprehensive national dialogue in which all Palestinian factions participate without exception,” according to the Times of Israel.

Mukhaymar Abu Saada, a political science professor at Gaza’s Al-Azhar University, told the Times, “The decree shows that we have entered a new level of seriousness when it comes to the willingness to hold elections.”

There remains a great deal to be sorted about the election processes - a subject that has torpedoed more than one attempt to hold elections in the past - but, according to Abbas’ plan, the first round of voting would take place on May 22, in which Palestinians in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza would vote for members of a Palestinian Legislative Council. A second round would take place on July 7, for Palestinian Authority president, and a third round for the Palestinian National Council on August 31.

Some items to be sorted include how security would be provided at polling places, an agreement not to make political arrests, and the establishment of an independent electoral council amenable to all parties.

A poll by the Palestinian Center for Policy and [Survey Research conducted](#) a few weeks ago found that if elections were held tomorrow, 38% of voters would vote for Fatah while 34% would vote for Hamas. Abbas would likely lose to Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, who would win 50% of the vote to the incumbent’s 43%, according to the survey.

It is unlikely, however, that Hamas would be able to establish primary control in the West Bank, which is separated from Gaza by Israeli territory. In May 2020, Abbas threw out existing security agreements with Israel made under the Oslo peace process in response to an Israeli initiative to annex additional parts of the West Bank, but resumed cooperation in November 2020.

According to the New York Times, it was driven by “relief” following the election of US President-elect Joe Biden, as US President Donald Trump has supported Israel’s expansion plans in the past.

Hamas’ 2006 victory came after years of militant struggle that succeeded in forcing all 8,000 Israeli settlers to evacuate the Gaza Strip. The subsequent unity government established with Fatah in the Gaza Strip collapsed soon after the election, and Fatah was left in control of the West Bank and the Palestine Liberation Organization. [Abbas dominates](#) all three.

Since the 2006 election, Tel Aviv regularly bombs and shells the Gaza Strip, while various militant groups launch rockets and incendiary balloons at Israeli territory, most of which are shot down by the latter’s air defense missiles. In 2007, [Israel began a total blockade](#) of Gaza, including trade and travel, electricity, and the delivery of other supplies, which has had a catastrophic effect on the quality of life in the territory and led to accusations of apartheid practices and its nickname as “the world’s largest open-air prison.”

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Some US Capitol Rioters Reportedly Sought ‘to Capture and Assassinate Elected Officials’ by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Amid the deadly January 6 Capitol riot, hundreds of Trump loyalists stormed the federal building after the president and several speakers at a "Stop the Steal" rally attempted to stop the US election from being "stolen," as lawmakers held a joint session to certify the results of the presidential race.

US federal prosecutors revealed in a new court filing against Jacob Chansley, a Capitol rioter known as the "QAnon Shaman," that the mob that staged the violent insurrection last week planned to "capture and assassinate elected officials."

In describing the threat posed by the defendant, the filing notes that "strong evidence, including Chansley's own words and actions at the Capitol, supports that the intent of the Capitol rioters was to capture and assassinate elected officials in the United States Government."

The recent court filing is the latest and most alarming claim from law enforcement officials addressing the threat posed by the rioters.

Chansley, who also goes by the name "Jake Angeli," is widely associated with face paint and a horns-and-fur costume he wore during the Capitol attack. He gained nationwide attention with the costume as photos captured him walking throughout the Capitol grounds and standing on the US Senate dais, as US Vice President Mike Pence presided over the joint congressional session to certify US President-elect Joe Biden's election win.

The memo itself was filed by prosecutors late Thursday as part of officials' argument against releasing Chansley while his case remains active.

"Chansley is an active participant in - and has made himself the most prominent symbol of - a violent insurrection that attempted to overthrow the United States Government on January 6, 2021," the document reads.

The filing also states that Chansley left a note for Pence on the Senate dais that read, "It's only a matter of time, justice is coming."

"When questioned as to the meaning of that statement, Chansley went on a lengthy diatribe describing current and past United States political leaders as infiltrators, specifically naming Vice President Mike Pence, former President Barack Obama, former Senator Hillary Clinton and U.S. President-elect Joe Biden as infiltrators involved in various types of wrongdoing. Although he stated his note was not a threat, the Government strongly disagrees," the filing explains. Prosecutors further argue that Chansley should remain in custody due to his criminal record, belief in QAnon conspiracy theories and his avowed intent to return to Washington DC during Biden's inauguration.

Officials highlighted that in speaking with FBI officials, Chansley expressed he would "for sure" want to attend protests in the nation's capital. "I'd want to be there, as a protester, as a protester, f\*\*\*in' a," he reportedly remarked.

Chansley is presently charged with a pair of felonies: obstructing the conduct of a law enforcement officer and obstructing an official proceeding. His next detention hearing is scheduled for Friday afternoon in Phoenix, Arizona.

Nation's Capital, Multiple States Placed on High Alert

In the wake of the deadly January 6 attack at the US Capitol, federal authorities have placed Washington DC on high alert over concerns that armed protests may unfold in the days ahead of Biden's inauguration on January 20.

Earlier this week, the FBI [issued a bulletin](#) alerting authorities that a "huge uprising" was being planned as Trump loyalists eyed holding armed protests at the state capitols across the nation, including the [now-shuttered](#) US Capitol.

The initial bulletin detailed that Trump supporters would be holding an armed demonstration from January 16 through "at least" Inauguration Day, with protests being held at the US Capitol on January 17.

Additionally, it was later revealed that law enforcement officials had briefed congressional lawmakers on three [potential attacks](#) against the US Capitol, the White House and the Supreme Court. Reports suggested the attacks were planned with the intention to seize and occupy the government buildings.

During a Thursday meeting at the Federal Emergency Management Agency headquarters in Washington DC, FBI Director Christopher Wray remarked that the bureau was monitoring ["extensive" online](#) chatter about potential threats.

In an effort to double down on security measures, Wray stated that the agency would be working nonstop in coordination with its 56 field offices across the nation. "Our posture is aggressive, and it's going to stay that way through the inauguration," he said.

In Washington DC, authorities have deployed thousands of National Guard troops, erected rows of fencing lined with barbed wire and implemented a series of roadblocks in anticipation of possible violence.

Authorities have warned local police across the nation to strengthen their security measures.

#### Capitol Riot Prompts Trump's Second Impeachment

As the deadly January 6 riot unfolded and saw five people killed, including a Capitol Police officer who was beaten to death, severe scrutiny has fallen on US President Donald Trump after many blamed him for inciting an insurrection.

Moments before the storming took place, Trump and several speakers at the "Stop the Steal" rally on the White House lawn called on supporters to take action and not allow the election to be "stolen." The repeated demands came as lawmakers held a joint session at the US Capitol to confirm the Electoral Vote.

It was as lawmakers began their first debate of the [Arizona electoral vote](#) won by Biden, that chaos unfolded and sent lawmakers into hiding, as hundreds of rioters broke past security barriers and ransacked the federal building.

The insurrection, which killed 5, continued for several hours before law enforcement officials began to regain control and push rioters away from the Capitol grounds; however, the damage was already done even after Trump issued a statement urging his supporters to leave.

As lawmakers returned to certify Biden as the next US president, officials began to voice support for removing Trump from office, either by invoking the 25th Amendment or by putting forth articles of impeachment.

Although the US House of Representatives passed its resolution to invoke the 25th Amendment on Tuesday, Pence stated that he would not support its use as, according to him, it would "set a terrible precedent." However, the House chamber made history the following day after it impeached Trump a second time.

While it was widely accepted that the House would easily pass the measure, it remains uncertain how the measure will be received in the Senate. Reports surfaced earlier this week

that Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) [was "pleased"](#) with the Democrat's impeachment, but seemed unlikely to take up the measure before Inauguration Day as McConnell said he would ["almost certainly"](#) not be convening lawmakers before then. Despite being impeached for inciting an insurrection, Trump has rejected any claim that he bears responsibility for the events, telling reporters that his remarks at the rally were "totally appropriate." He later indicated at an event that the historic second impeachment is a continuation of the "witch hunt" against him.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

CDC: Highly Contagious UK COVID-19 Variant May Become Dominant US Strain by March by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

As SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, continues to sweep the world, a new variant known as B.1.1.7 has quickly spread within communities, especially within the UK. Although the strain isn't believed to be more severe, it does appear to be more transmissible than other variants.

A [new report](#) from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has indicated the B.1.1.7 variant could become the predominant strain in the US by March, as the virus is rapidly spreads across the nation.

Published Friday, the report states that approximately 76 cases of B.1.1.7 have been documented in the US since January 13, and that the new variant is more than likely to threaten already-strained health care resources.

"The modeled trajectory of this variant in the US exhibits rapid growth in early 2021, becoming the predominant variant in March," reads the report, which notes that its rise will prompt "extended and more rigorous implementation of public health strategies, and increase the percentage of population immunity required for pandemic control."

"Taking measures to reduce transmission now can lessen the potential impact of B.1.1.7 and allow critical time to increase vaccination coverage," it adds.

The CDC report highlights that the public must adhere to social distancing, hand-washing and masking practices, as well as isolation and quarantine measures, to ensure that the virus does not spread. The CDC also details the importance of vaccinating every person against the virus. Additionally, to curb the spread of the pandemic, authors recommend the "strategic testing of persons without symptoms but at higher risk of infection, such as those exposed to SARS-CoV-2 or who have frequent unavoidable contact with the public."

"These measures will be more effective if they are instituted sooner rather than later to slow the initial spread of the B.1.1.7 variant. Efforts to prepare the health care system for further surges in cases are warranted," researchers underscored.

At present, the new variant has been found in Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Indiana, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Georgia, Florida, Texas, Colorado and California, according to the latest [CDC tracking information](#). The database reveals that most B.1.1.7 cases have been detected in California (32) and in Florida (22).

Officials have also recently grown more concerned with a spike in the 501Y.V2 COVID-19 variant, which was first identified in South Africa. Similar to the B.1.1.7 strain, 501Y.V2 does not appear to be more severe; however, there are worries that it could be [more resistant](#) to antibody treatments. The CDC has yet to identify any cases of the 501Y.V2 variant in the US. To date, the US [has distributed](#) over 31 million COVID-19 vaccines, having only administered some 12.2 million. Since taking on the vaccination effort, approximately 1.6 million Americans have received both doses of the approved vaccines.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US National Rifle Association Files for Bankruptcy, Will Relocate to Texas Amid Troubles  
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

The National Rifle Association (NRA), which is headquartered in Fairfax, Virginia, recently came under fire by the office of New York Attorney General Letitia James after an 18-month investigation revealed that the gun rights group was “fraught with fraud and abuse.” The [NRA announced](#) on Friday that the organization was in the early stages of filing for a Chapter 11 bankruptcy judgment as part of a larger restructuring plan to leave New York and relocate its business to Texas.

The firearms advocate explained in a statement that it would set up base in the Lone Star State as a nonprofit as a means of exiting what it complained was a “corrupt political and regulatory environment in New York.” The company is currently registered in the Empire State.

“The move will enable long-term, sustainable growth and ensure the NRA’s continued success as the nation’s leading advocate for constitutional freedom – free from the toxic political environment of New York,” the release stated, adding that despite the bankruptcy filing, the agency nonetheless described itself as being in the “strongest financial condition in years.” A Chapter 11 bankruptcy petition, which was filed at the Dallas division of the United States Bankruptcy Court for the Northern District of Texas, allows organizations to continue operating while repaying creditors at reduced rates and over much longer periods. A petition is considered the first form submitted in declaring this form bankruptcy.

NRA CEO Wayne LaPierre in a [separate statement](#) offered that the move sought to “seek protection from New York officials who illegally abused and weaponized the powers they wield against the NRA and its members.”

“You know that our opponents will try to seize upon this news and distort the truth. Don’t believe what you read from our enemies. The NRA is not ‘bankrupt’ or ‘going out of business.’ The NRA is not insolvent,” the official added in a newsletter to members.

LaPierre stated the organization had “no immediate plans to relocate” its headquarters from Virginia, but that the company had formed a “special committee” to determine the possibilities of moving the business elsewhere.

The latest development came months after the New York attorney general [announced a lawsuit](#) with the intention to dissolve the pro-gun group, after an in-depth investigation revealed that

NRA executives routinely misused charitable funds for personal gain and regularly awarded contracts to friends and family members.

The suit outlined dozens of examples that show how LaPierre, as well as a former NRA treasurer and chief financial officer, Wilson Phillips; a former chief of staff and executive director of general operations, Joshua Powell, and the current corporate secretary and general counsel, John Frazer, all contributed to a loss of over \$64 million during a three-year period.

The funds that the organization says are to protect gun rights were used for paying for vacations, private jets and costly meals, according to the 2020 legal filing. One finding against LaPierre revealed that the official had secured a post-employment contract with the NRA - without board approval - said to be valued at over \$17 million.

At the time of the August 2020 announcement, James said that the "NRA's influence has been so powerful that the organization went unchecked for decades while top executives funneled millions into their own pockets."

"The NRA is fraught with fraud and abuse, which is why, today, we seek to dissolve the NRA, because no organization is above the law," the attorney general noted.

In addition to dissolving the NRA, James and the courts are seeking to require each current and former executive named in the suit to pay a full restitution. Formerly an education and outreach support network, the NRA was chartered in the state of New York in 1871.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Pentagon Expands US Central Command Mission to Include Israel Amid Trump's Final Days  
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Earlier this week, reports surfaced that US President Donald Trump had ordered the US Department of Defense to split from decades-old practices and include Israel as part of the US Central Command's (CENTCOM) responsibility, in light of the recently-signed Abraham Accords.

The Department of Defense confirmed on Friday that CENTCOM's structure would be adjusted to include oversight for Israel, a major development that has been long sought after by pro-Israel groups despite legacy tension between Tel Aviv and its regional neighbors. CENTCOM's area of responsibility encompasses the Middle East and Central and South Asia, a region that stretches over 4 million square miles and has a population upwards of 550 million people.

This shift in protocol suggests that [Israel could play](#) a more central role in collaborating with regional partners to combat Iran, while also serving as a last-ditch effort by the Trump administration to shape US President-elect Joe Biden's national security agenda.

Confirming the change-up, the department noted in a statement that Tel Aviv would be pulled from the US European Command's area of responsibility, explaining that reassessments were conducted "every two years."

"We structure boundaries to best mitigate risk and protect US interests and partners," reads the statement. "The easing of tensions between Israel and its Arab neighbors subsequent to the

Abraham Accords has provided a strategic opportunity for the United States to align key partners against shared threats in the Middle East.”

“Israel is a leading strategic partner for the United States, and this will open up additional opportunities for cooperation with our US Central Command partners while maintaining strong cooperation between Israel and our European allies,” it adds.

The Wall Street Journal, reporting on the shift, stated that Anthony Zinni, a retired Marine general and former head of CENTCOM, on Thursday [told the outlet](#) that “the timing could be right” to shift Israel under the military command as “we could see more Arab countries recognize Israel.”

“It will make security cooperation better. It would not have made sense in the past because there was too much mistrust,” he added.

In August 2020, the US brokered a normalization in relations between Israel and Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Sudan and Morocco. Israel, however, it has yet to follow through on bilateral relations with Saudi Arabia.

The Pentagon did not specify how the new changes would affect future operations or planning.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Goodbye, #BeBest: FLOTUS Reflects on Legacy of Her Anti-Cyberbullying Campaign by [Evan Craighead](#)

The outgoing US first lady, Melania Trump's, 'Be Best' campaign was introduced to the public on May 7, 2018, and presented with three overarching pillars: the well-being of America's youth, fighting against cyberbullying and advocating against opioid abuse.

FLOTUS took to social media on Friday to take a look back at her 'Be Best' initiative and the work she has done during her tenure as America's first lady.

"From coast to coast, Americans have unwavering resolve to help one another and share a common bond in wanting to create a better future for our next generation," Melania Trump narrated. "'Be Best' is a platform that helps children achieve their fullest potential and also highlights the people and organizations that are doing extraordinary things in our country and around the world."

“Over the past two years, Be Best has played a major role in spreading awareness, highlighting successful programs and acts of kindness, and encouraging public-private sector relationships to help children overcome the struggles they face every day,” the first lady claimed.

The video, released to Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, shows footage from various Be Best events that have taken place since the 2017 initiative was launched.

While it is difficult to measure the impact of 'Be Best, Melania Trump expressed that she believes that "shining a light on these positive examples" of American excellence "will inspire others to do their part."

"As the legacy of Be Best comes to a close at the White House, we must continue to give a voice to our nation's children and the issues that impact their lives," she asserted.

It was not made clear how, or if, the first lady would continue her initiative in coming years.

As many netizens have pointed out, the end of the FLOTUS anti-cyberbullying campaign comes shortly after Twitter [permanently banned](#) her husband's account "due to the risk of further incitement of violence".

Stephanie Winston Wolkoff, a former friend and senior adviser to the first lady who [recently published](#) a tell-all on their relationship, criticized her ex-BFF in a Monday interview with CNN, labeling Melania Trump an "enabler" of her husband's behavior.

"This isn't the only complicit event that's occurred throughout these four years. Melania Trump has a voice and she hasn't used it," she [told CNN](#). "She has a platform, she hasn't used it [...] You have the ability to speak loudly, clearly, and for the rest of Americans," the author stated, adding that, "She is not just complicit, she is his enabler. And she's his biggest cheerleader and unfortunately she's done nothing but that".

Wolkoff, who also authored [an article](#) suggesting blood on FLOTUS' hands, claimed that the first lady's words are "vacuous" and "have no meaning" following the deadly January 6 riots and storming of the Capitol building in Washington, DC.

FLOTUS was reportedly hosting a photoshoot of "rugs and other items in the Executive Residence and East Wing" as the riots took place, according to a source familiar with the day's activities who [spoke to](#) CNN.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

'Very Dark Winter': Biden Vows to be 'Transparent' Amid Push to Vaccinate 100 Million in 100 Days  
by [Evan Craighead](#)

On Thursday, US President-elect Joe Biden presented the 'American Rescue Plan', a \$1.9 trillion stimulus proposal that includes a third round of direct COVID-19 relief payments to Americans and \$416 billion in funding for the administration's push to vaccinate 100 million Americans and reopen US schools within the first 100 days of the presidency.

With less than a week before the 20 January inauguration, the US president-elect addressed Americans virtually on Friday, outlining the multi-step approach to his administration's COVID-19 vaccine rollout, which is to be funded in part with the "American Rescue Plan" unveiled a day prior.

"Truthfully, we remain in a very dark winter," Biden acknowledged, making note of a current US death toll nearing 400,000 COVID-19-related fatalities. "The vaccine rollout in the United States has been a dismal failure thus far."

The president-elect's plan to combat the pandemic calls for seven points: ensuring Americans have reliable and free testing; fixing any known PPE problems; providing national guidance and resources for communities; planning for the "effective, equitable" distribution of treatment and vaccines; protecting vulnerable communities, including the elderly; rebuilding the US healthcare system to "predict, prevent, and mitigate pandemic threats;" and implementing a national mask mandate.

The president-elect pledged [to end confusion surrounding](#) vaccine distribution and quickly roll out a “transparent” approach [to getting vaccines out to states](#).

In his push to vaccinate 100 million Americans in the first 100 days of his presidency, Biden emphasized on Friday that he believes it is necessary to address the racism involved with the fallout from the COVID-19 coronavirus in the US.

"It's a critical piece to account for a tragic reality of the disproportionate impact this virus has had on Black, Latinos, and Native American people," Biden stated.

According to COVID-19 data from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Black Americans and Hispanic or Latino Americans are 2.8 times more likely [to die from the novel](#) coronavirus, compared to white Americans. American Indian or Alaska Native individuals are 2.6 times more likely to die than their white counterparts in the US.

"This is a fundamentally different approach than the Trump administration," said Jeff Zients, a COVID-19 coordinator for Biden, speaking to Politico. "This will be an all-of-the-federal government approach [...] based on science and informed and managed by a dedicated group of experts."

Historically, however, events such as the 20th century Tuskegee Experiment, an "ethically unjustified" syphilis study that resulted in the death of dozens of Black American men, and other questionable scientific studies of the past have left many Black Americans suspicious about the transparency of government-supplied vaccinations and medical treatment.

Some resistance as a result of a lack of trust in government will likely be encountered by Biden's vaccine program team, headed by David Kessler, a former Food and Drug Administration chief and current pandemic adviser for the US president-elect.

No Charges Filed in Discarded Ballots Case in Pennsylvania - US Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 16 (Sputnik) - No charges have been filed in the investigation into nine ballots that were discarded by a former temporary employee at the Luzerne County Elections Bureau in the state of Pennsylvania, acting US Attorney Bruce Brandler said in a press release. "After a thorough investigation conducted by the FBI and prosecutors from my office, we have determined that there is insufficient evidence to prove criminal intent on the part of the person who discarded the ballots," Brandler said in the release on Friday. "Therefore, no criminal charges will be filed and the matter is closed."

The investigation was launched at the request of the Luzerne County District Attorney's Office. Investigators found that the nine ballots were discarded and later retrieved from a trash can. President Donald Trump and the Republican party claimed widespread voter and election fraud took place in battleground states during the 2020 US presidential election, including in Pennsylvania, robbing Trump of election victory. The more than 60 legal challenges the Trump campaign and the Republican party filed in state and federal courts were rejected based on procedural grounds.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Facebook Blocking Creation of Events Close to White House, US Capitol Building - Statement

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - Facebook in a company statement said it is blocking users from creating events on its platform for gatherings near the White House, US Capitol and other state capitol buildings due to security concerns.

"We are blocking the creation of any new Facebook events happening in close proximity to locations including the White House, the US Capitol building and any of the state capitol buildings through Inauguration Day," the company said on Friday.

Facebook said it is also blocking event creation by any non-US based accounts and pages.

Earlier this week, Facebook announced that it decided to remove "Stop the Steal" contents that promote US President Donald Trump's allegations he won the 2020 election.

The company has also suspended indefinitely Trump's Facebook account and said that it is keeping a pause on all political advertisements in the United States.

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

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

UN Security Council Backs Guterres' Pick Kubis to Be Special Envoy for Libya - Source

UNITED NATIONS, January 15 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council supported the appointment of Jan Kubis, the Special Coordinator for Lebanon, as the new Special Envoy for Libya, a diplomatic source told Sputnik.

"The Security Council had supported the appointment of Jan Kubis as Libya's Special Envoy," the source said on Friday.

Earlier, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres sent a letter to the UN Security Council in which he informed about the intention to appoint the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Slovakia, Kubis, as Libya's Special Envoy. Kubis will succeed Acting Special Envoy Stephanie Williams, who has served since the resignation of Ghassan Salame in March.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

New York Attorney General Says Will Not Let NRA Use Bankruptcy to Evade Oversight

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - New York Attorney General Letitia James said in a statement that her office will not allow the National Rifle Association (NRA) to use bankruptcy to evade oversight.

Last year, James filed a lawsuit to dissolve the NRA over alleged corruption in the organization.

"The NRA's claimed financial status has finally met its moral status: bankrupt," James said on Friday. "While we review this filing, we will not allow the NRA to use this or any other tactic to evade accountability and my office's oversight."

Earlier on Friday, the NRA, which is the most powerful US pro-gun lobby group, said it will file for bankruptcy as part of its strategy to relocate its headquarters from the state of New York to Texas to escape a "toxic political environment."

The NRA said it is at its strongest financial condition in years, adding that its decision to file for bankruptcy is a usual move utilized by businesses and organizations to streamline legal and financial affairs.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

#### US National Rifle Association Says Plans to File for Bankruptcy - Statement

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - The National Rifle Association (NRA) said in a statement that it will file for bankruptcy as part of its strategy to relocate its headquarters from the state of New York to Texas.

"The NRA plan, which involves utilizing the protection of the bankruptcy court, has the Association dumping New York and organizing its legal and regulatory matters in an efficient forum," the release said on Friday. "The move comes at a time when the NRA is in its strongest financial condition in years."

The NRA and one of its subsidiaries filed voluntary Chapter 11 petitions in the United States Bankruptcy Court for the Northern District of Texas, which is usual move utilized by businesses and organizations to streamline legal and financial affairs, the release said.

The NRA explained it will have a better opportunity for growth and progress in Texas, citing its reason to relocate is due to New York's "toxic political environment."

The release added that there will be no immediate changes to the NRA's operations or workforce.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

#### Facebook Blocking Creation of Events Close to White House, US Capitol Building - Statement

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - Facebook in a company statement said it is blocking users from creating events on its platform for gatherings near the White House, US Capitol and other state capitol buildings due to security concerns.

"We are blocking the creation of any new Facebook events happening in close proximity to locations including the White House, the US Capitol building and any of the state capitol buildings through Inauguration Day," the company said on Friday.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

## US Transportation Security Agency Says Raising Security Posture During Inauguration

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) said in a statement that it has significantly increased its "security posture" following last week's Capitol violence and ahead of Joe Biden's presidential inauguration.

"Currently, TSA is processing hundreds of names with law enforcement agencies for a thorough risk assessment. Our intelligence and vetting professionals are working diligently around the clock to ensure those who may pose a threat to our aviation sector undergo enhanced screening or are prevented from boarding an aircraft" the statement said on Friday.

As in prior inaugurations, TSA screening officers will also assist the Secret Service by "screening individuals along the parade route and those authorized to attend the inauguration in-person."

Beyond the inauguration grounds, TSA said it has implemented additional layers of security at all three Washington, DC-area airports," the statement said.

The measures includes deploying more law enforcement and explosives detection canine teams, random gate screening, increased number of Federal Air Marshals on certain flights and "additional Visible Intermodal Prevention and Response (VIPR) teams to provide greater security presence at certain rail transportation hubs."

The US authorities are deploying over 25,000 troops in Washington, DC - in addition to local police and federal law enforcement agencies - and are fencing off most of the city's downtown areas for Biden's inauguration.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

## Trump Directs Agencies to Propose Ways of Minimizing Procurement From China - White House

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump directed the federal government to come up with proposals that would reduce its dependence on Chinese goods and services, National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien announced.

"Trump directed departments and agencies to review applicable laws, regulations, and policies and to propose regulatory and policy changes, including potential executive actions, to minimize the procurement of People's Republic of China (PRC) goods and services by the Federal Government," O'Brien said in a statement on Friday.

He called for adjusting regulations and policies as well as taking other necessary actions to reduce the risk of Chinese "technical and human espionage activities directed at the Federal Government."

"Today, President Trump took another step to do just that," O'Brien said.

He repeated that China poses the single greatest national security threat to America as it sees the US as the main impediment to achieving its regional and global ambitions.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

#### **New York Attorney General Says Will Not Let NRA Use Bankruptcy to Evade Oversight**

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - New York Attorney General Letitia James said in a statement that her office will not allow the National Rifle Association (NRA) to use bankruptcy to evade oversight.

Last year, James filed a lawsuit to dissolve the NRA over alleged corruption in the organization. "The NRA's claimed financial status has finally met its moral status: bankrupt," James said on Friday. "While we review this filing, we will not allow the NRA to use this or any other tactic to evade accountability and my office's oversight."

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

#### **Pentagon Agrees to Provide 25,000 Troops for Biden Inauguration - Statement**

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - The US Defense Department said in a press release that it will provide 25,000 troops in Washington, DC to ensure security during the inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden next week.

"The Defense Department has agreed to provide up to 25,000 service members to support the Presidential Inauguration National Special Security Event federal law enforcement mission and security preparations, as led by the US Secret Service," the release said on Friday.

As of Thursday, there are currently 7,000 National Guard members in the US capital.

The FBI warned that it has seen activity online about armed protests being planned in DC and other state capitals in the coming days in response to President-elect Joe Biden's victory, many of them claiming the US election win was stolen from President Donald Trump.

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.

On January 6, pro-Trump supporters stormed Capitol Hill in bid to prevent Congress from approving the presidential election results. At least five were killed and some 170 cases have been opened by police in connection with the riots.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

#### **Anti-IS Fighter Arrested After Calls to Arms Against Pro-Trump Protest in Florida**

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - US law enforcement agents arrested an American, who fought in Syria against the Islamic State (a terrorist organization, banned in Russia) alongside Kurdish militias, after he called for an armed attack on protesters in the state of Florida, the Department of Justice announced.

"Federal law enforcement agents today arrested Daniel Baker of Tallahassee for transmission, in interstate commerce, of a communication containing a threat to kidnap or to injure. Baker issued a call to arms for like-minded individuals to violently confront protestors gathered at the Florida Capitol this Sunday," the statement said on Friday.

The Department of Justice added that Baker specifically called for others to join him in encircling any protesters - US President Donald Trump's loyalists, according to local media reports - and confining them at the state Capitol complex using firearms.

He is described as a former US Army Airborne infantryman who was kicked out of the service and in 2017 joined the People's Protection Units (YPG), a Kurdish group fighting in Syria against IS and the Turkish government.

"He claimed on social media that he was a trained sniper for the YPG, and he can be seen in a documentary film fighting IS and Turkish militants," the Department of Justice said.

It added that Baker actively participated in multiple protests throughout the US last summer and used social media "to promote, encourage, and educate his followers on how to incapacitate and debilitate law enforcement officers."

The Department of Justice said that Baker can be seen in photos and YouTube videos with a variety of firearms, including those with high-capacity magazines. Social media posts also show that he was attempting to purchase additional firearms.

US authorities warned of the possibility of armed protests in 50 US states and the District of Columbia ahead of Joe Biden's inauguration that is to take place two weeks after incumbent Donald Trump's loyalists violently stormed the Capitol in an attempt to prevent the Congressional certification of the election results.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

#### US Completes 5G Infrastructure Security Plan - White House

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - The Trump administration has completed its strategy for securing 5G infrastructure, White House National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien said in a statement.

"Today, the White House is announcing the finalization of the Implementation Plan associated with the National Strategy to Secure 5G," O'Brien said on Friday. "This Implementation Plan, approved by President Donald Trump, is the culmination of a robust interagency development process."

The plan aims to ensure secure, reliable, and trustworthy 5G infrastructure, O'Brien added. The plan serves as the framework for how the United States, in partnership with industry and international partners, will lead the way in the development, deployment, and management of secure and reliable 5G telecommunications infrastructure, the statement said.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

**Pentagon Agrees to Provide 25,000 Troops for Biden Inauguration - Statement**

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - The Defense Department said in a press release that it will provide 25,000 troops in Washington, DC to ensure security during the inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden next week,

"The Defense Department has agreed to provide up to 25,000 service members to support the Presidential Inauguration National Special Security Event federal law enforcement mission and security preparations, as led by the US Secret Service," the release said on Friday.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

**Biden Says Will Set Up 100 Coronavirus Vaccination Centers During First Month in Office**

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - US President-elect Joe Biden revealed his plan to set up 100 federally-supported coronavirus vaccination centers during the first month in office.

"By the end of our first month in office, we will have 100 federally supported centers across the nation that will ultimately vaccinate millions of people," Biden told reporters on Friday.

The United States needs to expand its vaccination network to inoculate more people and the government should establish thousands of centers for that purpose, Biden said.

"In my first day in office, I will struck the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to begin setting up the first of these centers," he said.

Biden warned that the United States remains in a "very dark winter" and things will get worse until they get better.

He repeated his plan to conduct 100 million vaccinations during his first 100 days in office, adding that vaccines give a hope in the fight against the coronavirus.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

**US National Rifle Association Says Plans to File for Bankruptcy - Statement**

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - The National Rifle Association (NRA) said in a statement that it will file for bankruptcy as part of its strategy to relocate its headquarters from the state of New York to Texas.

"The NRA plan, which involves utilizing the protection of the bankruptcy court, has the Association dumping New York and organizing its legal and regulatory matters in an efficient

forum," the release said on Friday. "The move comes at a time when the NRA is in its strongest financial condition in years."

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

**Biden Picks Geneticist Eric Lander to Head Science, Tech Policy Office - Transition Team**

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - US President-elect Joe Biden has nominated geneticist Eric Lander to be director of the Office of Science and Policy, Biden's transition team said in a statement.

"The president-elect wrote a letter to Dr. Eric Lander, the Presidential Science Advisor-designate and nominee for Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy, tasking him to work broadly and transparently with the diverse scientific leadership of American society and make recommendations on how the Biden-Harris administration can harness the full power of science and technology on behalf of the American people," the statement said on Friday.

Biden has elevated the position Science Advisor to the cabinet for the first time, the statement said.

The president-elect has also added several officials to different positions in this office and in the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST).

Lander is president of the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard and served as co-chair of PCAST during the Obama administration.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

**Biden Says Feels Safe Ahead of Inauguration Based on Intelligence**

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - US President-elect Joe Biden said in a press conference that he felt safe ahead of his inauguration on January 20 based on the intelligence information he has seen.

"Yes," Biden told reporters on Friday when asked whether he felt safe about the Inauguration Day.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

**Biden Says Will Set Up 100 Coronavirus Vaccination Centers During First Month in Office**

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - US President-elect Joe Biden revealed his plan to set up 100 federally-supported coronavirus vaccination centers during the first month in office.

"By the end of our first month in office, we will have 100 federally supported centers across the nation that will ultimately vaccinate millions of people," Biden told reporters on Friday.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY  
WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) -

#### RUSSIA WITHDRAWS FROM OPEN SKIES TREATY

- \* Russia is launching procedures for withdrawing from the Open Skies Treaty, the foreign ministry said on Friday.
- \* Russia began its withdrawal from the Open Skies Treaty because the situation was unbearable after the US quit the agreement, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.
- \* After Russia's decision on the Open Skies Treaty, NATO allies remain committed to dialogue with Russia on arms control, NATO deputy spokesperson Piers Cazalet told Sputnik.

#### TRUMP IMPEACHMENT

- \* The US House of Representatives will announce on January 18 when the chamber will submit the article of impeachment of President Donald Trump to the Senate, Speaker Nancy Pelosi told reporters on Friday.
- \* Less than 10 percent of Republicans support the impeachment and dismissal of US President Donald Trump, according to a fresh poll conducted by the NBC News broadcaster.

#### SECURITY MEASURES

- \* US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi on Friday said she asked retired Lt. Gen. Russel Honoré to explore details of the attack on the Capitol building in Washington, DC and the security infrastructure of the complex.
- \* The internal government watchdogs at the US Departments of Justice (DOJ), Defense, Homeland Security and the Interior are launching reviews to examine their preparedness and response to last week's violence at the Capitol, the DOJ Office of the Inspector General said in a statement.

#### NORD STREAM 2 DEVELOPMENTS

- \* The German government is ready to discuss the problematic of US sanctions targeting the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project with the new US presidential administration, German Foreign Affairs Minister Heiko Maas said on Friday.
- \* The German Federal Maritime and Hydrographic Agency said it was extending to May the permit for pipelay works for constructing the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, expected to carry up to 1.942 trillion cubic feet of gas per year from Russia to Germany.
- \* The operator of the Nord Stream 2 project will decide this or next month when to resume laying pipes, a company representative told Handelsblatt newspaper.

#### PALESTINE ELECTIONS

\* Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas issued a decree on Friday to hold general elections for the first time in 15 years, state-run news agency WAFA reported.

#### NEW US SANCTIONS AGAIN IRAN

\* The United State has imposed additional sanctions on Iran's Marine, Aerospace and Aviation Industries Organizations over their alleged role in a conventional arms proliferation, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced in a statement on Friday.

\* The United States has designated seven entities and two individuals for allegedly flouting US sanctions against the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines, Pompeo announced.

#### US TROOPS WITHDRAWAL FROM IRAQ, AFGHANISTAN

\* The Pentagon has fully carried out US President Donald Trump's order to draw down troops in Afghanistan and Iraq, and now has just 2,500 soldiers stationed in each country, Acting Secretary of Defense Christopher Miller said in a pair of statements on Friday.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

#### Senate Panel Asks US Intel Chief for Briefing on Foreign Efforts to Disrupt Inauguration

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - The Heads of the US Senate Intelligence committee in a letter on Friday asked Director of National Intelligence John Ratcliffe to report on efforts by foreign actors to disrupt the inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden.

"Dear Director Ratcliffe... please update the Committee on all intelligence related to efforts by foreign actors to disrupt the inauguration," Senators Marco Rubio and Mark Warner, chair and vice chair of the panel, wrote. "Please describe the process by which this reporting will be shared with federal, state, and local stakeholders."

The lawmakers requested information in the wake of last week's riots on Capitol Hill, which pro-Trump supporters stormed in a bid to prevent Congress from approving the results of the presidential election.

"In light of the recent violence at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, we request that you provide the Committee with a detailed description of how the Intelligence Community (IC) is supporting relevant customers in the Congress, Executive Branch, and state and local law enforcement in preparation for the inauguration," the letter said.

Rubio and Warner also asked what products and briefings the DNI intended to issue to provide indications and warning of any potential unrest, whether foreign or domestic in origin, before and during the inauguration.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

## New COVID-19 Strain Found in UK to Become Dominant US Variant by March - CDC Projection

WASHINGTON, January 15 - The new coronavirus strain found in the United Kingdom is expected to become the dominant var in the United States by March, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said in a projection published on Friday.

"The modeled trajectory of this variant in the US exhibits rapid growth in early 2021, becoming the predominant variant in March," the CDC said of the B.1.1.7. coronavirus strain that had already infected some 76 people in ten US states.

The new strain, which scientists say is more transmissible, was first detected in the United Kingdom in September. It has spread to at least 35 other countries so far, accelerating new lockdowns in Europe.

The CDC said there was no known difference in the clinical outcomes associated with the different coronavirus variants.

However, the CDC also said "a higher rate of transmission will lead to more cases, increasing the number of persons overall who need clinical care, exacerbating the burden on an already strained health care system, and resulting in more deaths." and "the increased transmissibility of this variant requires an even more rigorous combined implementation of vaccination and mitigation measures."

The United States has reported more than 23 million positive cases since January and nearly 390,000 deaths related to the virus.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

## US Vice President Barely Escaped Capitol Rioters Last Week - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - US Vice President Mike Pence was on the Senate floor when protesters were already pouring into the Capitol building during the riot on June 6, the Washington Post reported on Friday.

Pence, his wife and daughter were not evacuated by the Secret Service for about 14 minutes after initial reports of the attempted breach of the Capitol building by a group of President Donald Trump's supporters, the report said. The group sought to protest the lawmakers certifying electoral slates from battleground US states that Trump claims are invalid and have robbed him of election victory. Five people died in the ensuing unrest, including an Air Force veteran who was shot by police.

"Pence and his family had just ducked into a hideaway less than 100 feet from that landing," the report said citing three sources familiar with his whereabouts. "If the pro-Trump mob had arrived seconds earlier, the attackers would have been in eyesight of the vice president as he was rushed across a reception hall into the office."

Pence was denounced as traitor by many of the protesters after presiding over the Congressional ceremony and resisting Trump's pleas to return the questionable electoral slates, and therefore the Trump supporter's proximity was perilous for the Vice President, according the report.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US Imposes Hong Kong-Related Sanctions on 3 Chinese, 3 Special Region Officials - Treasury \

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed sanctions on three Chinese and three Hong Kong officials in relation to a crackdown on protesters in the special administrative region on January 6 that led to more than 50 arrests, the Treasury Department said in a notice on Friday.

You Quan, the Vice Chairman of the Central Leading Group on Hong Kong and Macau Affairs, Sun Wenqing, the Deputy Director of the Office for Safeguarding National Security in Hong Kong and Tam Yiu-Chung, Hong Kong delegate to the National People's Congress Standing Committee as well as three Hong Kong security officials were designated by the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC).

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, in a statement, condemned the arrests and called on authorities in China and Hong Kong to release the detainees, while vowing to hold those alleged to have orchestrated the crackdown to account.

On January 6, Police in Hong Kong on Wednesday detained over 50 high-profile anti-Beijing activists and politicians, including one US national, in early morning raids. According to South China Morning Post, all former Democratic opposition lawmakers - who resigned in protest in November - were arrested along with high-profile political organizers who took part in last July's primary runoff effort to elect anti-Beijing candidates to the Legislative Council.

Beijing has expressed its support for the Hong Kong Police and has slammed Washington for what it says is a double standard in how the unrest in Hong Kong and at the US Capitol were perceived.

Frederic Choi Chin-Pang, Kelvin Kong Hok Lai, and Andrew Kan Kai Yan, officials in the National Security Division of the Hong Kong Police were also sanctioned by the OFAC, the notice said.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Guterres Picks Slovakia's Kubis as UN Special Envoy for Libya - Letter to Security Council

UNITED NATIONS, January 15 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in a letter to the Security Council, seen by Sputnik, said he intends to nominate Jan Kubis, the Special Coordinator for Lebanon and former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Slovakia, to serve as his new Special Envoy for Libya.

"I would like to inform you of my intention to appoint Mr. Jan Kubis (Slovakia) as my Special Envoy on Libya and Head of UNSMIL," Guterres said in the letter dated January 13. "He

succeeds Ms. Stephanie T. Williams (United States), who has served as my Acting Special Representative since 16 March 2020."

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Washington Mayor Says City Going Back to 'New Normal' After Special Security Event Period

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - Washington, DC will go back to a "new normal" after the national special security event (NSSE) period, Mayor Muriel Bowser told reporters on Friday. "I think that we are going back to a new normal," Bowser said. "I think that our entire country has to deal with how our intelligence apparatus, security apparatus at every level deal with a very real and present threat to our nation."

Bowser pointed out that the January 6 incident at the US Capitol have been a catalyst to start thinking about what she termed should be "a new posture" in Washington, DC.

"So, while we are focused on January 20, we are also focused on January 21 and every day thereafter in the nation's Capitol," Bowser said referring to the date of President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration and beyond.

The inauguration ceremony itself will be devoid of public attendance and much of Washington DC's monuments and squares will be closed off.

More than 7,000 National Guard troops have been deployed in the city since the January 6 incident at the US Capitol building. Some 2,000 troops have been tasked with overseeing security at the Biden's inauguration while the rest will also assist local law enforcement throughout the Washington, DC area.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

New York City Will Run Out of COVID Vaccines by Next Week - Mayor

NEW YORK, January 15 (Sputnik) - New York City will run out of COVID-19 vaccines by next week unless the federal government and others in the supply chain dramatically change their approach to meet demand, Mayor Bill de Blasio said on Friday.

"Since a month ago when we got the vaccines, some 300,000 New Yorkers have been vaccinated and this number is going up very quickly," de Blasio told the WNYC radio station in an interview. "At the rate we're going, there will not be any doses left in the city of New York by the end of next week. That would be insane after all the progress has been made setting up a system, so people could actually get appointments."

Mount Sinai Hospital and NYU Langone Health are at least two medical centers in New York City that have already stopped taking appointments for coronavirus vaccinations, de Blasio said. "We've been getting resupply right now at a very paltry level of about a 100,000 doses a week. I am telling you that we went through a 125,000 in the first four days of this week. We will run out

of vaccines by next week in New York City if there's not a very different approach from the federal government, Albany and the vaccine makers," he said.

Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, the two coronavirus vaccine makers whose doses have so far been authorized by world health bodies for emergency distribution, have reported manufacturing challenges after initially promising hundreds of millions of shots in 2021. Both companies have COVID-19 vaccines that need deep-freeze storage conditions and require at least two doses per person to be effective.

Johnson & Johnson, which has developed a one-dose vaccine that does not need deep freezing conditions, says it was working on bringing less than 10 million doses to the market by the second-half of February.

The logistics for vaccine supply have so far been coordinated by the Trump administration's Operation Warp Speed program, with each state capital — in New York state's case, Albany — responsible for their own on-ground distribution.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

#### UNGA President Says Looks Forward to Cooperating With Biden, Seeking Better Solutions

UNITED NATIONS, January 15 (Sputnik) - UN General Assembly President Volkan Bozkir said in a press briefing on Friday that he looks forward to cooperating closely with the incoming US administration of President-elect Joe Biden and exploring better solutions to global challenges. "I look forward to close cooperation between the General Assembly and the incoming US administration," Bozkir said. "Perhaps, we will have, in many cases, better solutions to problems and new methodology in dealing with problems."

In the months ahead, Bozkir and the Biden administration will have an opportunity to work together in a number of events scheduled for the remainder of the General Assembly's 75th session, including the second special session to discuss threats posed by corruption, scheduled for June.

In September, Bozkir said the UN General Assembly will hold a high-level dialogue on energy at a summit level and convene a thematic debate on digital technologies and connectivity. The UN General Assembly will also organize a high-level meeting on HIV/AIDS and the high-level thematic debate on urban safety, security and good governance, among other meetings planned for 2021, Bozkir added.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

#### Two Small Rallies to Be Permitted in DC During Inauguration - Official

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - US authorities will permit two small and heavily guarded rallies on Joe Biden's Inauguration Day next Wednesday in downtown Washington, DC, which is

on a lockdown for the event, the National Mall and Memorial Parks Superintendent Jeffrey Reinbold told reporters.

"We had several groups that had submitted First Amendment applications and we were able to identify two locations on Pennsylvania Avenue where up to 100 people will be able to gather," Reinbold said during a press briefing.

He added that activists will be escorted through magnetometers and then taken to permitted areas and backed by US Park Police, who will also accompany them throughout the event.

"Locations are at the Navy memorial and John Marshall park," Reinbold said. He could not specify who filed applications for the rallies.

US authorities are deploying up to 20,000 National Guard soldiers in Washington, DC and fencing off most of the downtown for Biden's inauguration that is to take place two weeks after incumbent Donald Trump's loyalists violently stormed the Capitol in an attempt to prevent the Congressional certification of the election results.

A Secret Service representative said at the briefing that he is not aware if any of the radical groups are going to protest during the inauguration, but vowed to prepare "as if they are."

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

**Pence Calls Harris to Congratulate Her, Offer Assistance - Reports**

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - US Vice President Mike Pence called Vice President-elect Kamala Harris, the Associated Press said on Friday.

Pence congratulated Harris on the election victory and offered her assistance, the report said, citing sources.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

**New COVID-19 Strain Found in UK to Become Dominant US Variant by March - CDC Projection**

WASHINGTON, January 15 - The New COVID-19 strain found in the United Kingdom is expected to become the dominant variant of the coronavirus in the United States by March, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said in a projection published on Friday.

"The modeled trajectory of this variant in the US exhibits rapid growth in early 2021, becoming the predominant variant in March," the CDC said of the so-called B.1.1.7 strain that had already infected some 76 people in 10 US states by January 13.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

## UNGA High-Level Week in September Likely to Be Held in Online Format - President

UNITED NATIONS, January 15 (Sputnik) - The 76th session of the UN General Assembly in September will likely be held in an online format due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, President Volkan Bozkir said in a press briefing on Friday.

"My personal feeling is that we will have to continue like what we have now in hand," Bozkir said. "I don't think we can see a September week where 10,000 people are in the building." Bozkir added that certain meetings of the General Assembly might see in-person participation of high-level officials.

The 75th session of the UN General Assembly in 2020, for the first time, was held in an online format due to health concerns caused by the spread of the coronavirus.

Instead of traveling to the UN headquarters in New York and delivering their statements in-person from the General Assembly hall, world leaders did so in an online format through pre-recorded video messages.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

## UN Chief Urges World to Act With 'Greater' Solidarity As COVID-19 Death Toll Hits 2Mln

UNITED NATIONS, January 15 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for the world to act with greater solidarity as the confirmed death toll from the coronavirus pandemic rose above 2 million on Friday.

"Our world has reached a heart-wrenching milestone: the COVID-19 pandemic has now claimed 2 million lives," Guterres said in a video message. "Sadly, the deadly impact of the pandemic has been made worse by the absence of a global coordinated effort. In the memory of those two million souls, the world must act with far greater solidarity."

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

## US House Speaker Asks Ex-General to Review US Capitol Security Infrastructure

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi on Friday said she asked retired Lt. Gen. Russel Honore to explore details of the attack on the Capitol building in Washington, DC and the the security infrastructure of the complex.

"We must subject this whole complex to scrutiny in light of what happened and the fact that the inauguration is coming," Pelosi said during a press briefing. "To this end, I have asked retired Lt. Gen. Russel Honore to lead an immediate review of security infrastructure, interagency processes and command and control."

Honore worked as a vice director of the operation within Joint Chiefs of Staff, and lead recovery efforts after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, she added.

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.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US Sanctions Cuba's Interior Ministry - Treasury

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed Global Magnitsky sanctions against the Cuban Interior Ministry and its chief over human rights abuses, the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) said in a notice on Friday. "Today, the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated the Cuban Ministry of Interior and the Minister of Interior, Lazaro Alberto Alvarez Casas, for serious human rights abuse, pursuant to Executive Order (E.O.) 13818, which builds upon and implements the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act and targets perpetrators of serious human rights abuse and corruption around the world," Treasury said in a statement.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in a statement accused the Cuban Interior Ministry of overseeing the torture of political prisoners.

Pompeo also called on the international community to demand accountability of the Cuban government over human rights abuses.

Relations between the United States and Cuba have soured under the Trump administration. President Donald Trump recently restored Cuba to a list of state sponsors of terrorism. Cuba was removed from the list by President Barack Obama in 2015, when he began to normalize relations with the island, but Trump cut off the rapprochement as soon as he took office in 2017.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US Imposes Hong Kong-Related Sanctions on 3 Chinese, 3 Special Region Residents - Treasury

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed sanctions on three Chinese and three Hong Kong officials in relation to crackdown on protesters in the special administrative region on January 6 that led to more than 50 arrests, the Treasury Department said in a notice on Friday.

You Quan, the Vice Chairman of the Central Leading Group on Hong Kong and Macau Affairs, Sun Wenqing, the Deputy Director of the Office for Safeguarding National Security in Hong

Kong and Tam Yiu-Chung, Hong Kong delegate to the National People's Congress Standing Committee as well as three officials in the National Security Division of the Hong Kong Police have been designated by the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC).

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US House Timeline for Sending Impeachment Article to Senate to Be Revealed Monday - Pelosi

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - US House of Representatives will announce on January 18 when the chamber will submit the article of impeachment of President Donald Trump to the Senate, Speaker Nancy Pelosi told reporters on Friday.

"We are working on taking this to trial, and on Monday you will be the first to know when we announce that we are going over there," Pelosi said.

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.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US Sanctions 7 Entities, 2 Persons Over Alleged Ties to Iran Shipping Entities - Pompeo

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - The United States has designated seven entities and two individuals for allegedly flouting US sanctions against the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced in a statement on Friday.

"In June 2020, the State Department sanctioned the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (IRISL) pursuant to Executive Order 13382 (WMD Proliferators and Their Supporters)," Pompeo said. "We have warned industry that those who do business with IRISL, its subsidiaries, and other Iranian shipping entities, risk sanctions. Today, we are sanctioning seven entities and two individuals for such conduct."

Pompeo noted that the State Department is sanctioning IRISL under the Iran Freedom and Counter-Proliferation Act.

"IRISL knowingly transferred, directly or indirectly, to Iran grain-oriented electrical steel to at least one Iranian person on the List of Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons maintained by the Office of Foreign Assets Control of the Department of the Treasury (SDN List), namely Hoopad Darya Shipping Agency Company (and thus this grain-oriented electrical steel was transferred to Hoopad Darya Shipping Agency Company)," he said.

Pompeo explained that the sanctions also target IRISL CEO Mohammad Reza Modarres Khiabani.

In addition, Pompeo said Department sanctioned Jiangyin Mascot Special Steel Co., LTD for knowingly transferring grain-oriented electrical steel to Iran via the IRISL.

"The State Department is also designating Iran Transfo Company and Zangan Distribution Transformer Company pursuant to IFCA Section 1245(a)(1)(C)(i)(II)," Pompeo said. "Both of these entities knowingly transferred (imported), directly or indirectly, to Iran grain-oriented electrical steel to at least one Iranian person on the SDN List, namely Hoopad Darya Shipping Agency Company (and thus this grain-oriented electrical steel was transferred to Hoopad Darya Shipping Agency Company)."

The latest designations targets include the UAE-based Accenture Building Materials, Iran's Mobarakeh Steel Company and the IRISL subsidiary Sapid Shipping, he said.

In June, Pompeo announced that the United States has activated the sanctions it had prepared against IRISL for allegedly carrying cargoes of weapons of mass destruction. Imposing sanctions was then delayed for 180 days in order to allow exporters of humanitarian goods to Iran sufficient time to find alternate shipping methods.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US Shifts Israel From European Command to Central Command Covering Mideast - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - The US military is shifting coverage and protection of Israel from its European Command (EUCOM) to Central Command (CENTCOM) which already covers the rest of the Middle East, the Department of Defense announced in a statement on Friday.

"The United States has made a change to the Unified Command Plan (UCP)," the statement said. "The 2020 UCP shifts Israel from the US European Command area of responsibility (AOR) to the US Central Command area of responsibility."

The Defense Department reviews the UCP every two years and reassesses all boundaries and relationships against the operational environment, the statement noted.

"The easing of tensions between Israel and its Arab neighbors subsequent to the Abraham Accords has provided a strategic opportunity for the United States to align key partners against shared threats in the Middle East. Israel is a leading strategic partner for the United States, and this will open up additional opportunities for cooperation," it said.

The United States will also continue to maintain strong cooperation between Israel and Washington's European allies, the Defense Department added.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US Sanctions Cuba's Interior Ministry - Treasury

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed Global Magnitsky sanctions against the Cuban Interior Ministry and its chief over human rights abuses, the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) said in a notice on Friday. "Today, the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated the Cuban Ministry of Interior and the Minister of Interior, Lazaro Alberto Alvarez Casas, for serious human rights abuse, pursuant to Executive Order (E.O.) 13818, which builds upon and implements the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act and targets perpetrators of serious human rights abuse and corruption around the world," Treasury said in a statement.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US National Mall Closed Until at Least January 21 for Biden Inauguration - Park Service

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) -The US government is closing the National Mall in Washington, DC until after the inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden next Wednesday, the National Park Service announced in a news release on Friday.

"The National Park Service, at the request of and in cooperation with the United States Secret Service, will implement a temporary public closure of the National Mall beginning at 11 am on Friday, January 15 and extending through at least Thursday, January 21," the release said. Activities of the presidential inauguration and permitted First Amendment activities in designated locations will be allowed and areas near the US Navy.

Memorial and John Marshall Park have been designated as demonstration areas for those holding permits, the NPS said.

"Demonstrations will be limited in number and participants will be screened prior to entry and escorted to their permitted location, in addition to other safety related requirements. Only those holding permits will be allowed within the closed area," the release said.

The closure has been ordered to ensure safety and security within the area of the National Special Security Event designated by the Department of Homeland Security for the presidential inauguration, the release added.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Canada's Energy Sector Declines Additional 3% in Q3 - Statistics Canada

TORONTO, January 15 (Sputnik) - Canada's energy sector declined by an additional 3 percent in the third quarter of 2020, Statistics Canada said in a report on Friday following two consecutive quarters of losses.

"A 3.0 percent decline in the energy subsector was attributable in large part to decreased extractions of crude oil (-3.9%) and natural gas (-6.8%) for three consecutive quarters," said the Natural resource indicators report.

Overall, the natural resource sector, for the first time since the second quarter of 2019, did not record a loss in real gross domestic product (GDP) - growing by 0.3 percent - in the third quarter of 2020.

According to Canada's state statistics agency, employment grew by 2.5 percent after falling for five consecutive quarters, including 8.4 percent in the second quarter of 2020.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

#### UN Expert Urges Accountability for Human Rights Violations in CAR - Statement

UNITED NATIONS, January 15 (Sputnik) - UN independent expert on the human rights situation in the Central African Republic (CAR) Yao Agbetse urged in a statement on Friday conducting investigations into violence surrounding the last month's presidential election in in the Central African Republic and prosecute those responsible for human right violations to prevent further conflict.

"I urge MINUSCA [UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic], the Special Criminal Court (SPC) and the International Criminal Court (ICC) to promptly investigate serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed by the CPC and other armed groups," Agbetse said. "Without a strong message combined with deterrent actions, including coercion where appropriate, the worst could happen: the implosion of the country and massive violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law."

The expert also called on the UN Security Council and the CAR Sanctions Committee to draw the consequences of the obstruction by the Coalition of Patriots for Change rebels of the country's electoral campaign in December and conducted attacks that resulted in the loss of life among the civilian population and MINUSCA peacekeepers.

Agbetse condemned the support of former CAR President Francois Bozize to the CPC and deplored the incitement of violence and obstruction of the electoral process by the former head of state.

He also called on the global community to wean the armed groups off any weapons supplies and urged the CAR government to promote an inclusive political dialogue.

The CAR held general elections on December 27. The week before the election saw violence between the forces backing incumbent President Faustin Archange Touadera and supporters of Bozize. Touadera won a second term, but the outcome of the election still needs to be certified by the republic's Constitutional Court.

On January 4, the CPC that supported Bozize took control of Bangassou some 750 kilometers away from their target Bangui. Almost 60,000 people were forced to flee the CAR due to election-related violence, according to the UN Refugee Agency.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US Sanctions 7 Entities, 2 Persons Over Alleged Ties to Iran Shipping Entities - Pompeo  
WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - The United States has designated seven entities and two individuals for allegedly flouting US sanctions against the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced in a statement on Friday.

"In June 2020, the State Department sanctioned the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (IRISL) pursuant to Executive Order 13382 (WMD Proliferators and Their Supporters)," Pompeo said. "We have warned industry that those who do business with IRISL, its subsidiaries, and other Iranian shipping entities, risk sanctions. Today, we are sanctioning seven entities and two individuals for such conduct."

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US Sanctions Iran's Marine, Aerospace, Aviation Industries Organizations - Pompeo

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - The United State has imposed additional sanctions on Iran's Marine, Aerospace and Aviation Industries Organizations over their alleged role in a conventional arms proliferation, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced in a statement on Friday.

"Today, we are announcing the designation of Iran's Marine Industries Organization (MIO), Aerospace Industries Organization (AIO), and the Iran Aviation Industries Organization (IAIO) for engaging in activities that materially contribute to the supply, sale, or transfer, directly or indirectly, to or from Iran, or for the use in or benefit of Iran, of arms or related materiel, including spare parts," Pompeo said.

He alleged that each of these entities manufactures lethal military equipment for Iran's military, including the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), designated in the US as a foreign terrorist organization.

"This military equipment, which includes attack boats, missiles, and combat drones, provides a means for the Iranian regime to perpetrate its global terror campaign," Pompeo said.

MIO, AIO, and IAIO were all previously sanctioned in the US pursuant to the weapons of mass destruction counterproliferation authority.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Canada Could See More Than 100,000 New Coronavirus Cases by January 24 - Modeling

TORONTO, January 15 (Sputnik) - Canada could see upwards of 100,000 new coronavirus cases and 2,000 virus-related deaths in the next nine days, health officials warned in an updated epidemiology and modeling report revealed on Friday.

The number of confirmed infections will range between 752,400 to 796,630, while the number of deaths is expected to fall in the 18,570 to 19,630 range by January 24, the Public Health Agency of Canada said.

Officials are also warning of an impending hospital bed shortage should the situation not improve, with the data showing that a host jurisdictions have far exceeded the hospitalization rates seen during the first wave of the pandemic.

The agency projects that if current trends hold, the country could see the daily case counts exceed 10,000 in February up from an average of 7,700 this week.

As of Friday, Canada's public health agency has reported over 690,000 confirmed cases of the disease and more than 17,500 virus-related fatalities.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Trump Approval Rating Plunges to New Low of 29% After Capitol Riot - Poll

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump's approval rating has crashed to an all-time low of 29 percent following the storming of the Capitol last week by his supporters and two-thirds of Americans do not want him to remain in public life, a new Pew opinion poll revealed on Friday.

"About two-thirds (68 percent) say Trump should not continue to be a major national political figure for many years to come; just 29 percent say he should remain a major figure in US politics," the Pew Research Center said in a statement about the poll. "Donald Trump is leaving the White House with the lowest job approval of his presidency."

By contrast, as President-elect Joe Biden prepares to take office just days after the riot inside the US Capitol, 64 percent of voters expressed a positive opinion of his conduct since he won the November election. And majorities also approved of Biden's Cabinet selections and how he has explained his plans and policies for the future, Pew said.

Even Trump voters have grown more critical of their candidate's post-election conduct, Pew found. "The share of his supporters who describe his conduct as poor has doubled over the past two months, from 10 percent to 20 percent," it said.

The new survey by Pew Research Center was conducted from January 8 to January 12 among 5,360 US adults, including 4,040 who say they voted in the presidential election, finds that a sizable majority of Americans do not want Trump to remain a major political figure after he leaves office.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

### US Retail Sales Down 3rd Straight Month - Commerce Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - US retail sales fell for a third straight month in December, with merchants netting 0.7 percent, or nearly \$550 billion, less sales than in November, the Commerce Department said in a statement on Friday.

"Advance estimates of US retail and food services sales for December 2020, adjusted for seasonal variation and holiday and trading-day differences, but not for price changes, were \$540.9 billion, a decrease of 0.7 percent from the previous month," the statement said. Economists polled by US media had expected December retail sales to be unchanged at least compared to November, on the assumption that last-minute promotional pushes could have saved the month for businesses.

But the impact of the increased number of coronavirus cases and the continuing restrictive measures had proven greater as they limited traditional year-end shopping and dining out. "Faced with rising transmission of the virus, state restrictions on retailers and heightened political and economic uncertainty, consumers chose to spend on gifts that lifted the spirits of their families and friends and provided a sense of normalcy given the challenging year," Matthew Shay, president and CEO of the National Retail Federation, said in a statement.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

### Pfizer Vaccine Deliveries to Canada to Slow Amid Production Retooling in Europe - Minister

TORONTO, January 15 (Sputnik) - Pfizer will curtail deliveries of its COVID-19 vaccine to Canada amid production restructuring at its European facility, Public Services and Procurement Minister Anita Anand told reporters on Friday.

"Due to work to expand its European manufacturing capacity, production of the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine will be impacted for a short period. This expansion work means Pfizer is temporarily reducing deliveries to all countries receiving vaccines manufactured at its European facility. And that includes Canada," Anand said.

Canada receives its vaccine supplies from Pfizer's European production facility after US President Donald Trump signed an executive order to prioritize domestic distribution of COVID-19 vaccines over their shipments to foreign countries.

However, Anand did assure reporters that the vaccine delivery slowdown will not impact Ottawa's goal of completing the vaccination campaign by September.

The news is a further blow to Canada's vaccination efforts, which have already been the subject of strong criticism, with the latest data showing that only 460,000 doses have been administered to date – far below other nations, including Israel, Russia and the United States.

On Thursday, the country's vaccine distribution czar Maj. Gen. Dany Fortin conceded that Canada will likely experience a shortage of COVID-19 vaccine doses through to the end of the first quarter of 2021.

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

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

#### US Watchdogs Initiate Review of Major Departments' Response to Capitol Riots

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - The internal government watchdogs at the US Departments of Justice (DOJ), Defense, Homeland Security and the Interior are launching reviews to examine their preparedness and response to last week's violence at the Capitol, the DOJ OIG said in a statement on Friday.

"The DOJ Office of the Inspector General (OIG) is initiating a review to examine the role and activity of DOJ and its components in preparing for and responding to the events at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021," the statement said.

The DOJ OIG vowed to coordinate its review with separate investigations "also being conducted by the Offices of Inspector General of the Department of Defense, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of the Interior."

The Department of Defense (DoD) OIG said that it plans to begin "a multidisciplinary review" in January. "Our objective is to determine the DoD's roles, responsibilities, and actions to prepare for, and respond to, the planned protest and its aftermath at the US Capitol campus on January 6, 2021," the statement said.

Last week, a group of supporters of President Donald Trump stormed the Capitol building in a bid to protest lawmakers certifying election slates from battleground US states the president claims are invalid and 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 and Trump supporter who was shot by police. The US House of Representatives impeached Trump on Wednesday over incitement of insurrection.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

#### US Force Levels in Afghanistan, Iraq Down to 2,500 Each - Acting Defense Secretary

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - The Pentagon has fully carried out US President Donald Trump's order to draw down troops in Afghanistan and Iraq, and now has just 2,500 soldiers stationed in each country, Acting Secretary of Defense Christopher Miller said in a pair of statements on Friday.

"Today, US force levels in Afghanistan have reached 2,500. Directed by President Trump, and as I announced on November 17, this drawdown brings US forces in the country to their lowest

levels since 2001," Miller said. "Today, the United States has reduced the force levels in Iraq to 2,500 as directed by President Trump."

Miller said the Pentagon continues to press ahead with plans to reduce US troop levels in Afghanistan to zero by May of 2021, but added that "such future drawdowns remain conditions-base."

The troop reductions come despite the fact that the US Congress earlier this month passed legislation to prevent the planned withdrawal of soldiers from Afghanistan. The 2021 National Defense Authorization Act passed earlier in January prohibits the use of Defense Department funds for any drawdowns in the country until Congress receives a report assessing the effect of such a pullout.

Miller in his statements argued that the United States does not need more than 2,500 commanders to protect its interests in Afghanistan. He also stressed that the reduction demonstrates Washington's support to the peace process and to its commitments under the US-Taliban deal.

"All sides must demonstrate their commitment to advancing the peace process. Further, the United States will continue to take any action necessary to ensure protection of our homeland, our citizens and our interest," he said.

In a separate statement on troop reductions in Iraq, Miller pointed out that the drawdown is consistent with Operation Inherent Resolve's transition from major combat operations and does not change US policy.

He also vowed that US and Coalition troops would remain in Iraq to ensure the enduring defeat of Islamic State (banned in Russia).

"We will continue to have a counter-terrorism platform in Iraq to support partner forces with airpower and intelligence," he said. "Most operations in Iraq were already being conducted by our Iraqi partners, enabled by US and Coalition forces. We can continue to provide this support to our Iraqi partners at the reduced US force level."

In early November, Miller announced plans to reduce by January 15 the number of US troops in Afghanistan and Iraq to 2,500 in each country.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

#### US Watchdogs Initiate Review of Major Departments' Response to Capitol Riots

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - The internal government watchdogs at the US Departments of Justice, Defense, Homeland Security and the Interior are launching reviews to examine their preparedness and response to last week's violence at the Capitol, the DOJ OIG said in a statement on Friday.

"The DOJ Office of the Inspector General (OIG) is initiating a review to examine the role and activity of DOJ and its components in preparing for and responding to the events at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021," the statement said.

The DOJ OIG vowed to coordinate its review with separate investigations "also being conducted by the Offices of Inspector General of the Department of Defense, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of the Interior."

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US Force Levels in Afghanistan, Iraq Down to 2,500 Each - Acting Defense Secretary

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - The Pentagon has fully carried out US President Donald Trump's order to draw down troops in Afghanistan and Iraq, and now has just 2,500 soldiers stationed in each country, Acting Secretary of Defense Christopher Miller said in a pair of statements on Friday.

"Today, US force levels in Afghanistan have reached 2,500. Directed by President Trump, and as I announced on November 17, this drawdown brings US forces in the country to their lowest levels since 2001," Miller said. "Today, the United States has reduced the force levels in Iraq to 2,500 as directed by President Trump."

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Biden Picks Ex-FDA Chief Kessler as Top Science Officer for COVID-19 Response - Transition

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - President-elect Joe Biden has selected David Kessler, who ran the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for Presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton, as his chief science officer of COVID-19 response to oversee vaccine safety and production, the Biden-Harris transition team said in a press release on Friday.

"David Kessler who serves as a co-chair of the COVID-19 Task Force for President-elect Joe Biden, was the Commissioner of the FDA from 1990 to 1997, under Presidents George H W Bush and Bill Clinton. ... (He) has also served as the dean of the medical schools at Yale and UCSF [University of California, San Francisco]," the release said.

Biden also named Amy Chang as policy adviser on the COVID-19 response, Yale Professor of Law Abbe Gluck as special counsel for the response team and Rosa Po, a previous policy adviser to Senator Amy Klobuchar as deputy chief of staff of the group, the transition team said. The COVID-19 Response Team will also include Andy Slavitt who ran the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services under President Barack Obama as senior adviser to the COVID Response Coordinator and former Obama health policy adviser Vidur Sharma as policy adviser for testing, the team said.

Biden also named Ben Wakana as deputy director of strategic communications and B. Cameron Webb as a senior policy adviser on the COVID-19 Response Team, the release added.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Biden Taps Former CIA Deputy Cohen to Return to Same Role at Agency - Transition Office  
WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - President-elect Joe Biden has chosen former CIA Deputy Director David Cohen for the same role in his incoming administration and picked Deanne Criswell to head the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), his transition team said in a press release on Friday.

"David S. Cohen is a national security, finance and legal expert currently leading Wilmer Hale's Business and Financial Integrity Group," the release said. "From 2015 to 2017, Cohen served as Deputy Director of the CIA. In that role, Cohen helped manage the Agency's domestic and worldwide operations."

Prior to serving with the CIA, Cohen held the post of Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence at the Treasury Department, where he oversaw the imposition of sanctions against Russia, Iran and North Korea, among others, the release noted.

Biden meanwhile picked New York Emergency Department Commissioner Criswell as administrator of FEMA, an agency where she previously served for six years.

"Criswell worked at FEMA from 2011 to 2017 where she held the roles of Federal Coordinating Officer and National Incident Management Team Lead," the release said.

Biden also named Janet McCabe as his nominee for deputy administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Shalanda Young as deputy director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and Jason Miller, as OMB deputy director for management at the Office of Management and Budget, the release said.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

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

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik) - Russian-born artist Andrei Molodkin told Sputnik on 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.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

**RPT - Charges in Michigan Water Crisis Long Overdue as Dying, Suffering Continues - Activists**

WASHINGTON, January 15 (Sputnik), Barrington M. Salmon - 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 "Tricey" 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.