

02/08/21 Monday

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.

Secretary Pete Buttigieg to Quarantine After Security Member Tests Positive for COVID-19 by [Mary F.](#)

Peter Buttigieg, an American politician and former US Navy intelligence officer, has been serving as the US Secretary of Transportation since February 3, 2021. Buttigieg previously served as the 32nd mayor of South Bend, Indiana, from 2012 to 2020.

In a Monday statement, the US Department of Transportation confirmed that its secretary, Pete Buttigieg, will quarantine for 14 days after an unidentified member of Buttigieg's security detail tested positive for COVID-19 Monday morning.

"Secretary Buttigieg underwent routine PCR testing for COVID-19 this morning and COVID-19 was not detected, nor has the secretary showed any symptoms," read the statement.

"Secretary Buttigieg will take any necessary steps to ensure there is no spread, including quarantining for a period of 14 days, and will continue to follow all other CDC guidelines," the statement added, noting that the Transportation Secretary received his first vaccine dose in recent weeks.

The Department of Transportation has also "initiated contact tracing protocols" for any staff members that may have been in contact with the exposed individual.

According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), anyone who is exposed to someone with COVID-19 should self-quarantine for 14 days; it can take up to 14 days after exposure to the virus to develop symptoms.

"A negative result before [the] end of the 14-day quarantine period does not rule out possible infection. By self-quarantining for 14 days, you lower the chance of possibly exposing others to COVID-19," the CDC outlines on [its website](#).

"The best way to protect yourself and others is to stay home for 14 days if you think you've been exposed to someone who has COVID-19. Check your local health department's website for information about options in your area to possibly shorten this quarantine period," the CDC adds.

Buttigieg was tapped by US President Joe Biden as the head of the US Transportation Department in November.

"The first openly gay major presidential candidate in American history, and one of the youngest ever to win a state primary or caucus, Buttigieg is a barrier-breaking public servant from the industrial Midwest with a track record of trailblazing, forward-thinking executive leadership," the Biden administration said in a [statement](#) at the time.

Buttigieg was officially confirmed by the US Senate as Transportation Secretary last week.

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 Tigers Test Positive for COVID-19 at US Zoo in Indiana
by [Mary F.](#)

SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, can also infect animals. According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the risk of animals spreading the virus to humans is considered low, based on the limited information available.

Officials at the Fort Wayne Children's Zoo in Indiana revealed over the weekend that two of its Sumatran tigers, named Bigara and Indah, tested positive for COVID-19.

In a [statement released Saturday](#), officials confirmed that the Sumatran tigers were tested after one started showing mild symptoms associated with SARS-CoV-2.

"Bugara, the male Sumatran tiger, has been experiencing a dry cough, and Indah, the female Sumatran tiger, has not shown symptoms at this time," said Dr. Kami Fox, staff veterinarian, in the release.

"Both tigers are being watched for any additional clinical signs and remain together in their enclosure," Fox added.

The source of the infection is not yet known and zoo officials are collaborating with the Allen County Department of Health and the State Board of Animal Health to determine potential sources.

"For the safety of the tigers and our Zoo team, we are implementing extra precautions in addition to following guidelines set by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and recommendations by the AZA Species Survival Plan," zoo officials confirmed in the statement.

These two tigers are not the first of their kind in the US to contract the highly-contagious disease.

According to a [report by the Hill](#), at least eight big cats, including tigers and African lions, have contracted the virus.

Several gorillas at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park tested positive for the virus just last month, UNESCO reported.

"Two sick individuals were spotted after the appearance of symptoms (congestion, runny nose, lethargy). The feces of the troop (8 individuals in total) were tested and 3 were positive. Gorillas are social beings and the troop is organized around a silverback, so it is likely that all 8 members were exposed to the virus and therefore they were not isolated from each other," UNESCO explained in release.

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.

Honduran President Target of US Drug Investigation, Court Filings Reveal
by [Mary F.](#)

Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernandez has been accused of participating in the country's narcotics trade. Honduras is a main drug route to the US, according to reports, as drug smuggling across the country is said to have increased after the US suspended anti-drug support following a 2009 Honduran coup d'état.

US prosecutors are currently investigating Honduras President Juan Orlando Hernandez for alleged participation in the country's narcotics trade, according to a new court document filed Friday night in the Southern District of New York.

According to [Reuters](#), the document was filed in the case of Geovanny Fuentes Ramirez, an alleged Honduran drug-trafficker who, along with other "high-ranking officials," is the target of an investigation related to drug-trafficking.

The filing did not outline, however, what Hernandez is being investigated for.

Last month, US federal prosecutors filed motions accusing Hernandez of taking bribes from drug traffickers, accusing the president of having "accepted millions of dollars in drug-trafficking proceeds and, in exchange, promised drug traffickers protection from prosecutors, law enforcement, and (later) extradition to the United States," Reuters reported.

Prosecutors have also stated that the Honduras government has "hardly been forthcoming" in investigations against Hernandez.

US prosecutors have accused the Honduran government of handing over "limited records" and not honoring extradition requests for witnesses against the president.

Hernandez, a key US ally, has denied any links to profiting off of the drug cartels.

Previous court records show that the US Drug Enforcement Agency began investigating Hernandez on drug trafficking and money laundering charges, [Al-Jazeera reported](#).

According to Reuters, the recent investigation into Hernandez could deteriorate ties between the Honduran government and the Biden administration, which is planning to invest \$4 billion in Central America to deal with root causes of migration.

"As president, Joe Biden will renew a robust commitment to US leadership in the region and pursue a comprehensive strategy for Central America by developing a comprehensive four-year, \$4 billion regional strategy to address factors driving migration from Central America," [explains the JoeBiden.com website](#).

The [US State Department](#) outlines that Honduras "suffers from high levels of crime and violence nationwide" and is a "transit country for drugs, primarily cocaine, destined for the United States."

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.

Photos Show Japanese Sub Mangled by Collision With Cargo Ship
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

In 2001, the US Navy attack submarine USS Greeneville collided with a small Japanese fishing boat, the Ehime Maru, killing nine people on the small craft. The US government later paid \$11.4 million to Tokyo in compensation.

Photos have emerged of the Japanese submarine Soryu after it collided with a cargo vessel in the Pacific Ocean on Monday.

On Monday, the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force reported that its diesel-powered attack submarine, Soryu, had collided with a commercial vessel off Cape Ashizuri on the southern island of Shikoku. According to [Kyodo News Agency](#), the submarine's "antenna mast and other upper parts were slightly damaged" and three crew were injured.

Photos that emerged on social media, however, show more damage to the Soryu, including mangled diving planes, a gash near the top of the sail, and much of the hull torn away on the starboard side.

The photos reportedly come from a maritime patrol aircraft owned by the Japanese Coast Guard.

For a comparison, here is a photo of the undamaged sail of the submarine Hakuryu, another boat of the Soryu-class.

According to [The War Zone](#), the commercial freighter was likely the Ocean Artemis, a Hong Kong-flagged cargo ship hauling iron ore from Qingdao, China. The ship is roughly 17 times the size of the Soryu, which displaces just 2,900 tons of water.

The Soryu hit the Ocean Artemis as it was beginning to surface during a routine training mission on Monday. Because the sub's communications system, which is mounted on the sail, was damaged by the collision, the crew was unable to report the accident for several hours, until they were close enough to shore to call in on their cell phones.

There have been no reports of injuries or damage to the Ocean Artemis.

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 Lawmakers Urge 'Haitian-led Democratic Transition' After State Dept Backs Moise's Power Claims

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Haitian President Jovenel Moise won the disputed 2015 election, but thanks to a prolonged investigation, was not inaugurated as president for a full year following the vote. As a result, he now claims his five-year term should be another year longer, to compensate.

Nearly two dozen members of the Haitian government were arrested over the weekend in what Haitian President Jovenel Moise has called a "coup." Critics say that, according to the Haitian Constitution, Moise's term expired on Sunday and the arrested figures were preparing an interim government to follow his departure from office.

On Monday, a correspondent from [Gazette Haiti News](#) reported that Haitian soldiers had fired live ammunition at a crowd of protesters in Champ de Mars in downtown Port-au-Prince, wounding two journalists. They also shot tear gas at the crowd.

US Lawmakers Oppose Backing Moise

US State Department spokesperson Ned Price [said on Friday](#) that the US backs the OAS position and that "a new elected president should succeed President Moïse when his term ends on February 7, 2022." United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has done the same. In response, US Rep. Gregory Meeks (D-NY), whose district includes a large number of Haitian-Americans, [sent a letter](#) to US Secretary of State Antony Blinken condemning "President Moïse's undemocratic actions in Haiti, urging for a Haitian-led democratic transition of power." He was joined by Reps. Yvette Clarke (D-NY), Albio Sires (D-NJ), Andy Levin (D-MI), Alcee Hastings (D-FL), Ilhan Omar, (D-MN) and Darren Soto (D-FL).

Levin blasted Moïse's move on Sunday, [tweeting that](#) "With no evidence to support his claims of a conspiracy against his life, Moïse is demonstrating what my colleagues and I have said: there is zero chance of real elections, real democracy or real accountability while he remains in power. I am deeply saddened but unsurprised that Moïse has escalated his anti-democratic campaign with a mass arrest of opposition officials and others on what should be his final day in office."

Moïse Claims Coup Plot Foiled

"I am not a dictator," Moïse said in a national address on Sunday. "My term ends Feb. 7, 2022." Earlier, Justice Minister Rockefeller Vincent said [an attempted coup](#) and an attempt on Moïse's life had been aborted and that 23 figures had been arrested, including Supreme Court judge Hiviquel Dabresil and Marie Louise Gauthier, inspector general of the Haitian National Police. [Citing a ruling](#) by the country's Superior Judicial Council, the opposition claims that Moïse's term ended on Sunday, according to the Haitian constitution, which lays out five-year terms for presidents. However, Moïse has contended that his term should last another year, since an interim government held power during the first year of his term thanks to election irregularities that delayed his inauguration.

The opposition named Mecene Jean-Louis, formerly a Supreme Court judge, as the interim president to rule until new elections can be organized for both a president and the parliament, the latter of which saw its term end last month without a new parliament elected to replace it. In an unusual [statement in May 2020](#) that seemingly went against its charter, the Organization of American States (OAS) intervened in the affairs of a member state by coming down on the side of Moïse. The international group, headquartered in Washington DC, is widely seen as representing US interests in Latin America and has energetically opposed several governments in the region that refuse to follow Washington's lead, including those in Venezuela and Bolivia.

Opposition to US Meddling

Protests broke out across both [Haiti and diaspora](#) communities in the US over the weekend, demanding the US stop involvement in Haitian affairs and that Moïse step down.

As the nonprofit group North American Congress on Latin America ([NACLA](#)) [has demonstrated](#), the US has repeatedly intervened in Haitian affairs, especially since the [catastrophic 2010 earthquake](#) that killed at least 230,000 people, helping to craft the present crisis by ensuring that Moïse and his Tet Kale party took power and retained it, including by backing the delays in the 2015 election process that created the present constitutional crisis.

Before Moïse, President Michel Martelly oversaw reconstruction efforts after the 2010 earthquake, putting the emphasis on profit-generating enterprises that served foreign interests, [including tourism](#), agribusiness, sweatshops, [and mining](#), ensuring that donors to the Clinton Global Initiative [directing aid](#) to the country "made out like bandits," as NACLA put it. Hillary Clinton was US Secretary of State at the time of the quake and helped to ensure Martelly's triumph.

As [Sputnik previously reported](#), Martelly was suspected of embezzling funds from a PetroCaribe program in which Venezuela provided Haiti with highly subsidized oil, enabling Port-au-Prince to sell it on the market and use the profits for social programs. That money is also believed to have helped ensure Moïse's election victory.

Once a wealthy French colony, Haiti became independent in 1804 after African slaves brought to the country by French planters rebelled, defeating a brutal anti-colonial campaign by French

Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte that devastated the country. However, the republic of freed Black slaves became an instant pariah in the western hemisphere, as it was surrounded by nations where slavery remained legal, ensuring that it would never be able to recover. Haiti later became a perennial source of cheap labor and massive profits for American companies, with the US intervening many times in Haiti's history to remove leaders who challenged the status quo.

In a cruel twist of fate, Moïse's declaration on Sunday fell on the 35th anniversary of the overthrow of the US-backed ruler Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier, who ruled Haiti with an iron fist and who fled the country on a US government aircraft.

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.

First Sitting US Congress Member, Texas Republican Rep. Ron Wright, Dies of COVID-19 by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Several US lawmakers, especially from the Republican Party, have been criticised by their colleagues for refusing to wear protective face masks in the US Capitol building to stem the spread of COVID-19.

On Monday, the office of US Rep. Ron Wright (R-TX) announced the congressman had passed away due to COVID-19 complications, which he contracted last month. Wright is the first sitting member of Congress to die from the virus.

The 67-year-old lawmaker tested positive for COVID-19 on January 21, after which he was admitted to Baylor Hospital in Dallas, Texas. He had previously been diagnosed with lung cancer in 2019.

According to a [count by GovTrack](#), 71 members of the US House of Representatives and Senate have tested positive for COVID-19, although Wright is the first to die while in office from the respiratory illness. In December, [a congressman-elect](#) from Louisiana, 41-year-old Republican Luke Letlow, died of COVID-19 just days before he was due to be sworn into office. House Minority Leader Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R-CA), who leads the Republicans in the House, [said Wright was](#) "a fighter who passionately served his constituents" and that he "emulated the very best of America, and we were fortunate to have had the opportunity to call him a colleague and a friend."

He was elected to Congress in 2018 to represent Texas' sixth district, which spreads across the central part of the state and includes the city of Arlington, where he served in local government for many years.

Wright was an outspoken opponent of abortion, [saying in 2019](#) that women who self-abort their pregnancies should be punished as "they committed murder." His last act in Congress was to vote for [two anti-abortion bills](#), including one that would make it illegal for a parent to transport their child across state lines in order to receive an abortion, punishable by up to a year in prison. This has become [increasingly common](#), especially in Wright's home state of Texas, due to restrictive laws on abortions and clinics that provide abortion services.

The politician was also known for being one of the [126 Republicans](#) who signed an amicus brief in December 2020 backing Texas' lawsuit against Pennsylvania filed in the US Supreme Court that sought to challenge the Keystone State's [election results](#), which showed Joe Biden as the winner over then-US President Donald Trump. The court rejected the plea and Biden was subsequently sworn in as president on January 20 2021.

In the US, more than 463,000 people have [died of COVID-19](#), with 107,000 new cases and 2,800 deaths reported on Saturday, [the last date](#) for which the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention has data.

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.

Hacker Tried to Poison Florida Town's Water Supply, Police Say
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

In July 2020, citizens of Oldsmar, Florida, pointed out that they were being dramatically overcharged for their water use, which the city government said was due to a shortage of city employees during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Police in the western Florida town of Oldsmar on Monday claimed that a hacker had attempted to poison the city's water supply on Friday by releasing a toxic chemical.

At a [press conference](#) on Monday, Pinellas County Sheriff Bob Gualtieri said that local police, as well as the FBI and the Secret Service, were looking into a reported attempt on Friday to poison the public water system for the city of Oldsmar, just west of Tampa.

According to Gualtieri, a plant worker noticed on Friday that his work station had been remotely accessed by someone who temporarily managed to increase the amount of sodium hydroxide in the water supply by a factor of over 100. The corrosive compound, better known as lye, is a common degreaser but is also used in small quantities at the city's water treatment center to control acidity.

Gualtieri said the city's water supply was not affected, as the city worker immediately noticed the change and reversed it.

"The protocols that we have in place, monitoring protocols, they work - that's the good news," said the Oldsmar mayor, Eric Seidel, at the presser. "Even had they not caught them, there's redundancies in the system that would have caught the change in the pH level."

"The important thing is to put everyone on notice," Seidel added. "There's a bad actor out there."

The news comes amid an investigation of a massive hacking attack of US government and corporate networks enabled by the compromising of SolarWinds' Orion software. Last month, several US intelligence agencies claimed in a [joint statement](#) that the attack was "likely Russian in origin." The Kremlin has denied responsibility, [attributing the claim](#) to anti-Russian bias.

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.

Schumer Says 'All Sides' Have Agreed to 'Eminently Fair' Trump Impeachment Trial Structure
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

The legal proceedings of former US President Donald Trump's second impeachment trial in the Senate are due to begin on Tuesday, less than a month after House lawmakers again impeached Trump, this time accusing him of "incitement of insurrection" that prompted the deadly January 6 Capitol building riot.

US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) announced Monday afternoon that a set schedule and rules for the much-anticipated second Senate impeachment trial of the former commander-in-chief have been reached in partnership with Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, the House managers and Trump's legal team.

The deal stipulates the trial will kick off on Tuesday and grant a total of 16 hours over a period of two days each to the House managers and Trump's legal defense so that both parties can present their arguments. The framework for the procedures will also include an equal time for senators to engage in a question-and-answer session, give closing arguments and hold deliberations.

Proceedings on Tuesday will specifically see four hours' worth of debating on the constitutionality of impeaching a president who is no longer in office. A final vote at a simple majority threshold will then follow the debate period.

Sen. Rand Paul (R-KY) previously forced a vote regarding the trial's constitutionality last month, but the effort ultimately failed as the chamber voted to table the issue. However, while Paul's move was scrapped, it underscored that Republicans were still largely against the trial despite the violence that broke out on January 6.

Schumer added that should Trump be convicted on the sole impeachment article, the Senate chamber will then proceed with a vote to determine whether or not he is qualified to hold public office in the future.

"The structure we have agreed to is eminently fair," Schumer said on the Senate floor, noting that the rules will allow for a the trial to provide "truth and accountability." He added, "following the despicable attack on January 6 there must be truth and accountability if we are going to move forward."

At the request of House managers, the tentative deal will also allow for a debate and subsequent votes on whether or not to call a witness. Schumer acknowledged earlier during a news conference that officials were still unsure of including witnesses but "wanted to preserve the option."

One of the more notorious faces of the Capitol riot was Jacob Chansley, better known as the self-described 'QAnon Shaman.' More recently, the detained Arizona resident has reportedly expressed interest in testifying against Trump, complaining that he feels "duped" by the former president after the latter failed to pardon him and the many others who were arrested after federal building was stormed.

Albert Watkins, Chansley's lawyer, previously explained to the [Associated Press](#) that he felt it would be important for officials to hear remarks from someone who felt encouraged by Trump to act out against congressional efforts to confirm the results of the 2020 presidential election. It remains unclear whether Chansley will be tapped to offer testimony.

In a push to wrap proceedings quickly, most Senate Democrats have indicated that witnesses are not necessary since lawmakers have their own first-hand experience and much of the trial will rely on Trump's public statements and actions.

While trials typically run throughout the week, the schedule for the impeachment case will be slightly altered since David Shoen, Trump's legal counsel, requested Senate leadership to pause proceedings so as to observe the Jewish Sabbath. As such, the trial will be paused from sundown Friday through Saturday, and continue on Sunday.

Trump Defense Calls Trial 'Political Theater' as House Managers File Rebuttal

[Driving headlines](#) on Monday, Trump's defense team issued a 78-page pre-trial brief attacking the looming impeachment trial and calling for the case to be dismissed on the grounds that Trump is no longer in office and was deprived of due process on account of the rushed nature of the proceedings, among other arguments.

"The article of impeachment presented by the House is unconstitutional for a variety of reasons, any of which alone would be grounds for immediate dismissal," [the brief](#) reads. "Taken together, they demonstrate conclusively that indulging House Democrats hunger for this political theater is a danger to our republic democracy and the rights that we hold dear."

Trump was charged by the House in the wake of the Capitol riot with "incitement of insurrection" for encouraging his supporters at a rally held earlier in the day to act out and not allow the 2020 election to be "stolen."

Aside from that the Trump defense team's main argument is that it's unconstitutional to impeach a president who is no longer in office, they have also suggested that allegations raised by the US House fail to meet the standard of a crime, and that Trump's speech was and remains protected by the First Amendment.

House impeachment managers responded to the Trump team in a five-page [legal brief](#) issued later Monday, noting "there is no 'January Exception' to the Constitution that allows presidents to abuse power in their final days without accountability."

"The House did not impeach President Trump because he expressed an unpopular political opinion. It impeached him because he willfully incited violent insurrection against the government," reads the briefing. "We live in a nation governed by the rule of law, not mob violence incited by presidents who cannot accept their own electoral defeat."

In response to claims that Trump was not afforded due process, managers wrote in the filing that the former president was asked to testify under oath, and highlighted that the offer was "immediately rejected."

At the time, Trump's [lawyers referred](#) to the offer as the House managers' "latest public relations stunt," adding that "the use of our Constitution to bring a purported impeachment proceeding is much too serious to try to play these games."

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.

Majority of Americans Say US Government System is 'Unsound', Needs 'Many' Upgrades - Poll by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

The latest findings highlighted in a Monmouth University poll mark the first time the survey has determined that less than half of those Americans participating in the poll believe the US government is “sound.”

A new survey recently published by the [Monmouth University Polling Institute](#) has found that a majority of those Americans participating in the poll believe the US government system is “unsound” and needs “many,” if not “significant” improvements to become a well-oiled machine. The survey found that 33% of polled participants were under the belief that the US system was “not too sound” and needed “many improvements,” whereas 22% agreed that the government was “not sound at all” and required “significant changes.” Compared to a similar study researchers conducted last year, those figures jumped by 9% and 1%, respectively. Overall, the Monday-published survey concluded the percentage of individuals participating in the survey who believed the system was “unsound” spiked by 18% since the question was first asked to respondents in 1980, when the institute found that 62% of the public felt the government was working efficiently.

Officials also noted in their conclusions that the view that the American system was unstable “held similar majorities” when findings were broken down into political affiliations, such as Republicans (58%), Democrats (55%) and Independents (54%).

“Just one year ago, this view was marked by a sharp partisan divide, with only 28% of Republicans and 41% of independents saying it was not sound compared with 65% of Democrats,” reads a [release](#) issued by the pollsters.

When asked how respondents felt about policies being implemented by officials whose political affiliations were different from their own, 52% of participants said it would concern them “a great deal” and that the nation could “suffer lasting damage.”

Another 45% of Americans in the telephone poll agreed that they felt that the “American way of life” was under threat, as 34% said only “some” parts of the US lifestyle were under fire. Respondents were not asked what specific threats were perceived.

Regarding [the inauguration](#) of US President Joe Biden, only 19% of respondents said they were “very confident” that the newly sworn-in commander-in-chief could unify the country. Twenty-five percent of participants said they were “not at all confident.”

“There is an abiding belief by many Americans that ‘the other side’ is not just wrong in their approach, but could actually destroy this country. This was a fringe view a generation ago,” Patrick Murray, director of the institute, said in a statement accompanying the release. “The only thing we can agree upon is that we are fundamentally divided.”

“The increased lack of confidence in the American system is built on a foundation of partisan hostility. Those differences are no longer limited to views on policy. They now extend to an underlying distrust of our democratic institutions themselves. Partisan tribalism is coming home to roost in a way that threatens the very stability of our system,” he suggested.

The poll was conducted by telephone between January 21 and 24, with a sample size of 809 Americans over the age of 18. The results have a margin of error of 3.5 percentage points.

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.

Twitter Weighs Subscription Service to Ensure Platform's 'Revenue Durability'
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Talk of social media giant Twitter switching its business model to charging users for a more tailored experience has been under consideration for years; however, renewed talks on the subject by the company has some netizens ready to jump ship.

Twitter is considering switching gears and tacking on a subscription fee for some of the platform's features as a means to diversify its revenue and reduce its dependence on advertising.

The social media giant is weighing a variety of funding options, including charging for ad-free content, detailed analytics information and customizable features, according to [Bloomberg](#), which also reported that the Tweetdeck dashboard could also fall under a service charge. The idea of charging users for an "undo send" option is also being considered.

In a statement to the outlet, Bruce Falck, Twitter's head of revenue products, explained that "increasing revenue durability is our top company objective" before acknowledging that the subscription effort is in the "very early" stages of being discussed.

"We do not expect any meaningful revenue attributable to these opportunities in 2021," he added.

Despite Falck's remarks, most netizens did not exactly welcome with open arms the possibility of a fee-based Twitter.

Some, however, suggested that they might be willing to shell out a few bucks, should the service be worthwhile.

Twitter previously prompted reports that it would start offering a subscription-based service during the summer of 2020, when the company released a [survey](#) asking users what services they would be willing to pay for. The services mentioned in the survey were mostly the same mentioned in the Bloomberg article.

The company later fueled the flame when it opted to list a [job posting](#) that indicated the interested applicant would be working on "building a subscription platform" in conjunction with Twitter's payment team.

Although Twitter has not yet offered any other details regarding the latest development, the social media giant is likely to reveal more of its plans during a fourth quarter earnings call with investors on Tuesday.

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.

Professional Sports Teams Reportedly Form Coalition Backing Legalized Sports Betting in Texas

by [Evan Craighead](#)

Presently, 25 of the 50 US states have legalized sports betting to some degree. However, some large states, such as Texas, have remained holdouts, despite critics and pro-sports betting lobbyists highlighting the potential revenue that could be drawn from the practice.

The Sports Betting Alliance, a coalition of franchises and betting platforms, revealed earlier this week that some of Texas' biggest sports teams, including the Dallas Cowboys, Texas Rangers and Dallas Mavericks, have teamed up to back legislation that would allow Texans to vote on whether to legalize sports betting in the state.

"Unregulated and illegal sports gambling is already taking place in the State of Texas," a Dallas Cowboys executive vice president, Charlotte Jones, said, [cited by](#) Dallas Morning News.

"Legalized sports betting would regulate the industry and generate hundreds of millions of dollars of new revenue for the state which will help fund critical programs without raising taxes." Jones [also sits](#) on the NFL Legalized Sports Betting Committee.

The US Supreme Court's May 2018 decision in *Murphy v. National Collegiate Athletic Association* struck down a federal ban related to sports gambling, effectively giving states the power to legalize the practice.

Texas currently has yet to pass any law related to the legalization of betting.

"My view is that Texas is going to be one of the 10 last states to allow gambling," suggested GOP consultant and chairman of the Travis County Republican Party, Matt Mackowiak, told The News. "I do think [sports betting is] a lighter lift, and it may be where they end up."

Under current draft legislation drawn up in the Texas city of Houston, by Rep. Daniel G. Huberty, bettors would receive up to 90% of their winnings and around 10% would go to fund special education efforts in the state.

"It could generate several hundred million dollars," Huberty argued to The News.

Texans annually spend around \$2.5 billion in out-of-state casinos, which - according to Dallas Mavericks owner Mark Cuban - "makes no sense."

"I think it's time," he told The News, speaking of the legalization of sports betting and casinos. "It makes no sense for us to force Texans to go to neighboring states to gamble in casinos."

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 Labels US School Closures, Women Leaving the Workforce as 'a National Emergency' by [Evan Craighead](#)

CBS News reported last week that some three million women have left the US labor force in the past year alone. Some experts have linked the recent employment exodus to a lack of policies that allow parents to have a balance between work and caregiving - especially during times of virtual learning.

Speaking to CBS host Norah O'Donnell in a [Sunday broadcast](#) ahead of the Super Bowl, US President Joe Biden declared that there is an ongoing "national emergency" when it comes to losing women in the workforce and the closing of schools.

Despite the desire by many to reopen schools, the US government will, however, have to take a measured approach, according to Biden.

"I think it's time for schools to reopen safely," Biden said. "You have to have fewer people in the classroom. You have to have ventilation systems that have been reworked. Our [US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] commissioner is going to be coming out with science-based

judgment, within I think as early as Wednesday as to lay out what the minimum requirements are.”

Biden also acknowledged that school-age children are missing out on some opportunities due to online schooling.

"I think about the price. So many of my grandkids and your kids are going to pay for not having had the chance to finish whatever it was," he remarked. "That graduation, where you didn't get to walk across the stage — I think they're going through a lot, these kids."

Biden's comments in the CBS broadcast come just two days after the US Department of Education announced the launch of a national survey to "gather vital data on the impact of COVID-19 on students and the status of in-person learning."

"To [reopen schools], we need more information about how students are learning during this pandemic – and we simply don't have it right now," explained Ian Rosenblum, acting assistant secretary of the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. "The administration, educators, parents, and education leaders need meaningful data in order to achieve these critical goals and this survey will give them that."

"Women are dropping out of the workforce," O'Donnell said at one point during the interview, before asking the US president: "Is this a national emergency?" "It is a national emergency," Biden replied. "It genuinely is a national emergency."

[CBS News](#) reported on Friday that an estimated three million women have left the US labor force and not returned as a result of the pandemic. As lockdowns and pandemic-related closures near the one-year mark, women have lost a net of [5.4 million](#) jobs - some 1 million more than those lost by men.

"The pandemic has exacerbated and shed light on a longstanding problem, which is lack of policies that enable folks to balance caregiving responsibilities and work responsibilities," Jocelyn Frye, a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress, told CBS News.

"Think of jobs in health care, grocery stores and other essential functions of life. By and large, we disproportionately see women in many of those low-paid jobs. Women are often in a bind in terms of being able to figure out, 'How do I juggle this work where I have to go? I can't work from home, but my kids are at home.'"

These COVID-19 conversations come amid Biden's push for a \$1.9 trillion COVID relief bill, which may include a \$15 minimum wage boost.

The US president told O'Donnell that he is prepared to bring a "separate negotiation on minimum wage," as he fears it won't survive ongoing negotiations for the COVID relief bill.

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: ANALYSIS - Biden Unlikely to Slow Arms Race Amid US \$1Trln Nuclear Upgrade

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden is unable and potentially unwilling to end or slow down the global arms race because US business and other interests already have too much invested in the enormous trillion dollar national nuclear arms modernization program, analysts told Sputnik.

On February 3, the United States and Russia agreed to extend the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) for five more years without any renegotiation of its terms. The treaty is the last remaining arrangement that limits US and Russian strategic arsenals.

PROGRESS UNLIKELY

Last week, the Pentagon said it considers the extension of the New START Treaty with Russia as the beginning of efforts to solve nuclear and strategic issues. However, some experts feel the rapid renewal of New START is very unlikely to be followed by any significant progress in slowing the strategic weapons escalation.

"Biden cannot do anything meaningful to defuse the new strategic arms race, because Obama started and Trump expanded a huge across-the-board, multi-trillion dollar strategic offensive and defensive modernization program," former Pentagon analyst Chuck Spinney told Sputnik. "This program has set the stage for pouring hundreds of trillions of politically engineered dollars in almost every congressional in the United States."

Spinney made the cover of TIME magazine in 1983 after publicly shining a light on billions of dollars that were being wasted at the Pentagon. He testified before the Senate Budget Committee on Defense after the release of what became famously known as "The Spinney report," which was suppressed within the Defense Department.

Spinney said the US program had set the stage for pouring hundreds of trillions of "politically engineered" dollars in almost every congressional district in the United States, creating an unstoppable political momentum for it.

"Many of these programs - including the new bomber, new strategic ballistic missile nuclear submarine (SSBN), new intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) and some missile defense programs are already in Milestone 2, or concurrent engineering and development," he said. This meant that the prime contractors in the program were already busily building their social safety net by shoveling money to tens of thousands of subcontractors in hundreds of congressional districts, Spinney pointed out.

"The goal has been to paralyze the President and Congress when it becomes clear that huge future cost overruns will make it impossible to cancel any of these lemons - think of this problem as the F-35 on such extensive super steroids that they set the stage for a political paralysis guaranteeing Cold War II until 2080 or later," he said.

The moves that locked the United States into a continuing nuclear global arms race for at least the next 60 years were done consciously by the program's planners with full recognition of the long-term consequences, Spinney stated.

"The threat of paralyzing our political decision making system with a looming programmatic debacle was done with malice of forethought and because its consequences were easily foreseen years ago," he commented.

NUCLEAR BUILDUP

On January 22, the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), signed by more than 84 states, went into effect. All five permanent members of the UN Security Council oppose the pact because they fear it will undermine the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). However, experts feel several factors will prevent the the major powers to agree to eradicate nuclear arms.

Canadian diplomat Patrick Armstrong, former charge d'affaires, Canadian Embassy in Moscow said Biden was indeed continuing the very same nuclear build up policies that his longtime

boss, former US President Barack Obama, had approved and launched during his own two terms as president.

"Given that we have a video of Obama saying that he'd like a third term if he had a front man with an earpiece and given what we know of his role in moving the Democratic primaries for Biden, it's a safe assumption to say that we are now in Obama [term] Three," he said. Biden's major foreign policy and strategic goals were all continuations of what Obama had done, Armstrong observed. This includes New START, which Obama negotiated and signed. Biden would continue providing benefits to the three B's - "bankers, billionaires and bomb makers," as Obama had done, Armstrong said.

In addition, the former diplomat said there is every reason to expect more hostility to Russia over Ukraine and Syria under Biden.

NUCLEAR BAN IMPOSSIBLE WITH NATO

Professor Edward Lozansky, head of Russia House in Washington and president of the American University in Moscow (AUM) said a complete nuclear ban was also unlikely, especially because of NATO's aggressive policies.

"Total prohibition of nuclear weapons is also unlikely since it would place Russia in the most vulnerable position due to overwhelming superiority of NATO in military power, both manpower and conventional weapons," he said.

Only if NATO was disbanded or transformed into IATO - an International Anti-Terrorist Organization - with Russia and China as members could one seriously discuss the abrogation of nuclear weapons, Lozansky advised.

Lozansky also said, as of now, China will probably not enter into any arms negotiations until it reaches nuclear weapons parity with the US and Russia.

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 - Georgia State Official Probing Trump's Effort to Overturn Election Results - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger's office has opened an investigation into allegations that former President Donald Trump tried to overturn the state's 2020 election results, Communications Manager for Voter Education Walter Jones told Sputnik.

"Yes, I can confirm," Jones said on Monday when asked to confirm reports that Raffensperger has formally opened a probe into Trump's effort to overturn the state's 2020 election results.

Jones said he could not provide further comment because the investigation is pending.

In early January, the Washington Post published a leaked recording of a January 2 telephone call between Trump and Raffensperger. The recording revealed Trump said during the call that he won in Georgia by hundreds of thousands of votes but did not need to prove the entire election save for "finding" 11,780 illegal votes in order to affirm his victory.

According to the transcript, Trump criticized Raffensperger and warned that the voter fraud, on which the president blames his defeat, is a criminal offense, and suggested Georgia's official that he "can't let that happen."

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 - Canada Postpones Deportation Hearings Against Ex-Nazi Until March 19 - Immigration Board

TORONTO, February 8 (Sputnik) - Canada's Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) is postponing until March 19 the deportation hearings against former Nazi Helmut Oberlander after the country's Federal Court of Canada ordered a stay of the proceedings, IRB spokesperson Anna Pape told Sputnik.

Earlier on Monday, the IRB cancelled the deportation proceedings against the former Schutzstaffel (SS) member moments before the admissibility hearings were set to begin. "I can confirm that the Federal Court of Canada has issued an order staying the admissibility hearing proceedings in this case. As a result, the Immigration Division has had to administratively postpone the matter until (and including) March 19, 2021," Pape said in a statement.

A new admissibility hearing date has not been scheduled, Pape added.

Justice Richard Southcott said that a further stay could be granted past the March 19 date if another application for leave is successfully submitted.

Oberlander's lawyers argued in the application that the proceedings would have a debilitating impact on the former Nazi's health and that his hearing disability combined with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic could impair his ability to comprehend and respond to the questions. The lawyers also raised concerns about an alleged abuse of process, violations of Oberlander's Charter rights and the ineffectiveness of any judicial reviews if the admissibility hearings proceed.

However, the Federal Court of Canada did throw out a motion from Oberlander's defense team to suspend the hearings until the leave and the potential judicial review of the case are completed, with Southcott stating that the application did not meet the "exceptional circumstance" threshold and ruling that the IRB's Immigration Division has jurisdiction to hear the case.

In December, an IRB adjudicator ruled that Oberlander's admissibility hearings could commence in January citing the numerous delays in the case and dismissing the defense's assertions that COVID-19 restrictions could impair the former SS member's communication with his legal counsel.

The IRB had previously consented to a number of procedural accommodations, including attending hearings via teleconference and appointing Oberlander's daughter as his designated representative due to his numerous ailments.

The 96-year-old has been embroiled in legal battle with the Canadian government since 1995, when the latter began trying to strip Ukrainian-born Oberlander of his citizenship, citing his failure to disclose his links to death squads. After a lengthy legal battle, Oberlander was stripped of his citizenship for the fourth time and final time in 2017 and Canada's Supreme Court issued a ruling last December that blocked any possibility for Oberlander to appeal this decision.

An adjudicator ruled in October that the IRB has the jurisdiction to pursue the deportation of Oberlander, concluding that no abuse of process had occurred.

Additionally, Oberlander faces legal scrutiny in Russia, where investigators say that Oberlander was complicit in the World War II massacre of 27,000 civilians, including orphaned children, in Russia's Rostov region.

Federal Security Service (FSB) files revealed that Oberlander, a former interpreter for the Sonderkommando SS-10A death squad, played a role in the massacre.

Russia's Investigative Committee has sent a request to the Canadian authorities to provide legal materials related to the probe of Oberlander's role in the massacre.

However, in an interview with Sputnik in December, the Russian Embassy in Ottawa said the Canadian government did not request documents related to the case and has refused to cooperate despite Moscow's request for legal assistance. The Russian Embassy added that "influential defenders" are working to delay former Nazi's deportation process.

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 - Shelters in US, Mexico Prepare for Migrant Influx Ahead of Policy Changes - Advocacy Group

EL PASO, February 8 (Sputnik) - Shelters in the United States and Mexico are preparing to receive large numbers of migrants at the southern US border due to potential changes in immigration policy under the Biden administration, Hope Border Institute Deputy Director Marisa Limon told Sputnik.

Last week, President Joe Biden signed an executive order to end Trump's family separation policy. US authorities over the weekend said they are already seeing large groups of parents and children crossing the border, according to The Washington Post.

"There are efforts underway on both sides of the border to receive larger numbers of people due to potential changes in immigration policy," Limon said.

The immigrant advocacy group in the border town of El Paso, Texas, helps provide support to migrants arriving in the neighboring city Juarez, Mexico.

Limon said Juarez has seen an increase in the number of migrants arriving at "filter locations," which are sites where newly arrived migrants can quarantine and seek medical attention if they have been exposed to the novel coronavirus.

Shelters are likely to see an increase in migrant guests soon, but they are not yet at full capacity, Limon said.

Biden is expected to ease even more strict Trump-era immigration policies that were designed to deter the flow of migrants arriving at the US-Mexico border.

The US president recently ordered a review of the current US immigration policies and a temporary stop to the so-called "Remain in Mexico" asylum program, officially known as the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), which required asylum-seeking migrants to temporarily return to Mexico for the duration of their immigration proceedings. More than 60,000 asylum-seeking migrants have been affected by the rule.

Last week, US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) said it has seen a steady increase in border encounters since April 2020, which has caused some facilities to reach maximum safe holding capacity. CBP data shows that more than 70,000 migrants have been apprehended at the US-Mexico border each month from October to December. The numbers for January will be released later this month.

In January, a caravan of some 4,500 Honduran migrants crossed over into Guatemala, scrambling to escape gang-related violence, poverty and unemployment in their home country, a situation which has been exacerbated by the pandemic. Guatemalan authorities have said that they were not going to allow in people who violated migration rules.

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 Court Rejects New York Bid to Prosecute Ex-Trump Campaign Manager Manafort - Filing

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - The State of New York Court of Appeals has rejected Manhattan District Attorney Cy Vance's effort to prosecute former Trump campaign manager Paul Manafort after he was pardoned, a court document revealed.

"Appellant having applied for leave to appeal to this Court pursuant to Criminal Procedure Law 460.20 from an order in the above-captioned case [State of New York versus Manafort]; upon the papers filed and due deliberation, it is ordered that the application is denied," Chief Judge Janet DiFiore wrote in a court ruling.

In December, President Donald Trump issued a full pardon for Manafort, who had been found guilty of bank fraud, tax fraud, conspiracy and lobbying violations related to his work in Ukraine. In October, a US appellant court blocked Vance from pursuing state charges against Manafort on the grounds of double jeopardy. The appellant court said the state indictment against Manafort includes the same fraud charges that he was already convicted for in federal court.

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.

Stay of Proceedings Against Ex-Nazi Undermines Canada's Reputation - Rights Group

TORONTO, February 8 (Sputnik) - The court mandated stay of deportation proceedings against former Nazi Helmut Oberlander undermines Canada's reputation and the admissibility hearings must resume as soon as possible, B'nai Brith Canada CEO Michael Mostyn said.

Earlier on Monday, Canada's Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) spokesperson Anna Pape told Sputnik that IRB is postponing deportation hearings against the former Schutzstaffel (SS) member until March 19 after a Federal Court Justice ordered a stay of the proceedings.

"Today's news of the stay of proceedings against ex-Nazi Helmut Oberlander until March 19, 2021, after more than a quarter of a century of legal wrangling, is a tragedy and disgrace to Canada's reputation," Mostyn said in a statement on Monday evening. "We seek to offer a voice

for those who can no longer speak for themselves: this matter must at the very least proceed immediately on March 20, 2021."

The legal battle, which stretches back to 1995, has seen Canada's legal system exploited to give Oberlander, complicit in the death of thousands, safe haven and evade justice, added the head of Canada's oldest independent Jewish Human Rights organization.

In his decision, Federal Court Justice Richard Southcott said allowing the proceedings to begin could subvert the fairness of the process and that a further stay could be granted past the March 19 date if another application for leave is successfully submitted.

Oberlander's lawyers argued in the application that the proceedings would have a debilitating impact on his health and the hearing disability combined with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic could impair his ability to comprehend and respond to the questions. The legal defense team has also raised concerns about an alleged abuse of process, violations of Oberlander's Charter rights and the ineffectiveness of any judicial reviews if the admissibility hearings proceed.

However, the Federal Court did toss out a motion from Oberlander's defense team to suspend the hearings until the leave and the potential judicial review of the case are completed, with Southcott stating that the application did not meet the "exceptional circumstance" threshold and ruling that the IRB's Immigration Division has jurisdiction to hear the case.

The IRB had previously consented to a number of procedural accommodations, including attending hearings via teleconference and appointing Oberlander's daughter as his designated representative due to his numerous ailments.

A new admissibility hearing date has not been scheduled, Pape said in her statement.

The 96-year-old has been embroiled in legal battle with the Canadian government since 1995, when the latter began trying to strip Ukrainian-born Oberlander of his citizenship, citing his failure to disclose his links to death squads. After a lengthy legal battle, Oberlander was stripped of his citizenship for the fourth time and final time in 2017 and Canada's Supreme Court issued a ruling last December that blocked any possibility for Oberlander to appeal this decision.

An adjudicator ruled in October that the IRB has the jurisdiction to pursue the deportation of Oberlander, concluding that no abuse of process had occurred.

Additionally, Oberlander faces legal scrutiny in Russia, where investigators say that Oberlander was complicit in the World War II massacre of 27,000 civilians, including orphaned children, in Russia's Rostov region.

Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) files, accessed by Sputnik in December, revealed that Oberlander, a former interpreter for the Sonderkommando SS-10A death squad, played a role in the massacre.

Russia's Investigative Committee has sent a request to the Canadian authorities to provide legal materials related to the probe of Oberlander's role in the massacre.

However, in an interview with Sputnik in December, the Russian Embassy in Ottawa said that the Canadian government did not request documents related to the case and has refused to cooperate despite Moscow's request for legal assistance. The Embassy added that "influential defenders" are working to delay former Nazi's deportation process.

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.

ANALYSIS - Biden Unlikely to Slow Arms Race Amid US \$1Trln Nuclear Upgrade

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden is unable and potentially unwilling to end or slow down the global arms race because US business and other interests already have too much invested in the enormous trillion dollar national nuclear arms modernization program, analysts told Sputnik.

On February 3, the United States and Russia agreed to extend the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) for five more years without any renegotiation of its terms. The treaty is the last remaining arrangement that limits US and Russian strategic arsenals.

PROGRESS UNLIKELY

Last week, the Pentagon said it considers the extension of the New START Treaty with Russia as the beginning of efforts to solve nuclear and strategic issues. However, some experts feel the rapid renewal of New START is very unlikely to be followed by any significant progress in slowing the strategic weapons escalation.

"Biden cannot do anything meaningful to defuse the new strategic arms race, because Obama started and Trump expanded a huge across-the-board, multi-trillion dollar strategic offensive and defensive modernization program," former Pentagon analyst Chuck Spinney told Sputnik. "This program has set the stage for pouring hundreds of trillions of politically engineered dollars in almost every congressional in the United States."

Spinney made the cover of TIME magazine in 1983 after publicly shining a light on billions of dollars that were being wasted at the Pentagon. He testified before the Senate Budget Committee on Defense after the release of what became famously known as "The Spinney report," which was suppressed within the Defense Department.

Spinney said the US program had set the stage for pouring hundreds of trillions of "politically engineered" dollars in almost every congressional district in the United States, creating an unstoppable political momentum for it.

"Many of these programs - including the new bomber, new strategic ballistic missile nuclear submarine (SSBN), new intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) and some missile defense programs are already in Milestone 2, or concurrent engineering and development," he said. This meant that the prime contractors in the program were already busily building their social safety net by shoveling money to tens of thousands of subcontractors in hundreds of congressional districts, Spinney pointed out.

"The goal has been to paralyze the President and Congress when it becomes clear that huge future cost overruns will make it impossible to cancel any of these lemons - think of this problem as the F-35 on such extensive super steroids that they set the stage for a political paralysis guaranteeing Cold War II until 2080 or later," he said.

The moves that locked the United States into a continuing nuclear global arms race for at least the next 60 years were done consciously by the program's planners with full recognition of the long-term consequences, Spinney stated.

"The threat of paralyzing our political decision making system with a looming programmatic debacle was done with malice of forethought and because its consequences were easily foreseen years ago," he commented.

NUCLEAR BUILDUP

On January 22, the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), signed by more than 84 states, went into effect. All five permanent members of the UN Security Council oppose the pact because they fear it will undermine the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). However, experts feel several factors will prevent the the major powers to agree to eradicate nuclear arms.

Canadian diplomat Patrick Armstrong, former charge d'affaires, Canadian Embassy in Moscow said Biden was indeed continuing the very same nuclear build up policies that his longtime boss, former US President Barack Obama, had approved and launched during his own two terms as president.

"Given that we have a video of Obama saying that he'd like a third term if he had a front man with an earpiece and given what we know of his role in moving the Democratic primaries for Biden, it's a safe assumption to say that we are now in Obama [term] Three," he said.

Biden's major foreign policy and strategic goals were all continuations of what Obama had done, Armstrong observed. This includes New START, which Obama negotiated and signed.

Biden would continue providing benefits to the three B's - "bankers, billionaires and bomb makers," as Obama had done, Armstrong said.

In addition, the former diplomat said there is every reason to expect more hostility to Russia over Ukraine and Syria under Biden.

NUCLEAR BAN IMPOSSIBLE WITH NATO

Professor Edward Lozansky, head of Russia House in Washington and president of the American University in Moscow (AUM) said a complete nuclear ban was also unlikely, especially because of NATO's aggressive policies.

"Total prohibition of nuclear weapons is also unlikely since it would place Russia in the most vulnerable position due to overwhelming superiority of NATO in military power, both manpower and conventional weapons," he said.

Only if NATO was disbanded or transformed into IATO - an International Anti-Terrorist Organization - with Russia and China as members could one seriously discuss the abrogation of nuclear weapons, Lozansky advised.

Lozansky also said, as of now, China will probably not enter into any arms negotiations until it reaches nuclear weapons parity with the US and Russia.

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.

Georgia State Official Probing Trump's Effort to Overturn Election Results - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger's office has opened an investigation into allegations that former President Donald Trump tried to

overturn the state's 2020 election results, Communications Manager for Voter Education Walter Jones told Sputnik.

"Yes, I can confirm," Jones said on Monday when asked to confirm reports that Raffensperger has formally opened a probe into Trump's effort to overturn the state's 2020 election results. Jones said he could not provide further comment because the investigation is pending. In early January, the Washington Post published a leaked recording of a January 2 telephone call between Trump and Raffensperger. The recording revealed Trump said during the call that he won in Georgia by hundreds of thousands of votes but did not need to prove the entire election save for "finding" 11,780 illegal votes in order to affirm his victory. According to the transcript, Trump criticized Raffensperger and warned that the voter fraud, on which the president blames his defeat, is a criminal offense, and suggested Georgia's official that he "can't let that happen."

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.

Stay of Proceedings Against Ex-Nazi Undermines Canada's Reputation - Rights Group
TORONTO, February 8 (Sputnik) - The court mandated stay of deportation proceedings against former Nazi Helmut Oberlander undermines Canada's reputation and the admissibility hearings must resume as soon as possible, B'nai Brith Canada CEO Michael Mostyn said.

Earlier on Monday, Canada's Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) spokesperson Anna Pape told Sputnik that IRB is postponing deportation hearings against the former Schutzstaffel (SS) member until March 19 after a Federal Court Justice ordered a stay of the proceedings.

"Today's news of the stay of proceedings against ex-Nazi Helmut Oberlander until March 19, 2021, after more than a quarter of a century of legal wrangling, is a tragedy and disgrace to Canada's reputation," Mostyn said in a statement on Monday evening. "We seek to offer a voice for those who can no longer speak for themselves: this matter must at the very least proceed immediately on March 20, 2021."

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 Senate Agrees on Trump's Impeachment Structure, Timing - Majority Leader

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - Democrats and Republicans in the US Senate agreed on a structure and timing of former President Donald Trump's impeachment trial that is scheduled to begin on Tuesday, Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said.

"All parties have agreed to a structure that will ensure a fair and honest Senate impeachment trial of the former President. Each side will have ample time to make their arguments," Schumer said on Monday evening.

Each side - the House of Representatives managers acting as the prosecution and Trump's lawyers - will be given 16 hours over two days to present their case.

"If managers decide they want witnesses, there will be a vote on that, which is the option they requested in regard to witnesses. The trial will also accommodate a request from the former President council to pause the trial during the Sabbath. The trial will break on Friday afternoon before sundown and will not resume until Sunday afternoon," Schumer said.

There will be equal time for Senators' questions and for closing arguments as well as an opportunity for the Senate to hold deliberations if it so chooses.

"And then we will vote on the Article of Impeachment. And if the former President is convicted we will proceed to a vote on whether he is qualified to enjoy any office of honor, trust or profit under the United States," Schumer said.

Trump's opponents seek to use the sole Article of Impeachment - the allegation he incited insurrection - to permanently bar him from holding public office, including running for president in 2024.

Trump's legal defense team urged the Senate earlier to dismiss as unconstitutional the trial given that Trump is not longer in office.

On January 6, a group of Trump supporters entered the US Capitol to protest lawmakers certifying elector slates from several states that Trump has claimed are invalid and robbed him of election victory.

Last month, the House of Representatives voted to impeach Trump and passed the case to the Senate, who will be sitting as a court starting and decide whether to acquit the former president or find him guilty. The Constitution requires a two-thirds majority for conviction, meaning that at least 17 of the 50 Senate Republicans have to join their Democratic colleagues.

Trump has reiterated that during his speech on January 6, he called on his supporters to protest "peacefully and patriotically."

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.

Georgia State Official Probing Trump's Effort to Overturn Election Results - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger's office has opened an investigation into allegations that former President Donald Trump tried to overturn the state's 2020 election results, Communications Manager for Voter Education Walter Jones told Sputnik.

"Yes, I can confirm," Jones said on Monday when asked to confirm reports that Raffensperger has formally opened a probe into Trump's effort to overturn the state's 2020 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.

Wall Street Continues Record High Spree as Biden Pushes Forth With US Stimulus

NEW YORK, February 8 (Sputnik) - Wall Street continued its record setting spree in all three major US stock indexes hit all-time highs for a second day in a row as the Biden administration pushed to have its \$1.9 trillion coronavirus stimulus approved by Congress with or without bipartisan support.

The S&P 500, a barometer for the top 500 US stocks, settled up 0.7 percent at 3,916 on Monday, after a record high at 3,894. The S&P 500 gained 4.7 percent last week.

The tech-heavy Nasdaq index, which includes sector giants such as Facebook, Apple, Amazon, Netflix and Google, closed up 0.8 percent at 13,988, after an all-time high at 13,898. Nasdaq ended last week up 6 percent.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average, the broadest gauge of the New York Stock Exchange, closed up 0.8 percent at 31,386. The Dow gained 3.9 percent last week.

"US stocks are feeling super as Wall Street remains confident Biden's stimulus plan will be big and is coming shortly and as COVID cases continue to trend lower," said Ed Moya, senior market strategist at New York-based online broker OANDA Capital.

Biden and his Democratic allies in Congress have cleared the path for their \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief package as lawmakers approved a budget outline that will allow them to muscle the plan through without Republican support. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, meanwhile, said on Sunday that she expected the United States to revert to full employment by next year if Congress approved the stimulus package.

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.

Domestic Extremist Groups in US Aggressively Recruit Soon-to-Be Veterans - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - US Defense Department spokesperson John Kirby told reporters that domestic extremist groups in the United States are actively engaged in recruiting future veterans.

"Some of these groups are very organized; they very aggressively recruit soon-to-be veterans," Kirby said during a press briefing on Monday.

Kirby explained that extremists hire former service members because they believe veterans embrace the same ideologies. The recruiters also value veterans' leadership skills, management capabilities, and knowledge of weapon use, Kirby added.

"There is an organized, almost aggressive effort by some of these groups to pull veterans into their circle," he said.

On January 6, a group of former President Donald Trump's supporters entered the US Capitol to protest lawmakers accepting electoral states from US battleground states that Trump has claimed are invalid and robbed him of election victory.

Media outlets have reported that at least 27 of the more than 140 people charged over the recent storming of the US Capitol building were either serving or had served in the United States military.

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 Postpones Deportation Hearings Against Ex-Nazi Until March 19 - Immigration Board

TORONTO, February 8 (Sputnik) - Canada's Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) is postponing until March 19 the deportation hearings against former Nazi Helmut Oberlander after the country's Federal Court of Canada ordered a stay of the proceedings, IRB spokesperson Anna Pape told Sputnik.

Earlier on Monday, the IRB cancelled the deportation proceedings against the former Schutzstaffel (SS) member moments before the admissibility hearings were set to begin. "I can confirm that the Federal Court of Canada has issued an order staying the admissibility hearing proceedings in this case. As a result, the Immigration Division has had to administratively postpone the matter until (and including) March 19, 2021," Pape said in a statement.

A new admissibility hearing date has not been scheduled, Pape added.

Justice Richard Southcott said that a further stay could be granted past the March 19 date if another application for leave is successfully submitted.

Oberlander's lawyers argued in the application that the proceedings would have a debilitating impact on the former Nazi's health and that his hearing disability combined with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic could impair his ability to comprehend and respond to the questions. The lawyers also raised concerns about an alleged abuse of process, violations of Oberlander's Charter rights and the ineffectiveness of any judicial reviews if the admissibility hearings proceed.

However, the Federal Court of Canada did throw out a motion from Oberlander's defense team to suspend the hearings until the leave and the potential judicial review of the case are completed, with Southcott stating that the application did not meet the "exceptional circumstance" threshold and ruling that the IRB's Immigration Division has jurisdiction to hear the case.

In December, an IRB adjudicator ruled that Oberlander's admissibility hearings could commence in January citing the numerous delays in the case and dismissing the defense's assertions that COVID-19 restrictions could impair the former SS member's communication with his legal counsel.

The IRB had previously consented to a number of procedural accommodations, including attending hearings via teleconference and appointing Oberlander's daughter as his designated representative due to his numerous ailments.

The 96-year-old has been embroiled in legal battle with the Canadian government since 1995, when the latter began trying to strip Ukrainian-born Oberlander of his citizenship, citing his failure to disclose his links to death squads. After a lengthy legal battle, Oberlander was stripped of his citizenship for the fourth time and final time in 2017 and Canada's Supreme Court issued a ruling last December that blocked any possibility for Oberlander to appeal this decision.

An adjudicator ruled in October that the IRB has the jurisdiction to pursue the deportation of Oberlander, concluding that no abuse of process had occurred.

Additionally, Oberlander faces legal scrutiny in Russia, where investigators say that Oberlander was complicit in the World War II massacre of 27,000 civilians, including orphaned children, in Russia's Rostov region.

Federal Security Service (FSB) files revealed that Oberlander, a former interpreter for the Sonderkommando SS-10A death squad, played a role in the massacre.

Russia's Investigative Committee has sent a request to the Canadian authorities to provide legal materials related to the probe of Oberlander's role in the massacre.

However, in an interview with Sputnik in December, the Russian Embassy in Ottawa said the Canadian government did not request documents related to the case and has refused to cooperate despite Moscow's request for legal assistance. The Russian Embassy added that "influential defenders" are working to delay former Nazi's deportation process.

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 Human Rights Council Reform Should Tackle Disproportionate Focus on Israel- State Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - Any potential reforms in the United Nations Human Rights Council should address that body's disproportionate focus on Israel, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said during a press briefing.

"You outlined one of those reforms that is necessary - the Council's disproportionate focus on Israel, and second I think ensuring countries with strong human rights records serve on the council. We firmly believe that states with the worst human rights record don't belong on the human rights council," Price told reporters on Monday.

Earlier on Monday, US President Joe Biden ordered the State Department to immediately re-engage with the Human Rights Council as an observer.

Price said the US government's view on both elements is that the best way for to reform and improve the Human Rights Council as an institution is to engage with it and its members in a principled fashion.

In July 2018, former President Donald Trump pulled the United States out of the Human Rights Council citing as a reason the body's bias against Israel. By withdrawing, the United States also gave up its three-year term that allowed Washington the right to exercise its vote in the UN body.

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 State Dept. Says Myanmar Military Rejected Request to Speak With Suu Kyi

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - The Myanmar military has rejected the United States' request to speak with State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said at a press briefing.

"Shortly after the events of February 1, we made an effort to reach out to Aung San Suu Kyi, we did that both informally and we did that formally as well, those requests of course were denied," Price said on Monday.

Last week, Myanmar's military overthrew the government and declared a year-long state of emergency after accusing Aung San Suu Kyi's party of election fraud.

US officials have said the Biden administration is crafting measures to impose on Myanmar's military if it does not relinquish power.

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.

PREVIEW - US Senate Starts Trial Arguments in Trump's Impeachment Over 'Insurrection'

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - The US Senate begins hearing trial arguments Tuesday on whether to impeach former President Donald Trump over last month's violence at Capitol Hill with chances looking slim for his conviction in a chamber evenly divided along party lines.

Trump's opponents seek to use the sole article of impeachment - the incitement of violence against the US government - to permanently disqualify him from holding public office including running for president in 2024. His defense team urged the Senate to dismiss as unconstitutional allegations that Trump had a role in the January 6 attack on the Capitol by his loyalists who sought to prevent the congressional certification of his election loss.

Last month, the House of Representatives approved the impeachment article - which is akin to an indictment - in a simple majority vote. The Senate's subsequent role is to sit as a High Court of Impeachment - considering evidence, hearing witnesses, and finally voting to acquit or convict.

The Constitution requires a two-thirds vote for conviction, meaning that at least 17 of the 50 Senate Republicans have to join their Democratic colleagues. Last month, only five of them voted against a procedural motion to dismiss the trial on constitutional grounds, an indication that the impeachment lacks the necessary support.

Five people - four protesters and a police officer - were killed in the riots. The last time the Capitol was stormed was when British troops marched into Washington and set fire to the building in 1814. The attack on the Capitol came immediately after Trump, in a fiery speech near the White House, urged his followers to fight and not allow the election to be "stolen." The article of impeachment also alleges that in the months preceding the congressional certification of the vote Trump repeatedly issued false statements asserting that the presidential election results were the product of widespread fraud and should not be accepted by the American people.

As the unrest broke out, Trump condemned the violence and committed himself to an orderly transition.

His defense team argued that the Senate lacks jurisdiction over Trump because he holds no public office from which he can be removed. Their trial brief issued on Monday also claimed that all allegations against him are "self-evidently wrong" and fail to meet "the constitutional standard for any crime, let alone an impeachable offense." Trump's lawyers also accused the House of

failing to conduct "any meaningful... investigation" that would allow "the 45th President's positions to be heard."

"The Senate should dismiss these charges and acquit the President because this is clearly not what the Framers wanted or what the Constitution allows," the brief said.

According to CNN, the Senate on Tuesday will conduct a four hour debate on the issue of the constitutionality of the trial to be followed by a simple majority vote. Starting Wednesday, each side will have up to 16 hours for presenting its case. Senators may debate and vote calling witnesses. Per the request of Trump's lawyers, the trial will adjourn for the Sabbath and reconvene on Sunday.

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

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, February 8 (Sputnik)

US-INDIA RELATIONS

* President Joe Biden and Indian Prime Minister Nahendra Modi agreed in a phone conversation to continue the close cooperation on advancing freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific region and also insisted on a return to the rule of law in Myanmar, the White House said in a readout of the call on Monday.

* The two leaders also agreed that Myanmar should return to the rule of law, the readout said.

THREE EU COUNTRIES EXPEL RUSSIAN DIPLOMATS

* Germany, Poland and Sweden on Monday expelled one Russian diplomat each in response to the last week's expulsion of diplomats from Russia over their participation in unauthorized rallies.

* Russia considers the expulsion of its diplomats from Sweden, Germany and Poland to be an unjustified and an unfriendly step and Moscow has provided all justifications for the expulsion of European diplomats from Russia because of their participation in unauthorized rallies, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

* The Russian Embassy in Berlin said that Germany's decision to expel Russian diplomat was "openly confrontational" and will be given an "adequate and proportionate response."

NAVALNY CASE

* The West is trying to make the Navalny topic almost the main one in the dialogue with Russia, giving Moscow an ultimatum demand to open a criminal case on the alleged poisoning, while actually hiding the key "evidence," Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on Monday.

* Navalny could not have made a movie about the "palace" in Gelendzhik without cooperation with Western intelligence, so Moscow asked Berlin how he had gained access to archives

concerning Russian President Vladimir Putin, and Germany confirmed that the materials had been provided, Lavrov said.

* Germany refused the fourth request of the Russian Prosecutor General's Office on the incident with Navalny, in particular about the reliability of media information that the Novichok-class poison was found on a bottle brought to Germany from Tomsk by his colleague Maria Pevchikh, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

MH17 CASE HEARING IN DUTCH COURT

* The court in the Netherlands, which is holding a hearing on the 2014 crash of the MH17 flight over Ukraine, has agreed to add reports of Russian arms company Almaz-Antey to the case materials, the judge said Monday.

* The district court of The Hague does not believe it necessary to allow experts from Russian arms company Almaz-Antey examine the debris of the MH17 flights, the judge said.

CORONAVIRUS VACCINES

* The vaccine produced by the pharmaceutical companies Pfizer and BioNTech may be effective against new highly infectious variants of COVID-19 first identified in the United Kingdom and South Africa, a new scientific study published in the journal "Nature Medicine" has found.

* Health officials in the United Kingdom are planning to offer booster shots that will offer protection against new coronavirus variants this coming fall, England's deputy chief medical officer Jonathan Van-Tam 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.

US Military Does Not See Russia-China-Iran Naval Drill as 'Impediment' - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - The US military does not view an upcoming exercise of Russian, Chinese and Iranian navies in the Indian Ocean as an impediment to its ability to defend freedom of the seas and support allies, the Pentagon spokesman John Kirby told reporters on Monday.

"Navies exercise. I did an awful lot of that myself," Kirby said when asked during a daily press briefing about potential concerns. "Exercising naval capabilities is to be expected. I don't think we view exercises like this as an impediment to our ability to defend freedom of the seas and to support our alliances and partnerships around the world."

Russian Ambassador to Iran Levan Dzagharyan told Sputnik earlier that multilateral drills will be held in the Indian Ocean in the middle of February. The navies plan to practice search and rescue operations and measures to ensure safe navigation.

Russia, Iran and China held their Marine Security Belt naval drills in late December 2019.

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 Concerned Over Myanmar Military's Restrictions on Peaceful Assembly - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - The United States is concerned about the Myanmar military's decision to restrict peaceful protests, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Monday.

"We stand with the people of Burma [Myanmar], support their right to assemble peacefully, including to protest peacefully in support of the democratically-elected government... we're of course very concerned about the military's recent announcement restricting public gatherings," Price said during a press briefing.

Last week, Myanmar's military overthrew the government and declared a year-long state of emergency after accusing State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi's party of election fraud. Price added that the United States has been urging China in public and private channels to condemn the coup in Myanmar.

Moreover, Price said the US administration is looking at policy measures to impose if Myanmar's military does not relinquish power.

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 Not Looking at 'Particular Date' for Iran Compliance to Nuclear Deal - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - The United States is not aiming at any specific date but looking at Iran's willingness to go along with the proposal of US President Joe Biden to comply to the nuclear deal, State Department spokesperson Ned Price told reporters on Monday.

Iran gave the EU until February 21 to negotiate a way of lifting sanctions on its banking and financial sectors. Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif said a "very easy way" would be to make the United States come back into compliance with the nuclear deal.

"What we have put on the table is that we are looking for Iran to resume its full compliance... So, we aren't looking to any particular date, we are looking for Iran to indicate it's willingness to go along with the proposition that as a candidate Vice President Biden put on a table and proposition that remains on the table today," Price said.

Price said Iran will still be out of compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) "by definition" if it does not comply by February 21. When asked whether Washington sees that date as the deadline for Iran's full compliance with the JCPOA commitments or some red line that Iran should not cross, Price said, "No."

The White House earlier in the day said if Iran fully complies with the JPOA governing Tehran's nuclear program, the United States will do the same.

Zarif said on Sunday the United States must remove sanctions imposed on Iran and return to the nuclear agreement if it really wants to discontinue with the policies of former Trump administration.

On Sunday, Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei Tehran said the country would only return to its commitments if the United States lifted sanctions it had re-imposed on Iran.

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.

National Guard Deployment to Protect US Capital Will Cost Nearly \$500Mln - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - The deployment of the National Guard to secure Washington, DC will cost \$483 million through mid-March, US Department of Defense spokesperson John Kirby told reporters on Monday.

"The estimate through March 15 is that the total cost of National Guard support will come to \$483 million," Kirby said during a press conference.

Kirby explained that \$284 million of that amount covers personnel expenses and \$199 million supports the troops' operations.

More than 26,000 troops from all 50 US states were deployed to Washington, DC to secure the capital during the inauguration of President Joe Biden.

The decision to deploy guardsmen to the capital was made in response to the January 6 incident at the US capitol, when a group of supporters of former President Donald Trump entered the building to protest lawmakers approving electoral slates from US states that Trump claims are invalid and robbed him of election victory.

In late January, the National Guard said it would keep 5,000 troops in Washington through mid-March, but recent media reports have indicated that the number of troops may be 7,000 or more.

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, Modi Agree on Open Indo-Pacific, Rule of Law in Myanmar - White House

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden and Indian Prime Minister Nahendra Modi agreed in a phone conversation to continue their close cooperation on advancing freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific region and also insisted on a return to the rule of law in Myanmar, the White House said on Monday in a readout of their call.

"The leaders agreed to continuing close cooperation to promote a free and open Indo-Pacific, including support for freedom of navigation, territorial integrity, and a stronger regional architecture," the readout said. "They further resolved that the rule of law and the democratic process must be upheld in Burma [Myanmar]."

Biden and Modi also agreed to extend and expand bilateral collaboration on a broad range of issues, the White House said.

They made a commitment "that the United States and India will work closely together to win the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, renew their partnership on climate change, rebuild the global economy in a way that benefits the people of both countries and stand together against the scourge of global terrorism," the readout stated.

Biden stressed his desire to defend democratic institutions and norms around the world and the two leaders agreed to stay in close touch on a range of global challenges, the White House 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 to Look for Ways to Boost Saudi Arabia's Ability to Defend Itself - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - The United States will seek ways to improve its support for Saudi Arabian efforts to defend itself, State Department spokesperson Ned Price told reporters on Monday.

US President Joe Biden announced last week that the United States was stopping all support for the Saudi-led offensive operations in Yemen.

"Saudi Arabia faces genuine security threats from Yemen which we again saw over the weekend," Price said. "We will look for ways to improve support for Saudi Arabia's ability to defend itself on its territory against threats."

Price said it will be considered during the interagency process of future potential weapons transfers to Saudi Arabia.

Earlier, US Central Command (CENTCOM) chief Gen. Kenneth McKenzie said the United States will continue sharing intelligence with Saudi Arabia to help Riyadh defend itself from security threats, but will halt support for any offensive operations in Yemen.

Biden has also vowed to step up diplomatic efforts to solve the conflict by peaceful means and appointed veteran diplomat Timothy Lenderkin as his special envoy for Yemen.

On Friday, the Saudi Foreign Ministry said it welcomes the United States' stance to help resolve the crisis in Yemen by political means.

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 Postpones Ex-Nazi's Deportation Hearings Until March 19 - Immigration Board

TORONTO, February 8 (Sputnik) - Canada's Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) is postponing deportation hearings against former Nazi Helmut Oberlander at least until March 19 after the country's Federal Court ordered a stay of the proceedings, IRB spokesperson Anna Pape told Sputnik on Monday.

"I can confirm that the Federal Court of Canada has issued an order staying the admissibility hearing proceedings in this case. As a result, the Immigration Division has had to administratively postpone the matter until (and including) March 19, 2021. At this time, a new hearing date for the admissibility hearing is not available," Pape 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.

Biden, Modi Agree on Open Indo-Pacific, Rule of Law in Myanmar - White House

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi agreed in a phone conversation to continue their close cooperation on advancing freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific region and also insisted on a return to the rule of law in Myanmar, the White House said on Monday in a readout of their call. "The leaders agreed to continuing close cooperation to promote a free and open Indo-Pacific, including support for freedom of navigation, territorial integrity, and a stronger regional architecture," the readout said. "They further resolved that the rule of law and the democratic process must be upheld in Burma (Myanmar)."

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 to Keep Up Pressure on Yemen's Houthis - State Department

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - The United States will continue to exert pressure on the leadership of Yemen's Houthi Ansarullah movement, State Department spokesperson Ned Price told reporters on Monday.

"We will certainly keep up the pressure on the leadership [of the] Ansarullah movement, on the Houthis," Price said.

Last week the Biden administration reportedly informed Congress it would remove the Houthis from the US foreign terrorist organizations list.

Price accused the Houthis of being "maligned actors" that have inflicted suffering on the Yemeni people.

The United Nations welcomes the US intention to remove Yemen's Houthi movement from the US list of groups designated as foreign terrorists, UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Saturday.

The Trump administration added the Houthi movement to its list of foreign terrorist organizations days before the end of its tenure. The leader of the movement, Abdul-Malik al-Houthi, his brother and military commander Abd al-Khaliq al-Houthi and another Ansar Allah commander Abdullah Yahya al-Hakim were listed as global terrorists.

On Friday, media reported, citing US officials, that the administration of President Joe Biden had formally informed Congress it would remove the Houthis from the US foreign terrorist organizations list.

The Middle Eastern nation has been engulfed in an armed conflict between the government forces led by President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi and the Houthi rebels for over six years now. The former is backed by a military coalition of Arab countries led by Saudi Arabia.

In mid-December, Hadi announced the creation of a new power-sharing government consisting of 24 ministers in line with the terms of the Riyadh peace deal concluded with Yemen's separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC) in November 2019. The new cabinet is supposed to sit in the temporary capital of Aden, as the official capital of Sanaa has been under the control of the Houthi movement since September 2014. Under the agreement, the STC should also return military facilities and state institutions seized in southern Yemen to the legitimate authorities.

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 Concerned Over Myanmar Military's Restrictions on Peaceful Assembly - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - The United States is concerned about the Myanmar military's decision to restrict peaceful protests, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Monday.

"We stand with the people of Burma [Myanmar], support their right to assemble peacefully, including to protest peacefully in support of the democratically-elected government... we're of course very concerned about the military's recent announcement restricting public gatherings," Price said during a press briefing.

Last week, Myanmar's military overthrew the government and declared a year-long state of emergency after accusing State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi's party of election fraud.

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 to Keep up Pressure on Yemen's Houthis - State Department

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - The United States will continue to exert pressure on the leadership of Yemen's Houthi Ansarullah movement, State Department spokesperson Ned Price told reporters on Monday.

"We will certainly keep up the pressure on the leadership [of the] Ansarullah movement, on the Houthis," Price said.

Last week the Biden administration reportedly informed Congress it would remove the Houthis from the US foreign terrorist organizations list.

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 Special Envoy Ready to Visit Myanmar to Calm Situation - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, February 8 (Sputnik) - UN Special Envoy for Myanmar Christine Schraner Burgener is ready under certain conditions to visit the country to calm tensions there following the recent military coup, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said during a press conference on Monday.

"The Secretary-General's Special Envoy remains prepared to visit UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric told reporters on Monday that under agreeable conditions to help calm the situation," Dujarric told reporters.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres continues the situation in Myanmar with concern and has been calling together with Schraner Burgener on key international leaders to create conditions to reverse the military coup.

The two officials will continue to mobilize the international community to urge a return to democracy, pursuing dialogue and reconciliation as well as push for the immediate release of detained individuals, Dujarric added.

Last Monday, Myanmar's military overthrew the government and declared a year-long state of emergency after accusing State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi's party of election fraud. The military blocked social media and shut down the internet across the country, among other measures.

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.

Shelters in US, Mexico Prepare for Migrant Influx Ahead of Policy Changes - Advocacy Group

EL PASO, February 8 (Sputnik) - Shelters in the United States and Mexico are preparing to receive large numbers of migrants at the southern US border due to potential changes in immigration policy under the Biden administration, Hope Border Institute Deputy Director Marisa Limon told Sputnik.

Last week, President Joe Biden signed an executive order to end Trump's family separation policy. US authorities over the weekend said they are already seeing large groups of parents and children crossing the border, according to The Washington Post.

"There are efforts underway on both sides of the border to receive larger numbers of people due to potential changes in immigration policy," Limon said.

The immigrant advocacy group in the border town of El Paso, Texas, helps provide support to migrants arriving in the neighboring city Juarez, Mexico.

Limon said Juarez has seen an increase in the number of migrants arriving at "filter locations," which are sites where newly arrived migrants can quarantine and seek medical attention if they have been exposed to the novel coronavirus.

Shelters are likely to see an increase in migrant guests soon, but they are not yet at full capacity, Limon said.

Biden is expected to ease even more strict Trump-era immigration policies that were designed to deter the flow of migrants arriving at the US-Mexico border.

The US president recently ordered a review of the current US immigration policies and a temporary stop to the so-called "Remain in Mexico" asylum program, officially known as the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), which required asylum-seeking migrants to temporarily return to Mexico for the duration of their immigration proceedings. More than 60,000 asylum-seeking migrants have been affected by the rule.

Last week, US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) said it has seen a steady increase in border encounters since April 2020, which has caused some facilities to reach maximum safe holding capacity. CBP data shows that more than 70,000 migrants have been apprehended at the US-Mexico border each month from October to December. The numbers for January will be released later this month.

In January, a caravan of some 4,500 Honduran migrants crossed over into Guatemala, scrambling to escape gang-related violence, poverty and unemployment in their home country, a situation which has been exacerbated by the pandemic. Guatemalan authorities have said that they were not going to allow in people who violated migration rules.

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.

Griffiths, Iran's Zarif Meet to Discuss Political Process in Yemen - UN Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, February 8 (Sputnik) - UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths on Monday met with Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif to address the resumption of the political process in Yemen, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing. On Sunday, Griffiths started his two-day visit to Iran to seek support for a negotiated political solution to the conflict in Yemen.

"Today, he [Griffiths] met with Foreign Minister Javad Zarif and other Iranian officials, they exchanged views on Yemen and how to make progress towards the resumption of the political process," Dujarric said.

The two officials also discussed the need to make progress toward a nationwide ceasefire, the opening of the airport in the capital and easing restrictions on the port of Hudaydah, Dujarric added.

Yemen has been engulfed in an armed conflict between the government forces led by President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi and the Houthi rebels for over six years now. The former is backed by a military coalition of Arab countries led by Saudi Arabia.

2/8/2021 10:02:57 PM +03:00

Ontario Extends Stay-at-Home Orders for Most of Province Until February 23 - Statement
TORONTO, February 8 (Sputnik) - The Canadian province of Ontario is extending the existing stay-at-home order for most of the province for the next two weeks, the provincial government said in a statement on Monday.

"In consultation with the Chief Medical Officer of Health, the government is moving to a regional approach and maintaining the shutdown in the majority of the public health regions in Ontario, including the Stay-at-Home order and all existing public health and workplace safety measures," the statement said.

The new order is extended through to February 23 for the province's public health regions unless otherwise stated, the statement also said.

The current order, which was originally enacted in December, will expire for three of the province's health regions - Hastings Prince Edward, Kingston, Frontenac and Lennox and Addington as well as Refrew County - on February 10.

Ontario is reporting some 1,200 people testing positive for the novel coronavirus daily and the province has recorded nearly 280,000 cases and more than 6,500 virus-related deaths since the onset of the pandemic a year ago.

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 Minimum Wage Plan Might Hike Unemployment by 1.4Mln, Budget Deficit by \$54Bln - CBO

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - President Joe's Biden plan to virtually double the US minimum wage to \$15 per hour by June 2025 would raise unemployment by an estimated 1.4 million and the budget deficit by \$54 billion in the decade between 2021 and 2031, the bipartisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) said on Monday.

"Employment would be reduced by 1.4 million workers, or 0.9 percent, according to CBO's average estimate," the agency said in a report that pointed out that the number taken out of poverty will only be around 900,000. "The cumulative budget deficit over the 2021–2031 period would increase by \$54 billion."

The US budget deficit stands at around \$573 billion, after having risen 61 percent in the first three months of fiscal 2021, the Treasury Department said in its monthly balance sheet reported on January 12. The minimum wage itself is at \$7.25 per hour.

Rival Republican lawmakers to Biden's Democratic Party have pushed back against his attempts to include the minimum wage plan as part of a \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief bill he seeks to pass in Congress.

Business owners and captains of industry have also argued that such a hike in minimum wages would put a damper on the economy and ultimately defeat efforts to reach full employment when the country recovers from the impact of COVID-19.

While those arguments appeared strengthened by the CBO's report, the agency also said there were other economic models that presented "conflicting conclusions" to its thesis.

"Some researchers have suggested that during and after periods of high unemployment, a larger-than-average share of firms open or go out of business, and employment might be more responsive to a higher minimum wage under such conditions," the CBO said. "But it is also possible that many of the workers who in normal times would be projected to lose their jobs

because of a higher minimum wage, such as restaurant workers, have already lost their jobs because of the pandemic. In that case, the bill's effect on employment could be weaker." The United States lost more than 21 million jobs between March and April, at the height of business lockdowns forced by the coronavirus. A rebound of 2.5 million jobs was logged in May and 4.8 million in June, before the recovery began slowing. For both September and October, less than 700,000 jobs were added each month. In November, there were just 245,000 additions while December saw a loss of 140,000 jobs - the first such decline since April - before a growth of 49,000 in January.

As for the economy, the Commerce Department estimated that gross domestic product shrank 3.5 percent in 2020, after a 2.2 percent growth in 2019.

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 Defends Impeachment Allegations Against Trump - Lawyers

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - Lawyers for the US House of Representatives defended the allegations against former President Donald Trump in a written response to the request for dismissal of the Article of Impeachment submitted by his legal team to the Senate.

"The House states that each and every allegation in the Article of Impeachment is true, and that any affirmative defenses and legal defenses set forth in the answer are wholly without merit," the House lawyers wrote.

Trump faces impeachment on the charge of "inciting insurrection" on January 6 attack, when a group of his supporters entered the US Capitol to protest lawmakers certifying electoral slates from several battleground states that Trump considers invalid and claims robbed him of election victory.

Trump's defense team argued that the Senate lacks jurisdiction over Trump because he does not hold public office from which he can be removed. The brief claimed that the allegations are "self-evidently wrong" and fail to meet "the constitutional standard for any crime, let alone an impeachable offense."

Trump's lawyers also accused the House of Representatives of failing to conduct any meaningful investigation that would allow "the 45th President's positions to be heard." Trump has said he called on his supporters to "peacefully and patriotically" protest.

Last month, the House voted to impeach Trump and passed the case to the Senate, which will conduct a trial set to begin on Tuesday.

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 Considering Taking Actions Against Myanmar Military Over Coup - White House

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is considering taking possible actions against the Myanmar military following the coup in that country, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said during a press briefing on Monday.

"In terms of what actions we're taking, there are considerations that are underway, or policy processes that are underway, on our national security team as we speak," Psaki told reporters. Psaki also said the Biden administration is concerned about China's absence from the conversation regarding the situation in Myanmar.

Last Monday, Myanmar's military overthrew the government and declared a year-long state of emergency after accusing State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi's party of election fraud. The military blocked social media and shut down the internet across the country among other measures.

White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan told reporters on Thursday that the Biden administration may impose targeted sanctions on Myanmar's military and entities they control.

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 Has Nearly 700 Coronavirus Cases of UK Variant in 34 States - Health Agency

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - The United States has confirmed 699 cases of the UK coronavirus variant in 34 states of the union, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said on Monday.

"The continued proliferation of variants remains of great concern and is a threat that could reverse the recent positive trends we are seeing," Walensky said. "As of February 7, 699 variant cases have been confirmed across 34 states with 690 of these cases being the B.1.1.7 variant - ten variant first reported in the United Kingdom."

The mutated coronavirus variant, which was originally discovered in the United Kingdom and is found to be more contagious, is spreading across the United States and may become the dominant strain in many states as soon as by March, a new study suggests.

The UK variant was imported into the United States multiple times in November 2020, the study said.

UK public health officials in December announced the emergence of the new coronavirus strain that is believed to be up to 70 percent more transmissible. The new strain was first discovered in southeast England in September and subsequently spread rapidly throughout the United Kingdom and continental Europe.

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.

If Iran Returns to Full Compliance With Nuclear Agreement, US Will Do Same - White House

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - If Iran fully complies with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) governing Tehran's nuclear program, the United States will do the same, White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki told reporters on Monday.

"If Iran comes into full compliance with its obligations under the JCPOA, the United States would do the same," Psaki said, adding that it could lead to a larger agreement that addresses other areas of concern as well. "That would of course be done with our P5+1 partners as it was done when we're putting together the JCPOA in the first place."

Psaki was asked to comment on President Joe Biden's statement during an interview on Sunday that he was not going to lift US sanctions on Iran in order to get Tehran back to the negotiating table. Asked whether he expected Iran to stop enriching uranium beyond the limits set in the nuclear agreement, Biden simply nodded.

Asked whether Biden's position on the issue was non-negotiable, Psaki said Biden "never said that exactly" and "didn't respond to the question."

Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Sunday the United States must remove sanctions imposed on Iran and return to the nuclear agreement if it really wants to discontinue with the policies of former Trump administration.

Zarif emphasized that the Biden's administration needs to decide whether the United States wants to turn away from the policies pursued by former President Donald Trump, or build on Trump's failures that will inevitably lead to additional failures.

Zarif also said Iran was going to reduce the presence of United Nations inspectors in the country by the end of February, but that does not mean that the window is fully shut, adding that the ball is "not on our side."

On Sunday, Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei Tehran would only return to its commitments if the United States lifted sanctions it had re-imposed on Iran.

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 Welcomes US Move to Re-Engage With UN Human Rights Council - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, February 8 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres welcomed the decision by US President Joe Biden to rejoin the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) almost three years after former President Donald Trump announced the withdrawal from the body, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Monday.

Biden ordered the State Department earlier on Monday to immediately re-engage with HRC as an observer, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.

"The Secretary-General welcomes the decision of the United States of America to re-engage with the United Nations Human Rights Council," Dujarric said.

The United Nations looked forward to hearing the "crucial voice" of the United States across the work of the Council, Dujarric added.

In July 2018, former President Donald Trump exited the United States from the HRC citing the body's bias against Israel. By withdrawing from the HRC, the United States also gave up its three-year term that allowed Washington the right to exercise its vote in the UN body.

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.

If Iran Returns to Full Compliance With JCPOA, US to Do Same - White House

WASHINGTON, February 5 (Sputnik) - If Iran fully complies with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JPOA) governing Tehran's nuclear program the United States will do the same, White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki told reporters on Monday.

"If Iran comes into full compliance with its obligations under the JCPOA, the United States would do the same," Psaki said, adding that it could lead to a larger agreement that addresses other areas of concern as well. "That would of course be done with our P5+1 partners as it was done when we're putting together the JCPOA in the first place."

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's Lawyers Call US House Article of Impeachment 'Unconstitutional' - Trial Brief

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump's lawyers called on the US Senate to dismiss as unconstitutional the article of impeachment against him in a brief filed ahead of the trial that is set to start on Tuesday.

"The Article of Impeachment presented by the House is unconstitutional for a variety of reasons, any of which alone would be grounds for immediate dismissal," Trump's lawyers said in the trial brief filed on Monday.

Trump faces trial in the Senate after being impeached in the House of Representatives on a charge of "inciting insurrection" after a group of his supporters entered the US Capitol to protest lawmakers certify electoral slates from battleground US states that Trump claimed were invalid and robbed him of election victory.

"The Senate should dismiss these charges and acquit the President because this is clearly not what the Framers wanted or what the Constitution allows," the brief said.

The defense team argued that the Senate lacks jurisdiction over Trump because he holds no public office from which he can be removed.

The brief also said that the allegations against Trump are "self-evidently wrong" and fail to meet "the constitutional standard for any crime, let alone an impeachable offense."

Trump's lawyers also accused the Democratic-led House of Representatives of failing to conduct any meaningful investigation that would allow "the 45th president's positions to be heard."

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 Congressman Ron Wright Dies After Battle With COVID-19 - Office

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) – US Congressman Ron Wright, a Republican representing Texas' 6th congressional district, has died following a battle with COVID-19, his office said on Monday.

"Congressman Ron Wright passed away peacefully at the age of 67 on Feb. 7, 2021," the statement said.

Wright and his wife, Susan, had been admitted to Baylor Hospital in Dallas two weeks ago after contracting COVID-19, it added. Wright had been battling lung cancer since 2019.

Wright was first elected to the US House of Representatives in 2018 and reelected during the general elections in November. The 67-year-old sat on the foreign affairs and education and labor congressional committees.

Wright is the first sitting US Congressman to succumb to complications from the disease. In December, Congressman-elect Luke Letlow, a Republican from Louisiana, died after contracting the virus and a resulting blood clot.

Wright is survived by his wife, brother, three children and nine grandchildren.

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 Congressman Ron Wright Dies After Battle With COVID-19 – Office

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) – US Congressman Ron Wright, a Republican representing Texas' 6th congressional district, has died following a battle with COVID-19, his office said on Monday.

"Congressman Ron Wright passed away peacefully at the age of 67 on Feb. 7, 2021," the statement said.

Wright and his wife had been admitted to Baylor Hospital in Dallas two weeks ago after contracting COVID-19, it 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.

Trump's Lawyers Call US House Article of Impeachment 'Unconstitutional' - Trial Brief

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump's lawyers dismissed as unconstitutional the article of impeachment against him in a trial brief filed ahead of the start of arguments in his trial in the Senate on Tuesday.

"The Article of Impeachment presented by the House is unconstitutional for a variety of reasons, any of which alone would be grounds for immediate dismissal," his lawyers said in the trial brief filed on Monday.

Trump faces impeachment on charges of inciting violence against the US government over the January 6 attack on the Capitol by his loyalists who sought to prevent the congressional certification of his election loss.

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.

Americans Believe Trump Better at Fighting Terror Than Obama - Poll

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - US citizens believe former president Donald Trump had a better record in fighting terrorism than his predecessor Barack Obama did, a new Gallup poll revealed on Monday.

"Results from the poll show that 44 percent of those surveyed said the US made progress in combating terrorism under Trump, while 35 percent said the country has lost ground," Gallup said. "[O]nly 28 percent of Americans said Obama made progress fighting terrorism, while 49 percent said the US lost ground ... during his term."

As Trump's second Senate impeachment trial is about to begin, the poll also found that a slim majority of Americans (52 percent) favored convicting him. In January 2020 just before his first Senate trial, 46 percent said they favored conviction. Trump was acquitted in that trial, Gallup said

Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents overwhelmingly back Trump's conviction this time with 89 percent in favor and only seven percent against while 88 percent of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents currently oppose conviction, and 10 percent favor it, the poll 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.

UN International Labor Organization Achieves 'Carbon Neutrality' - Statement

UNITED NATIONS, February 8 (Sputnik) - The International Labor Organization (ILO) said in a press release on Monday that it had achieved carbon neutrality in line with the United Nations-set goals to become climate neutral.

"The ILO has achieved carbon neutrality, in line with the target set across the United Nations system to become climate neutral by 2020," the release said.

In 2016, the agency implemented an environmental sustainability policy that introduced recycling of 80 percent of the waste volume at the ILO headquarters in Geneva and issued a "paper-smart policy," the release said.

The ILO offset the remaining carbon emissions through the so-called Certified Emission Reductions credits earned by reducing extra air emissions beyond what is required, the release added.

The ILO's efforts are a part of the Greening the Blue United Nations' strategy, which has began in 2007 aiming for all UN agencies to become climate neutral by 2020 by reducing emissions and offsetting., according to the release

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 CENTCOM Commander Says Expects Russia, China to Continue Challenging US in Middle East

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - Russia and China will continue to pose challenges for the United States in the Middle East, US Central Command (CENTCOM) chief Gen. Kenneth McKenzie said on Monday.

"I suspect, Russia will continue to challenge the US presence [in the Middle East]." McKenzie said during a virtual discussion at the Middle East Institute.

McKenzie also said Russia will continue to pursue its greater strategic goals in the region, including reinforcing of the global power status.

The CENTCOM commander pointed out that Russia's activity in the Middle East, along with Iranian malign activity, Turkey's security concerns over Syria major barriers to the US-led coalition to defeat the Islamic State terror group (banned in Russia) undermine and disrupt US influence in the region.

"In 2020, Russia and China exploited ongoing regional crisis, financial infrastructure needs, perception of declining US engagement and opportunities created by COVID-19 to advance their objectives across the Middle East," McKenzie said.

China currently imports about the half of crude oil from the region and will continue to expand it economic and trade relations with countries there, McKenzie 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 to Share Some Intelligence With Saudis Amid Halting Yemen Operations Support - CENTCOM

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - The United States will continue sharing intelligence with Saudi Arabia to help Riyadh defend itself from security threats, but will halt support for any offensive operations in Yemen, US Central Command (CENTCOM) chief Gen. Kenneth McKenzie said during a virtual event hosted by the Middle East Institute on Monday.

"Over the last several weeks a number of attacks have been launched out of Yemen against Saudi Arabia. We will help the Saudis defend against those attacks by giving them intelligence when we can about those attacks," McKenzie said. "What we will not do is help them ... continue conduct offensive operations into Yemen."

McKenzie pointed out that the United States' interest in Yemen first and foremost is to counter terrorism and emphasized that its support for the Saudi-led coalition operating in Yemen has been made extremely limited.

McKenzie's comments come after US President Joe Biden announced on Thursday the United States was stopping all support for the Saudi-led offensive operations in Yemen, but would continue to defend its ally against other threats.

Biden also vowed to step up diplomatic efforts to solve the conflict by peaceful means and appointed veteran diplomat Timothy Lenderkin as his special envoy for Yemen.

On Friday, the Saudi Foreign Ministry said it welcomes the United States' stance toward to help resolve the crisis in Yemen by political means.

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.

SDF Retains 10,000 Islamic State Fighters in Northeast Syria- US Central Command

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have some 10,000 foreign fighters of the Islamic State terror group (banned in Russia) in more than two dozen detention centers throughout northeast Syria, US Central Command (CENTCOM) chief Kenneth McKenzie said on Monday.

"Today, the SDF retains approximately 10,000 ISIS [Islamic State] fighters, including approximately 2,000 foreign fighters," McKenzie said during an Middle East Institute event. McKenzie explained the SDF holds the fighters in more than two dozen detention centers across northeast Syria.

The SDF, founded in 2015 of Kurdish and Arab militias and operating in the north of Syria, has played an active role in fighting the Islamic State. The SDF has placed thousands of the captured militants and members of their families in prisons and camps.

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 Rights Experts Urge 57 Countries to Repatriate Nationals From Camps in Syria - OHCHR

UNITED NATIONS, February 8 (Sputnik) - United Nations human rights experts called on 57 countries to repatriate their nationals from the Al-Hawl and Roj refugee camps in northeast Syria amid the worsening security and humanitarian conditions there, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) said on Monday.

"UN human rights experts expressed serious concerns at the deteriorating security and humanitarian situation at the Al-Hawl and Roj camps in northeast Syria - home to over 64,000 people, mostly women and children - and urged 57 States whose nationals are held there to repatriate them without delay," OHCHR said in a statement.

The experts issued letters to the 57 governments that have their nationals in the camps, recalling the need for repatriation and justice for all the victims of violations of human rights in the region.

"Thousands of people held in the camps are exposed to violence, exploitation, abuse and deprivation in conditions and treatment that may well amount to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment," the experts said.

They also expressed concern at a data collection process that took place in July, during which "highly personal" and "unique" information was gathered from women and children.

The experts said the exercise aimed to identify third-country nationals who may pose a security risk so that states of origin may use the data to decide the further course of action, including trial, repatriation, children's separation from their families and male children detention.

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 Stays Deportation Proceedings Against Ex-Nazi Oberlander – Immigration Board

TORONTO, February 8 (Sputnik) – A Canadian court has stayed the deportation proceedings against former Nazi Helmut Oberlander, an Immigration and Refugee Board representative said on Monday, moments before admissibility hearings were set to begin.

The representative said that a court order has stayed the proceedings and canceled the admissibility hearing scheduled for Monday.

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.

RECAST - Biden Instructs State Dept to Reengage Robustly With UN Human Rights Council - Blinken

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden has ordered the State Department to immediately re-engage with United Nations Human Rights Council (OHCHR) as an observer, almost three years after his predecessor Donald Trump withdrew from the organization, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Monday.

"The Biden administration has recommitted the United States to a foreign policy centered on democracy, human rights, and equality. Effective use of multilateral tools is an important element of that vision, and in that regard the President has instructed the Department of State to reengage immediately and robustly with the UN Human Rights Council," Blinken said in a statement.

The Trump administration withdrew from OHCHR in 2018, with then-US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley saying the organization was biased against Israel and protected human rights abusers such as Cuba, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, China and Venezuela.

Blinken said the US still regards OHCHR as a "flawed body" that needs to reform its agenda, membership and focus, "including its disproportionate focus on Israel."

However, he argued that Washington's pullout from the organization in 2018 did nothing to encourage change, but rather led to a vacuum of US leadership.

"The Council can help to promote fundamental freedoms around the globe, including freedoms of expression, association and assembly, and religion or belief as well as the fundamental rights of women, girls, LGBTQI+ persons, and other marginalized communities. To address the Council's deficiencies and ensure it lives up to its mandate, the United States must be at the table using the full weight of our diplomatic leadership," he said.

Blinken said that in the immediate term, Washington would engage with the OHCHR as an observer, a position that would allow it to engage in debate and partner with other nations to introduce resolutions.

Since taking office in January, Biden signed a flurry of executive orders to reverse Trump's policies. The US has already rejoined the Paris Agreement on climate change and the World Health Organization.

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 Instructs State Dept to Reengage Robustly With UNHRC - Blinken

WASHINGTON, February 8 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden has ordered the State Department to immediately re-engage with United Nations Human Rights Council as an observer, almost three years after his predecessor Donald Trump withdrew from the organization, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Monday.

"The Biden administration has recommitted the United States to a foreign policy centered on democracy, human rights, and equality. Effective use of multilateral tools is an important element of that vision, and in that regard the President has instructed the Department of State to reengage immediately and robustly with the UN Human Rights Council," Blinken said in a statement.

The Trump administration withdrew from UNHCR in 2018, with then-US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley saying the organization was biased against Israel and protected human rights abusers such as Cuba, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, China and Venezuela.

Blinken said the US still regards UNHCR as a "flawed body" that needs to reform its agenda, membership and focus, "including its disproportionate focus on Israel."

However, he argued that Washington's pullout from the organization in 2018 did nothing to encourage change, but rather led to a vacuum of US leadership.

"The Council can help to promote fundamental freedoms around the globe, including freedoms of expression, association and assembly, and religion or belief as well as the fundamental rights of women, girls, LGBTQI+ persons, and other marginalized communities. To address the Council's deficiencies and ensure it lives up to its mandate, the United States must be at the table using the full weight of our diplomatic leadership," he said.

Blinken said that in the immediate term, Washington would engage with the UNHRC as an observer, a position that would allow it to engage in debate and partner with other nations to introduce resolutions.

Since taking office in January, Biden signed a flurry of executive orders to reverse Trump's policies. The US has already rejoined the Paris Agreement on climate change and the World Health Organization.