

**05/07/21 Friday**

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Photo: Chinese Satirist Mocks G7 Image With Comparison to 1900 Anti-Boxer Rebellion Invasion  
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Between 1842 and 1949, China was forced to accept a series of unequal treaties that opened the country to foreign traders, causing huge volumes of wealth to flow from China to Europe, Japan, and the US. By contrast, the socialist era that began in 1949 has been presented as the end to foreign domination and the resumption of socioeconomic progress.

After the Group of 7 (G7) issued a statement Wednesday labeling China and Russia as "threats," a Chinese artist has crafted a satirical take on a photo the G7 foreign ministers posed for. The image shows them in turn-of-the-century garb as the powers who invaded China to crush the 1899-1901 Boxer Rebellion and impose their collective will on the late Qing Dynasty. "The last time when these guys colluded to [suppress] China was still in 1900," Chinese cartoonist Wuheqilin posted on his Weibo account on Friday. "120 years have passed, they are still dreaming."

"Invaders United Kingdom 1900," a satirical take by Chinese artist Wuheqilin on a May 4 photo of the G7 foreign ministers. The eight figures are recast as the eight powers who invaded China in 1900 to crush the nationalist Yihetuan Movement.

According to [the Global Times](#), the image isn't just a digital alteration, but painted. It shows the members of the Eight-Nation Alliance who formed an international army to invade China and crush an anti-Western rebellion in 1900. The text on the wall that said "United Kingdom 2021" in the May 4 photo has been replaced with "Invaders United Kingdom 1900."

European High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs, Josep Borrell, German Foreign Affairs Minister Heiko Maas, Italy's Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio, Britain's Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, Japan's Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi, French Foreign Affairs Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, Canada's Foreign Affairs Minister Marc Garneau and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken pose for a family photo on the stairs at Lancaster House, at the start of the G7 foreign ministers meeting in London, Britain May 4, 2021.

Wuheqilin added another character, though: the Indian soldier in the left-hand corner, holding an IV drip. This was to symbolize India's invitation to the G7 and the COVID-19 scare that happened among India's delegation, as well as the [catastrophic explosion](#) of COVID-19 cases in the country over the last few weeks.

The People's Republic of China, founded in 1949, has prided itself on ending what it calls the "Century of Humiliation" that began with the Opium War, and has presented the socialist era as one of China beginning to [develop itself](#) socially and economically instead of being [slowed or halted](#) by the domination of foreign powers.

At the summit in London, the ministers discussed a number of geopolitical topics, including the situations in Myanmar and Ethiopia, but mostly focused on Russia and China, which UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab characterized [as "rising threats."](#)

The G7's [Wednesday statement](#) criticized China on issues including cybersecurity, Hong Kong, Xinjiang, and Taiwan. Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson [Wang Wenbin told reporters](#) the following day that the G7 ministers had "launched groundless accusations against China, blatantly interfered in China's internal affairs and engaged in anachronistic bloc politics."

"This is gross interference in China's sovereignty, flagrant trampling on norms of international relations and violation of the trend for peace, development and win-win cooperation of our times," Wang said. "China strongly condemns it."

'No Chinese Will Ever Again Dare to Look Cross-Eyed at a German'

Called the Boxer Rebellion in the West, the Yihetuan (Righteous and Harmonious Fists) Movement was a reaction to the growing encroachments by Western imperial powers on Chinese sovereignty. Sixty years earlier, the UK defeated Qing Dynasty China in the First Opium War, forcing Beijing to loosen its rules on trading with foreign powers. Subsequent wars in which tens of millions of Chinese died eventually imposed free trade on the vast majority of China, and permitted Christian missionaries to evangelize among the Chinese population.

Yihetuan, a traditional and previously reclusive marital arts society, took on an increasingly political stance against this and in the late 19th century began killing Christian missionaries, rallying around the Qing government and laying siege to the Legation Quarter in Beijing, where envoys from the imperial powers were stationed. Amid the chaos, the Empress Dowager Cixi seized control of the government from the young and pliant Guangxu Emperor and declared war on the western powers, who sent a combined army of 20,000 men to attack Beijing and destroy the Yihetuan.

German Kaiser Wilhem II, who was part of the alliance, [infamously told](#) his troops on the eve of their departure for China: "Should you encounter the enemy, he will be defeated! No quarter will be given! Prisoners will not be taken! Whoever falls into your hands is forfeited. Just as a thousand years ago the Huns under their King Attila made a name for themselves, one that even today makes them seem mighty in history and legend, may the name German be affirmed by you in such a way in China that no Chinese will ever again dare to look cross-eyed at a German."

The eight nations of the alliance in addition to Germany were the UK, France, Japan, Italy, Austria-Hungary, the US, and Russia - the G7 today, having kicked Russia out of the G8, are composed of the same nations except for Austria-Hungary, which has been replaced by Canada.

After breaking the siege, the international army looted Beijing and the surrounding countryside, massacring thousands of Chinese, and imposed harsh indemnities on the government, including a payment of 18,500 tons of silver and accepting the stationing of Western troops in Chinese cities. The monarchy was overthrown just 11 years later and a republic was declared, but the right of the eight nations to meddle in Chinese affairs did not end until 1949, when the republic was overthrown everywhere in China except Taiwan by a socialist revolution led by Mao Zedong.

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Amid LNG Impact Fears, EU Aims to Send Troops Against Mozambique Insurgency 'As Soon as Possible'

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

After a new report has warned that delays to the huge liquid natural gas (LNG) projects in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado are likely to cause global deficits, the European Union and Portugal are moving to send troops to fight a growing insurgency near the LNG sites. However, experts are warning further militarization will only make the rebellion worse.

In Mozambique's northern Cabo Delgado province, a militant movement among the Muslim population has slowly been gaining steam since 2017. The group recently pledged itself to Daesh despite no demonstrable link between them, drawing the attention of Western powers already involved in apparent anti-terror campaigns elsewhere in Africa.

As [Sputnik has reported](#), the movement Ansar al-Sunna, known locally as al-Shabab ("the youth"), is more so fueled by anger at the exploitation and displacement that the LNG projects and ruby mining by Western multinational corporations has wrought in the province, which is among Mozambique's poorest, than it is by a serious dedication to a militant Muslim ideology.

EU's Rapid Response Force

Josep Borrell, the European Union's foreign policy chief, said Thursday after a [G7 summit](#) in London that the EU was planning on sending a military training mission to Mozambique "as soon as possible."

"The Mozambique government has been asking for help, we will try to send a training mission...in order to contain the security situation," [Borrell told reporters](#). "If we are not able to send the mission by the end of this year, I would not consider this as a good result. I would hope we would do it before."

Borrell compared the potential EU mission to the bloc's present involvement in the Sahel, which involves a mixture of humanitarian aid, investment via an EU Trust Fund for Africa, and several military deployments that "include training, advising and offering direct support to security forces, with the ultimate objective of reinforcing national capacities," [according to a 2020 European Parliamentary Research Service report](#).

Borrell's announcement also comes as the EU has once again revived talk of creating a 5,000-strong "rapid reaction force." [According to AFP](#), the proposal has the support of 14 of the bloc's 27 members and is intended "to be able to deploy quickly this response force if for instance you have a legitimate government in a specific country which is afraid of a possible takeover by a terrorist group," according to a senior EU official who spoke anonymously with the agency. Discussions on the issue began in Brussels on Thursday.

Borrell has hailed the initiative, saying "I think that it's good to have the capacity to intervene immediately if you really want to be a geopolitical power. We should be able to act as quick[ly] as needed." However, previous attempts to organize a rapid response force have never yielded results thanks to persistent disagreements about nations supplying funding and forces.

Former Colonizer Portugal Gets More Deeply Involved

"Portugal has already offered half of the staff and sent military instructors but that has to be considered as an advance to be integrated into a European Union training mission if we finally agree," Borrell said. Portugal ruled Mozambique as a colony for nearly 500 years, and fought a brutal anti-colonial war against the FRELIMO liberation movement that now rules the country. However, Portuguese troops have already returned to Mozambique. In December, Lisbon and Maputo signed an agreement for the deployment of 1,500 Portuguese troops to the country this year with an undefined role, although so far only [60 special forces](#) have arrived in the country in the aftermath of the March attack on the northern city of Palma.

[Lusa News Agency](#) reported on Friday that the Portuguese and Mozambican defense ministers will pen a five-year cooperation agreement on Monday.

Portuguese Minister of Defense João Gomes Cravinho told the Lisbon-based agency the situation in the northern Cabo Delgado province "requires a multifaceted approach and cannot be resolved overnight, but over a period of a couple of years, starting with the security situation because this is the basis for any development, and provide humanitarian aid to the affected populations."

Cravinho said that Portuguese troops will be posted primarily in the country's south and center, not in the north where the rebellion is raging. However, he noted "there is much to gain from working with drones, which offer an intelligence-gathering capability that can be valuable."

The EU and Portuguese forces will likely join [roughly 3,000 troops](#) invited by Maputo from the Southern African Development Community (SADC), although [Modern Ghana noted](#) last week that those troops will also be dependent on US and EU security funding sent to their home countries.

There are also an unknown number of private security forces hired by Maputo to fight against Ansar al-Sunna, since International Monetary Fund restructuring has so [restricted government spending](#) as to render the Mozambican military incapable of handling the rebels. [Amnesty International](#) has called attention to how the misconduct of these mercenaries in Cabo Delgado was only further amplifying resentment over the local industrial projects.

#### Not Weapons, But Dialogue

However, some experts aren't so sure the leap to a military response is the best idea.

Abdullahi Boru Halakhe, an expert on governance, security and peace in Africa, wrote in a recent [op-ed in Al Jazeera](#) that further militarization will only amplify the problems in Cabo Delgado.

"Due to Washington's designation of Ansar al-Sunna as a terrorist entity and the recent escalation in violence in the region, militarisation in Cabo Delgado is expected to increase exponentially in the coming months," Halakhe wrote on Thursday. "But as seen elsewhere in Africa and in the last four years in Mozambique, militarisation does not curb violence – it brings more abuse, resentment and consequently, more violence."

"In the end, the Mozambican government is unlikely to end the violent insurgency in Cabo Delgado through further militarization. Defeating Ansar al-Sunna requires not more troops and weapons but dialogue and development. If the local authorities and their regional and international partners fail to see this, the region will see more violence, conflict, and death."

Danny Sjursen, a former US Army Major-turned anti-war activist, has criticized the US labeling Ansar al-Sunna a Foreign Terrorist Organization, [writing last month](#) that it "gives the illusion of a meaningful connection between America's mostly vanquished (but lingeringly frightful) Islamic

State foes in Iraq and Syria, and in fact, the entire framework of an exaggeratedly expansive global jihad. Yet it's simply not true; not in either case.”

He further noted the label virtually ensures that a military response will be the only or primary response to the attacks, since humanitarian groups will be less likely to send aid to people they believe to be terrorists.

A map of Total's Mozambique LNG (liquified natural gas) project in Cabo Delgado province  
In 2019, the French non-governmental organization Les Amis de la [Terre France](#) noted how “the militarization of the area and gas activities contribute to fuel the tensions that feed it. Human rights violations are on the increase in communities, caught between insurgents, private military and paramilitary forces, multinationals or their subcontractors.” Thousands of families have been evicted by the gas and ruby extraction projects.

#### Endangered LNG Projects

In late April, French gas giant Total [declared force majeure](#) on the Afungi Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) project in Cabo Delgado, a colossal \$20 billion plan to mine gas found off the coast and export it via a shore-based facility. The maneuver allows Total to temporarily dodge liability concerns amid the rising violence nearby.

Another LNG project by US-based ExxonMobil and Italy-based Eni is worth \$4.7 billion, and a third project by ExxonMobil, Eni and the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) is the largest at \$30 billion, but has not yet been approved. Together, the three are Africa's largest gas projects.

[Rystad Energy](#) warned in a Wednesday report that the projects' delay is likely to cause an LNG supply crunch later this decade as the three massive projects will now come online much later. “If the expected delays materialize, 2029 will see an LNG supply deficit of 5.6 mtpa [metric tons per annum] instead of a previously expected surplus of 2 mtpa,” Rystad warned, adding that “there is an increasing risk of a prolonged period of tightness midway through this decade, and that lower prices could be seen one to two years later than previously expected.”

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Trump-Era DOJ Reportedly Tracked Washington Post Reporters' Phone Calls for Three Months in 2017

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Although many US presidents have hailed the role of the press and promised to protect “legitimate” whistleblowers, the pace of US government crackdowns on whistleblowers and press organs as well as the probing and assault of journalists have accelerated, especially in the final years of the Trump administration that ended in January.

According to the [Washington Post](#), three of its journalists were recently notified by the US Department of Justice that call records for all of their phones had been obtained by the department for three months in 2017.

The three reporters - Ellen Nakashima, Greg Miller, and Adam Entous, the latter of whom is no longer employed there - received letters from the DOJ on May 3 notifying them of the event.

According to the paper, the letters said they were “hereby notified that pursuant to legal process the United States Department of Justice received toll records associated with the following telephone numbers for the period from April 15, 2017 to July 31, 2017.”

“We are deeply troubled by this use of government power to seek access to the communications of journalists,” Cameron Barr, the Washington Post’s acting executive editor, said in a statement. “The Department of Justice should immediately make clear its reasons for this intrusion into the activities of reporters doing their jobs, an activity protected under the First Amendment.”

The Post noted that the DOJ got information about the parties on the call and how long they lasted, but not recordings of the calls. They reportedly sought similar information about the reporters’ emails during that period, but that request was denied.

Much about the request is unclear. The time period covers the volatile months in which then-FBI [director James Comey](#) was suddenly fired amid a budding Russiagate probe, the FBI briefly opened a [counterintelligence investigation](#) of then-US President Donald Trump, several senior administration figures weighed options [on removing Trump](#) from office, and former FBI director Robert Mueller was appointed special counsel to investigate alleged Russian collusion with Trump’s 2016 election campaign.

According to the Post, [an article dating](#) to the period by the trio of reporters, titled “Sessions discussed Trump campaign-related matters with Russian ambassador, US intelligence intercepts show,” might have been of interest to the DOJ. The article is about a 2016 phone conversation between Russia’s-then ambassador to the US, Sergey Kislyak, and then-Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-AL), who later became attorney general under Trump, in which they discussed Trump’s electoral campaign then underway. Sessions had [recused himself](#) in March 2017 from heading the Russiagate probe, leaving it to his deputy, Rod Rosenstein.

#### A Leak Investigation

DOJ spokesperson Marc Raimondi informed the Post that the request was made “as part of a criminal investigation into unauthorized disclosure of classified information” - in other words, they were chasing a leak.

The decision to obtain reporters’ records while pursuing a leak investigation has to be made by the attorney general, the Post wrote, noting Raimondi had said the information was sought in 2020. It was thus very likely William Barr who approved the move, since he was attorney general for all but one week of the year.

“The targets of these investigations are not the news media recipients but rather those with access to the national defense information who provided it to the media and thus failed to protect it as lawfully required,” Raimondi continued.

However, it’s illegal to classify information in order to conceal illegal activity and federal government employees who reveal illegality are protected under the [Whistleblower Protection Act](#) of 1989.

“Usually whistleblowers are called ‘leakers,’ until they’re able to convince the public that they’re whistleblowers,” former CIA agent-turned whistleblower John [Kiriakou told Sputnik](#) in 2019. “A whistleblower is any person who brings to light evidence of waste, fraud, abuse, illegality or threats to the public health or public safety.”

The Obama administration certainly ignored this fact as it prosecuted a record number of whistleblowers, but it was the Trump administration that indicted WikiLeaks co-founder [Julian](#)

[Assange](#) for helping to publish damning information. Eighteen charges have been levied against Assange, who is currently being held in the UK's Belmarsh Prison as the US [seeks to extradite](#) him, with 17 of those charges coming under the 1917 Espionage Act.

According to the DOJ, Assange helped then-US Army analyst Chelsea Manning hack into US government computers to steal the "[Collateral Murder](#)" video, which revealed the US government had lied about a July 2007 incident in Baghdad in which a US Army Apache helicopter gunship killed as many as 18 people, two of whom were Reuters journalists.

The Pentagon claimed the chopper had been attacked and the journalist caught in the crossfire, but the video shows unarmed people talking on a street corner. According to Manning, the video wasn't classified, but she was nonetheless [sentenced to 35 years](#) in prison for leaking it to WikiLeaks, of which she served seven year in confinement before being pardoned in 2017.

In August 2017, amid a deluge of new leak reports, [Sessions raged](#) the DOJ was "taking a stand. This culture of leaking must stop."

He then told the intelligence agencies the DOJ "is open for business" and warned "would-be leakers: don't do it." He claimed the department was reviewing media subpoena policies and valued the role of the press, but said it is "not unlimited."

"We must balance the press' role with protecting our national security," Sessions said.

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TripAdvisor Belatedly Takes Down 'Fun for the Family' Review of Auschwitz Museum After Complaints

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Despite being a site of sacred remembrance and anguish, the location of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp complex is often the target of incidents ranging from the insensitive to the deliberately offensive, particularly with the rise of anti-Semitism in Europe in recent years.

The Auschwitz Museum in Poland recently announced that an offensive review of their facility posted on travel website TripAdvisor had successfully been removed - but not without a fight. "This place was great went there with my newborn babys to test the chamber but they came out deformed. But its fun for the whole family," read a review posted by an anonymous person on TripAdvisor's page for the Auschwitz Museum.

According to the museum, which is located at the Nazi-built concentration camp and death camp outside Oswiecim, Poland, TripAdvisor initially refused to remove the review after the museum complained, saying it "complies with our submission guidelines and will remain published on TripAdvisor."

However, at some point the website decided to reverse its decision, since the review is now gone.

"In this case, our initial screening failed to identify this review as promoting intolerance," TripAdvisor said in a statement, according to the [Times of Israel](#). "Through our escalation

process, this review was removed. We always aim to get it right the first time and we apologize to the Auschwitz Memorial and Museum and the Jewish community-at-large for this initial miss.” The camp was established following the Nazi German invasion of Poland in 1939 and converted from a soldiers’ barracks into a death camp for conducting [mass exterminations](#) in line with Nazi racial and eugenic theories. Roughly 1.1 million people were killed at Auschwitz before it was liberated, the vast majority of them Jews but also Romani, Poles, Russians, and others, primarily through the use of poison gas in specialized gassing chambers. As the Soviet Red Army advanced westward in the closing months of World War II, the Nazis attempted to disguise their crimes, but were unsuccessful. The day the Soviets liberated the camp - January 27, 1945 - became International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

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Listen: NASA Captures Sounds of Ingenuity Chopper’s Fourth Flight on Mars  
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

NASA’s Ingenuity helicopter recently managed its fourth successful flight on the red planet on April 30, but also managed to capture an unexpected gift for space enthusiasts with an interest in video and audio content from the agency’s ongoing Mars missions.

A microphone installed on NASA’s Perseverance rover recently stunned engineers after it managed to successfully record the humming sounds made by the Ingenuity chopper during its fourth flight on Mars.

Officials with the US space agency have indicated that the recordings picked up by Perseverance marked the very first time that a machine on another planet managed to capture the sounds made by another vehicle.

The footage released by NASA combines both video and audio captured by the Perseverance rover, which - despite the sounds of the rumbling Martian wind - managed to tape the muffled sounds of Ingenuity’s rotor blades with its SuperCam laser instrument.

Although the rover’s Mastcam-Z device has obtained various videos and images of the Martian environment, a [Friday release](#) from NASA explained that the flight test also proved to be the first time that video footage was synced with audio.

NASA researchers have acknowledged that engineers were not entirely sure whether Perseverance’s microphone would be able to capture anything since the rover was situated some 262 feet away from Ingenuity’s designated landing spot.

“This is a very good surprise,” David Mimoun, science lead for Perseverance’s SuperCam microphone, said in a statement accompanying NASA’s release.

“We had carried out tests and simulations that told us the microphone would barely pick up the sounds of the helicopter, as the Mars atmosphere damps the sound propagation strongly. We have been lucky to register the helicopter at such a distance.

“This recording will be a gold mine for our understanding of the Martian atmosphere,” Mimoun added.

Weighing in at just four pounds, the Ingenuity chopper [arrived](#) on Mars's Jezero Crater in mid-February while stowed away inside the Perseverance rover. The mission will see NASA researchers looking for evidence of microbial life on the red planet, among other objectives. Perseverance is expected to spend two years examining the 28-mile-wide area of the since-dried Jezero lakebed.

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Washingtonian Staffers Refuse to Publish After CEO Issues 'Slap in the Face' Back-to-Office by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Staff at the Washington, DC-based Washingtonian magazine have been working remotely since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, similar to many journalists in the industry. However, as COVID-19 vaccines are more readily available and cases appear to be leveling out in the nation's capital, employers are eyeing next steps to returning to the office.

Washingtonian staffers launched a daylong work stoppage on Friday in response to an opinion piece written by the outlet's chief executive that appeared to serve as a warning indicating continued remote work may just make it easier to "let go" of employees.

The [op-ed](#), which was authored by Cathy Merrill and published via the Washington Post on Thursday, highlights her concerns about the growing popularity of remote work and worries over the effects its continued use will have on the workplace environment.

"I am concerned about the unfortunately common office worker who wants to continue working at home and just go into the office on occasion," Merrill wrote, emphasizing that staffers in favor of staying remote are giving executives "a tempting economic option the employees might not like."

"I estimate that about 20 percent of every office job is outside one's core responsibilities - 'extra.' It involves helping a colleague, mentoring more junior people, celebrating someone's birthday - things that drive office culture," she noted. "If the employee is rarely around to participate in those extras, management has a strong incentive to change their status to 'contractor.'"

Keeping in mind that contract workers are typically paid hourly for their work, Merrill stated that the potential change in status would give employers the opportunity of "not having to pay for health care, a 401(k) match and our share of FICA and Medicare taxes."

"[Work] benefits that in my company's case add up roughly to an extra 15 percent of compensation," Merrill acknowledged. "Not to mention the potential savings of reduced office space and extras such as bonuses and parking fees."

In short, Merrill's views on remote work did not fall on deaf ears, especially as staffers at Washingtonian caught wind of the article, which was originally titled, "As a CEO, I want my employees to understand the risks of not returning to work in the office." Incidentally, the op-ed's title was later adjusted to better reflect the piece's message, the Post [reported](#).

In the hours that followed the op-ed's publication, Washingtonian's staff, who are not part of a union, made the decision to protest Merrill's stance by completely refusing to publish online on Friday.

“As members of the Washingtonian editorial staff, we want our CEO to understand the risks of not valuing our labor,” [various staffers tweeted](#) early Friday. “We are dismayed by Cathy Merrill’s public threat to our livelihoods. We will not be publishing today.”

Support for the work halt was also in full swing on social media.

Even Ward 4 DC council member Janeese Lewis George weighed in on the backlash, [stating](#) via Twitter that “no worker should ever have their livelihood threatened for wanting to work from home during a pandemic.”

Amid the backlash, Merrill apologized over how her comments were taken, revealing in an [emailed statement](#) to local interest publication DCist that she “could not be more proud” of the work put out by the Washingtonian team, and “that there will be no changes to benefits or employee status.”

An unidentified staffer with Washingtonian relayed that Merrill’s stance that remote work was ruining the work atmosphere was untrue. “If anything I feel like we’ve been really resilient and really quick on our feet to adapt,” the individual said.

Andrew Beaujon, a senior editor at Washingtonian, told the local outlet that staffers were “really surprised and shocked” about Merrill’s commentary, saying it ultimately felt “like a slap in the face.”

“We had to answer publicly to what was basically a public letter to us ... in a national newspaper,” he said.

It’s presently unclear what next steps the staffers intend to take.

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Biden Administration Says Iran Sanctions Could Be Lifted Only If Tehran Returns to JCPOA Status

by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Since early April 2020, negotiators representing the signers of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action have been holding discussions in Vienna to come to an understanding that would see both the US and Iran fall back under the stipulations outlined in the deal. Neither Iran nor the US have been willing to be the first to resume the agreement.

The White House has stated that sanctions implemented against Iran will only be lifted in the event that the Middle Eastern nation comes back into compliance with the 2015 nuclear deal, doubling down on past remarks.

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki informed reporters during a Friday briefing that in order for the US to fully lift the various sanctions it has imposed, Iran must first regain its status as a complying signer of the JCPOA.

Mirroring [past statements](#) made by US State Department, Psaki added that some progress has been made amid the ongoing Vienna nuclear talks, noting that continuing discussions between negotiators are a good sign for the future.

Since the start of the Biden administration, the press secretary has repeatedly indicated that the US would be willing to ease up on its sanctions, so long as Iran rolls back under JCPOA restrictions, specifically its levels of uranium enrichment.

Iran recently declared that it would start enriching uranium supplies to [60% purity](#), its highest level to date. Under the JCPOA, the nation's enrichment limit is set at 3.67%.

Psaki's latest remarks came as reports have surfaced detailing that the Vienna talks hit somewhat of a roadblock as both US and European representatives have called for the destruction of Iran's recently installed IR-4, IR-6 and IR-9 centrifuges at the nation's Natanz nuclear site.

Officials have grown increasingly concerned that the newer, more sophisticated centrifuges would allow Tehran to enrich its uranium supplies at a higher level, and allow the nation the ability to eventually build a nuclear weapon. Iran has repeatedly stated that it has zero intention of using its technology to create such a weapon.

Although the latest round of the Vienna talks ended without much progress, officials did resume negotiations on Friday.

It's worth noting that discussions are being held as two major deadlines that could have a severe impact on talks are nearing. On May 20, a temporary deal allowing continued inspections of Iranian nuclear sites by the International Atomic Energy Agency is expected to expire. Less than a month later, Iranian presidential elections are set to take place on June 18.

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US Calls for 'Deescalation' of Tensions Over East Jerusalem Amid Eviction of Palestinians  
by [Evan Craighead](#)

This news comes amid a long-running legal case between Palestinians and Jewish settlers in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood. Lawyer Hosni Abu Hussein, the attorney representing the Palestinian families, claimed to reporters that the "prevailing atmosphere made it difficult" for an Israeli court judge to make the decision alone.

As the eviction appeal case moves on to the Israeli Supreme Court, the US Department of State has expressed concern about the looming possibility of Palestinian families being removed from their homes in Sheikh Jarrah.

State Department deputy spokesperson Jalina Porter [told reporters](#) on Friday that Washington is "deeply concerned about the heightened tensions in Jerusalem."

[Recent reports](#) from the area have claimed that Israeli forces operating in the area have injured dozens of Palestinians, and reportedly "kidnapped" a number of individuals from their homes. "As we head into a sensitive period in the days ahead, it will be critical for all sides to ensure calm and act responsibly to deescalate tensions and avoid violent confrontation," Porter said. "We're deeply concerned about the potential eviction of Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah, many of whom have lived in their homes for generations."

Porter's comments come weeks after State Department spokesperson Ned Price issued a similar statement of "concern" for the city of Jerusalem.

Rupert Colville, spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, has stated that the evictions, "if ordered and implemented, would violate Israel's obligations under international law" regarding East Jerusalem.

"We call on Israel to immediately halt all forced evictions, including those in Sheikh Jarrah, and to cease any activity that would further contribute to a coercive environment and lead to a risk of forcible transfer," he said on Friday.

The legal case regarding the Palestinian families' rights remains ongoing and has been advanced to the Supreme Court. Previously, an Israeli court failed to get the families and settlers to reach an agreement regarding land ownership.

Jewish settler organization Lahav Shomron has argued that the land in question has belonged to a Jewish group since 1972. However, the Palestinian families' attorney has disputed the authenticity of said group's documents, and claimed that the Jewish settlers are "illegally" attempting to make the Palestinian families pay rent.

"Our request to appeal the eviction was based on sound legal arguments that any judge would have easily accepted but the prevailing atmosphere made it difficult for the judge to stand up for justice," the families' attorney told [Arab News](#).

According to rental law in Jerusalem, the families' agreement to pay rent would mean the settlers legally own the land.

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Bon Voyage: Norwegian Cruise Line May Skip Florida Ports Due to COVID-19 Vaccine Passport Ban

by [Evan Craighead](#)

On Monday, Florida Governor Ronald DeSantis signed SB 2006 - legislation which, in part, allows the governor to overrule local emergency rules. The Republican governor also signed executive orders that called for the immediate suspension of local COVID-19 restrictions, and introduced vaccine passport prohibitions.

During a Thursday earnings call with analysts, Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings CEO Frank Del Rio remarked that subsidiary Norwegian Cruise Line may be forced to run operations out of ports in other US states - or the Caribbean - if Florida maintains its statewide prohibition of vaccination documentation.

"It is a classic state-versus-federal-government issue," Del Rio said, as reported by the [Associated Press](#). "Lawyers believe that federal law applies and not state law, but I'm not a lawyer. And we hope that this doesn't become a legal football or a political football."

Del Rio explained that US law currently requires cruise lines operating in the country to confirm that most of the crew members and passengers have received the COVID-19 vaccine. However, new legislation in Florida would impede these efforts.

"We certainly hope it doesn't come to that," Del Rio said on Thursday.

Cruise ships have been blocked from leaving US ports since the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued a "no-sail" edict in March 2020. Recent CDC guidance

details that cruise ships may return to US waters if they can prove 95% of the passengers, and 98% of the ship's crew are vaccinated against COVID-19.

[SB 2006](#), dubbed 'Emergency Management,' authorizes Florida's governor to "invalidate certain emergency orders" and restricts local emergency orders to 7 days, unless a governing body issues a majority vote to extend. If approved, emergency orders are then subject to 7-day increments that cannot exceed more than 42 days in total.

Additionally, Executive Order [21-101](#) extended a previous order that blocked requirements for vaccine documentation or "vaccine passports," and Executive Order [21-102](#) invalidated all remaining local [emergency orders](#) on individuals and businesses.

"This legislation ensures that legal safeguards are in place so that local governments cannot arbitrarily close our schools or businesses," [DeSantis said](#) on Monday, after signing all three bills into law. "In Florida, your personal choice regarding vaccinations will be protected and no business or government entity will be able to deny you services based on your decision."

SB 2006 goes into effect on July 1.

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Photo: Three US Men Found Dead After Allegedly Igniting 'Black Powder Substance' Near Illinois River

by [Evan Craighead](#)

Thursday night, emergency personnel in LaSalle County, Illinois, responded to reports of an explosion along a section of the Illinois River. Several state and federal agents, including Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) personnel, later responded to the scene.

La Salle County Coroner Rich Ploch announced on Friday that no signs of foul play have been discovered at the explosion site, according to preliminary observations by his office and other law enforcement agencies.

The blast occurred around 7:20 p.m. local time on Thursday, and claimed the lives of three men near Starved Rock State Park.

Furthermore, "it was determined that the individuals appeared to have ignited a type of black powder substance along an area near the riverbank," Ploch stated, as reported by the

[Associated Press](#).

Responding law enforcement departments included the Utica Police Department, Illinois State Police, Illinois Department of Natural Resources Conservation Police and the Kane County Bomb Squad.

FBI agents were also on the scene and collected a sample of said "black powder substance." Some have speculated the substance may be gunpowder.

"It's probably going to be awhile before we find that out unfortunately," Ploch expressed.

The three deceased men have not been publicly identified by authorities.

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Olivia And Liam Listed as Top US Baby Names for 2020

by [MariTi Blaise Lovell](#)

Every year since 1997, the US' Social Security Administration (SSA) has released a list with the most popular baby names. The agency has indicated that the most popular baby names over the past century have been James and Mary.

The list of top baby names for 2020 has been released, with Olivia and Liam coming out as the most popular given names for girls and boys, respectively.

A release issued by the Social Security Administration on Friday details that "parents chose to stick with the familiar [name] during an unprecedented time, with the top three names for both girls - Olivia, Emma, and Ava - and boys - Liam, Noah, and Oliver - remaining the same for the second year in a row."

"Olivia and Liam are once again America's most popular baby names in 2020," adds the announcement. "In fact, out of both Top 10 lists combined, only two names changed, with the traditional names Henry and Alexander edging out Mason and Ethan."

The announcement explained that "the name Henry has been steadily rising in popularity, last appearing in the Top 10 over a century ago, in 1910."

So far, the top rising names in 2020 have been Avayah and Zyair. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, about 17 girls have been named Rona.

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'Time to Pass the Baton': Keisha Lance Bottoms Drops Out of Atlanta Mayoral Race

by [MariTi Blaise Lovell](#)

Keisha Lance Bottoms, Atlanta's mayor for the last four years, posted a letter on Thursday to her constituents outlining the accomplishments made during her career, citing the handling of a 2018 cyberattack and her role in the 2020 presidential election. The notice also revealed she would be dropping out of the mayoral race.

Bottoms confirmed during a Friday news conference that she would not be pursuing a second term as Atlanta's mayor despite the launch of her reelection campaign earlier this year.

"In the same way that it was very clear to me almost five years ago that I should run for mayor of Atlanta, it is abundantly clear to me today that it is time to pass the baton on to someone else,"

Bottoms said in her [remarks](#) to reporters.

It was [reported](#) by some media outlets that Walgreens CEO Rosalind Brewer, a close friend of Bottoms' family, offered the Atlanta mayor a new position with the company. Bottoms shot down those rumors during the news conference, stating that her decision was made after careful consideration with her family.

Bottoms' announcement comes after City Council President Felicia Moore announced plans to run against the Atlanta mayor in the November 2 election. Moore has responded to Bottom's decision in a release on Friday.

"This was obviously a difficult decision for the mayor, but she needs to do what is right for her and her family. As she continues to serve out the remainder of her term, I look forward to working with her to address the critical issues the city is facing and particularly the crime happening across," Moore said, according to local station [11Alive](#).

Bottoms had launched her reelection campaign earlier this year at a fundraising event headlined by US President Joe Biden, which raised over \$500,000.

In both her letter and a video posted online Thursday evening, titled "[Dear Atlanta](#)," Bottoms did not rule out the possibility of running for another term, and inferred that she would still pursue fundraising events.

Bottoms is the second Black woman to lead the city of Atlanta. The first was Shirley Franklin, who served two terms from 2002-2010. Bottoms also served as a judge and city council member for eight years.

Bottoms was offered a position in Biden's cabinet following his presidential win, which [she declined](#).

During the Friday conference, Bottoms reiterated her support for an increase in the minimum wage, but insisted that the income gap, crime rate and criminal justice record would be something the next mayor would have to work to rectify. Her early departure from the race leaves room for new mayoral candidates to organize.

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Prince Misuzulu, First Born Son of Queen Mantfombi, Named Heir to Zulu Thone in Will Readout  
by [MariTi Blaise Lovell](#)

The Zulu nation recently lost both King Goodwill Zwelithini on March 12, and subsequently Queen Mantfombi on April 30. The queen was buried on Thursday evening in a private ceremony followed by a memorial. As funeral preparations were ongoing, tensions emerged among royals as to who would ascend to the throne.

Prince Misuzulu Zulu, the first son of Queen Mantfombi, was named heir during the read out of his mother's will by advocate lawyer Madoda Madonsela on Friday.

The will reading was broadcast live and was attended by Prince Misuzulu; Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi, the traditional prime minister of the Zulu nation; and Prince Thokozani Zulu, who recently challenged Buthelezi and the decision to crown Misuzulu as king.

Following the reading of the will, Buthelezi and Thokozani appeared to be at odds after the announcement as the broadcast showed Thokozani being confronted by Buthelezi. Prince Misuzulu's security detail subsequently removed him hurriedly out of Kwakhangamelamankengane Royal Palace.

Since the death of his father in March, Prince Misuzulu has been sheltered at the eSwatini royal palace, the home of his late mother.

The royal drama following the death of the king has emerged as a result of the many objections raised over Prince Misuzulu taking the throne, while others have praised the announcement. Following the chaos that took place outside of the palace during the reading of the queen's will, [media outlets](#) have announced that a statement from the prince will be released imminently concerning the announcements of his succession to the throne.

The royal family is also [facing tensions](#) after the king's first wife, Queen Sibongile, filed legal action asking the high court in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, to recognize her as the only legitimate wife of Zwelithini. Prince Mbonisi and his sister Princess Thembi have also come forward with accusations that their father's will has been forged.

No official challenge has yet been made against the appointment of Prince Misuzulu.

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New York City Restaurants See Drop in Employment Rates After Unemployment Benefits Increase

by [MariTi Blaise Lovell](#)

When US President Joe Biden signed the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan Act in March, it offered a \$1,400 stimulus check to Americans who earn less than \$75,000 a year. The package also granted an extra \$300 in weekly unemployment benefits through September 6.

New York City restaurants have recently been experiencing a devastating shortage of employees, as many find the relief efforts of unemployment checks more favorable than their usual low-waged wait staff positions offer.

The increase in unemployment has for months placed the Biden administration in hot water after Republicans [blasted](#) the commander-in chief's policies for disincentivizing workers and prompting the labor shortage.

Biden responded to the backlash on Friday, and explained that it would take time before the economy reaped the benefits of his policies. However, he also predicted that job gains would accelerate in the coming months.

Shedding light on the development, Philippe Massoud, CEO of Ilili, a Lebanese restaurant on 5th Avenue, told the [New York Post](#) that he won't be able to open his restaurant to the 75% indoor capacity set by Governor Andrew Cuomo last week due to the staff shortage.

"The government unintentionally shot itself in the foot," Massoud told the Post, remarking that "the stimulus plan is being completely undermined by the unemployment program."

Restaurants and economists have [reported](#) that wait staff who earn lower wages can make more money if they stayed home and simply collected unemployment checks.

"It seems as though they are perfectly content living off of unemployment," Polina Jourbina, a 31-year-old manager at Mermaid Inn, a seafood restaurant in NYC, told the Post. "It's maybe still a slight fear of COVID. Maybe still people are unsure. I know [for] some people just going back to the idea of living a normal life post-COVID is a little weird."

Jourbina admitted that half or fewer of her employees came back to work after the COVID-19 shutdown hit New York, which appears to be the issue for many small business owners. Some employers have mentioned that even hiring agencies are having a hard time filling the employee pool.

Citing the latest [jobs report](#), the US Chamber of Commerce tweeted on Friday that the added unemployment benefits granted by Biden are the root cause in the "dampening" job market. Latest government figures showed that the unemployment rate rose by over 6%, with payrolls increasing by just 266,000, effectively becoming a massive letdown as earlier estimates indicated the US would see an increase of over a million new jobs.

[Reports](#) in April showed that the increase in unemployment insurance rates backfired as it subsequently imposed financial burdens on already-struggling restaurants. The New York State Restaurant Association wrote a [letter](#) on April 19 to Cuomo and others asking officials to rectify the issue of workers not returning.

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RPT - South Carolina Firing Squad Bill Prioritizes Executions Over Justice - Advocacy Group

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - US state of South Carolina lawmakers by backing firing squads without reforming the justice system are prioritizing executing prisoners over fairness, Death Penalty Information Center Executive Director Robert Dunham told Sputnik.

Earlier this week, South Carolina's House green-lighted firing squad executions as an option amid the unavailability of lethal injection drugs. The state's senate is widely expected to pass the measure, which the governor has already vowed to sign.

"Before the state thinks about this, [firing squads] it needs to be thinking about the many problems around the criminal justice system and the death penalty," Dunham said. "The South Carolina legislators have made their choice and their choice is to make a priority, make it more important to execute prisoners than ensure that it is fair."

Dunham, who has headed the advocacy organization since 2015, said if this bill passes, South Carolina will become the 4th state - along with Oklahoma, Mississippi and Utah - to authorize firing squads as a backup to executions.

"South Carolina has now gone 10 years without an execution. Given the state's history with capital punishment, one has to question whether this is the appropriate reform to make," he said.

The state also has a long history of discrimination in capital punishment, he added.

"This simply continues a system that has long been a symbol of racial injustice," Dunham said. Even as South Carolina lawmakers follow this tact, Dunham said most states nationwide are moving away from the death Penalty.

"The prior administration created a lot of political polarization. And that polarization is clear when you look at the way states respond to the Death Penalty," Dunham said. "This continues to lose support among the American public but in some of the states in which it is an entrenched part of

state's culture, we're seeing legislators trying to expedite executions without regards to fairness."

Dunham also said it is clear, based on statistics, that South Carolina juries are far less interested in the death penalty.

"South Carolina juries have imposed only three death sentences in the past decade and that compares with an average of 6.5 death sentences per year 2 decades ago," he said.

Dunham said the murder of George Floyd and subsequent protests has affected the conversations around the death penalty.

There have been shifts in public perception and widespread demands for accountability and responsibility of law enforcement, he added. One prominent example, Dunham said, was the state legislature in Virginia being the first state to repeal the death penalty.

"The American public has become more aware of the disparities in the criminal justice system. But no single factor will produce change," he explained. "Changes always comes with/through coalitions. This - the racial reckoning - will increase the momentum in states and municipalities. It is one of many factors at play."

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WHO Says Up to 194 Members to Decide on Taiwanese Observership at World Health Assembly

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - It is up to the 194 member states of the World Health Organization to decide on whether to extend an invitation to Taiwan to participate in the World Health Assembly, according to WHO.

On Friday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the United States was urging the WHO to extend an invitation to Taiwan to take part in the Health Assembly.

"Taiwanese observership at the World Health Assembly is a question for the 194 Member States of WHO to consider and decide upon," according to WHO. "The World Health Assembly can invite observers through a resolution or decision adopted by a simple majority of its 194 Members."

Blinken said in a statement that there is "no reasonable justification for Taiwan's continued exclusion from this forum," and stressed that Washington is calling on the WHO Director-General to invite Taiwan to take part as an observer at the event.

The World Health Assembly will be held virtually on May 24 - June 1.

Beijing strongly opposes Taiwan's bid to gain an observer status at the WHO, saying the attempt is a violation of the "One China" policy.

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## Washington Post Says Trump's Justice Dept. Obtained Reporter Phone Records

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump's Justice Department obtained phone records from The Washington Post's journalists related to their reporting on Russia's alleged role in the 2016 election, the newspaper said, citing government officials.

"The Trump Justice Department secretly obtained Washington Post journalists' phone records and tried to obtain their email records over reporting they did in the early months of the Trump administration on Russia's role in the 2016 election, according to government letters and officials," Washington Post reporter Devlin Barrett wrote in an article published on Friday. The Washington Post's Acting Executive Editor, Carmeron Barr, said the news agency is troubled by the move.

"We are deeply troubled by this use of government power to seek access to the communications of journalists. The Department of Justice should immediately make clear its reasons for this intrusion into the activities of reporters doing their jobs, an activity protected under the First Amendment," The Washington Post Acting Executive Editor Carmeron Barr said in a statement as quoted by the Post.

Federal investigators were trying to uncover proof of collusion between Russia and the Trump campaign in the 2016 election, but ultimately uncovered no evidence of such a conspiracy. The subpoenas to obtain the phone records were obtained last year as part of a criminal investigation into unauthorized disclosure of classified information by officials with access to national defense information, the report said on Friday citing a Justice Department spokesperson.

The report said that the Justice Department obtained three-and-a-half months worth of phone records from Washington Post reporters Ellen Nakashima, Greg Miller, and former reporter Adam Entous. The Justice Department was investigating their reporting in 2017 related to the investigation into alleged Russian interference in the 2016 election.

Former Attorney General Bill Barr declined to comment on the matter, the report added.

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US Joins Global Call to Action to Combat Violent Extremist Content Online - White House

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - The United States has joined a global call to action to fight against violent extremist content on the internet, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said. "Today, the United States announced that it will join the Christchurch Call to Action to Eliminate Terrorist and Violent Extremist Content Online, a global pledge by member governments and technology partners to work together to address terrorist and violent extremist content online," Psaki said in a press release on Friday.

The Biden administration said it will participate in a virtual summit on May 14 with other governments and tech partners that have joined this call to action as well.

Brenton Tarrant received a life sentence without parole - the first ever in New Zealand's history - for killing 51 people and injuring 40 others during an attack on a mosque and Islamic center in Christchurch, New Zealand in 2019. The shooter live streamed the attack on social media and he had posted a racist manifesto online shortly before committing the crime.

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Oklahoma to Receive Refund for Hydroxychloroquine Stockpile - State Attorney General

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - Oklahoma has reached a deal with pharmaceutical wholesaler FFF Enterprises to receive a refund for the stockpile of hydroxychloroquine that the state had purchased, Oklahoma Attorney General Mike Hunter announced.

"Based on the unique circumstances encountered by the Oklahoma Department of Health, the company has agreed to return to the Department of Health the full purchase price paid for the medication last year," the Office of the Attorney said in a statement on Friday.

Oklahoma purchased hydroxychloroquine after it was authorized for emergency use as a treatment for people infected with the coronavirus. However, the authorization was later revoked by the Food and Drug Administration, prompting Oklahoma to ask for a refund.

Oklahoma is set to receive a refund of roughly \$2.6 million from the pharmaceutical wholesaler FFF Enterprises, whom Attorney General Hunter thanked for their understanding and partnership.

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"Before the state thinks about this, [firing squads] it needs to be thinking about the many problems around the criminal justice system and the death penalty," Dunham said. "The South Carolina legislators have made their choice and their choice is to make a priority, make it more important to execute prisoners than ensure that it is fair."

Dunham, who has headed the advocacy organization since 2015, said if this bill passes, South Carolina will become the 4th state - along with Oklahoma, Mississippi and Utah - to authorize firing squads as a backup to executions.

"South Carolina has now gone 10 years without an execution. Given the state's history with capital punishment, one has to question whether this is the appropriate reform to make," he said.

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"This simply continues a system that has long been a symbol of racial injustice," Dunham said. Even as South Carolina lawmakers follow this tact, Dunham said most states nationwide are moving away from the death Penalty.

"The prior administration created a lot of political polarization. And that polarization is clear when you look at the way states respond to the Death Penalty," Dunham said. "This continues to lose support among the American public but in some of the states in which it is an entrenched part of state's culture, we're seeing legislators trying to expedite executions without regards to fairness."

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"The American public has become more aware of the disparities in the criminal justice system. But no single factor will produce change," he explained. "Changes always comes with/through coalitions. This - the racial reckoning - will increase the momentum in states and municipalities. It is one of many factors at play."

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## Federal Jury Convicts Iran Citizen for Conspiring to Violate US Trade Embargo

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - A federal grand jury convicted Iranian national Mehrdad Ansari of conspiring to illegally export sensitive military items in violation of US-imposed trade restrictions, the Department of Justice announced.

"A federal jury convicted an Iranian citizen and a resident of the United Arab Emirates and Germany, for scheming to obtain military sensitive parts for Iran in violation of the Iran Trade Embargo," the Justice Department said on Friday.

The federal jury convicted Ansari on one count of conspiracy to violate the Iran Transaction Regulations, one count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud, one count of conspiracy to defraud the Treasury Department and two counts of aiding and abetting the making of false statements, the Justice Department said.

The scheme, which took place between 2007 and 2011, involved obtaining various military parts from companies worldwide valued at approximately \$2.6 million and attempting to ship the parts to Iran without notifying the companies of their end destination or getting the required US government license to ship them, the Justice Department added.

Ansari is scheduled to be sentenced on September 1 and faces up to 40 years in prison on all charges, according to the Justice Department.

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## US Capitol Police Says Confident Number of Threats Against Lawmakers to Continue to Rise

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - The US Capitol Police issued a statement saying it was confident the high number of threats issued against the members of Congress will continue to increase.

"As the [Capitol Police] Department has previously reported, the number of threats made against Congress has increased significantly," the statement said on Friday. "This year alone, there has been a 107 percent increase in threats against members compared to 2020. Provided the unique threat environment we currently live in, the Department is confident the number of cases will continue to increase."

Last month, acting Capitol Police Chief Yogananda Pittman said the number threats against US lawmakers increased by 65 percent in the first four months of 2021 as compared to the same period in 2020.

Pittman said the Capitol Police force wants to hire and train an additional 212 officers to boost security in the aftermath of the January 6 breach at the Capitol building.

The Office of the Inspector General recommended the Capitol Police reform their threat assessment section to be more like that of the US Secret Service. Whereas the Capitol Police has about 30 analysts and agents working roughly 9,000 cases a year, the Secret Service has more than 100 analysts managing some 8,000 cases last year.

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#### US, UK Allege Russian Intelligence Made Use of Microsoft Vulnerability

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - US and UK cybersecurity agencies accused Russia's foreign intelligence service SVR of exploiting recently discovered flaws in Microsoft's mailing software. "The group has... been observed making use of numerous vulnerabilities, most recently the widely reported Microsoft Exchange vulnerability," the US Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency and British National Cyber Security Center said in a joint advisory. Loopholes in the popular mail and calendaring software allowed malign actors to steal emails from servers around the world. Experts estimated that at least ten different hacking groups attempted to take advantage of the flaws before they were fixed by the developer. Last month, the US government accused Russia's intelligence agency SVR of orchestrating the SolarWinds hacking attack - a cyberespionage campaign that exploited vulnerabilities of commercial patches and updates to target 16,000 computer systems worldwide, mostly in America. Russia has rejected all allegations as baseless.

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#### European Allies Ask US to Delay Pullout From Afghanistan - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - The United States allies in Europe have asked Washington to slow down its withdrawal from Afghanistan, claiming that they need more time to make the exit safe, the Wall Street Journal reported. Turkey has said earlier that it may depart from Afghanistan and bring home the Turkish forces that protect the airport in Kabul. Without the Kabul airport being secured, several countries have questioned whether they ought to keep open their embassies in Afghanistan.

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#### Dow Jones Has Best Week in 3 Months After Streak of Record Highs on Wall Street

NEW YORK, May 7 (Sputnik) - The Dow Jones Industrial Average, Wall Street's broadest equity barometer, had its best week in three months after a streak of record highs helped by a rebound in industrial and leisure stocks battered by the coronavirus pandemic crisis. Despite a disappointing US jobs report for April issued on Friday, the Dow hit all-time highs for a fourth time in five days as investors interpreted the data to mean that the Federal Reserve will

not be pressured into raising interest rates anytime soon. Easy monetary policy had juiced the US stock market through the pandemic. The Dow reached a new peak at 34,811 points as benchmark Treasury yields, which help influence rates, hit three-month lows.

"US stocks rallied after the disappointing payroll report allowed financial markets to unwind mounting taper tantrum bets that were calling for a Fed pivot," Ed Moya, analyst at New York's OANDA, said on Friday. "This is only one report, but this is changing many traders thinking on how this recovery is unfolding" for industrial and leisure stocks hit by the pandemic.

The Dow closed the session up 0.7 percent, or 230 points, at 34,777. For the week, the index rose 2.7 percent for its best performance since the week ended March 5. For the year, the Dow was up 13.6 percent.

The S&P 500 index, which groups the top 500 stocks on the New York Stock Exchange, also hit record highs, closing at a peak of 4,232 for a gain of 0.7 percent, or 31 points, on the day. For the week, the S&P 500 rose 1.1 percent while for the year, it gained 12.7 percent.

The Nasdaq Composite index, which groups Big Tech stocks such as Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Microsoft and Google, gained 119 points, or 0.9 percent, on the day to close at 13,752. Nasdaq fell 1.5 percent on the week while remaining up 6.7 percent on the year.

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#### SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Spuntik)

#### PUTIN-BIDEN MEETING

\* There is no predetermined component to a potential Biden-Putin summit this summer and not all bilateral issues need to be resolved in advance of the meeting, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Friday.

\* No meeting has been set yet between Putin and Biden, Psaki said.

\* Biden believed that a possible meeting with Putin would be a positive step forward in the US-Russia bilateral relations to both ease tensions and have more stable ties, Psaki said.

\* Biden said a tentative meeting between him and Putin was being arranged for June.

#### UN SECURITY COUNCIL HIGH-LEVEL MEETING

\* Moscow is hopeful that the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council — the United Kingdom, China, Russia, the United States and France - will hold a leaders summit once the epidemiological situation permits, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on Friday.

\* Lavrov during a UN Security Council meeting on Friday denounced attempts by the European Union and the United States to impose totalitarianism as unacceptable.

\* US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told the UN Security Council Washington has in recent years undermined the rules-based international order but pledged that the current administration would take a different course.

\* Moscow urges all nations to abide by the United Nations Charter without any conditions when they form their foreign policies, Lavrov said.

\* The United States is ready to "push back forcefully" if countries undermine international order, Blinken said.

#### EU SANCTIONS POLICY ON RUSSIA, BELARUS

\* EU foreign ministers will not consider any new proposals for sanctions against Russia at the upcoming May 10 meeting, an EU source told journalists on Friday.

\* The European Union is working on the fourth package of sanctions against Belarus and is expecting it to be agreed at the next meeting of EU foreign ministers in June, an EU source told reporters.

#### CORONAVIRUS EPIDEMIC

\* The US government is allocating \$21.6 billion to help residents in need to pay rent, preventing them from being evicted during the novel coronavirus pandemic, the Treasury Department said in a press release on Friday.

\* Belarus has developed its own coronavirus vaccine, President Alexander Lukashenko said.

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RPT - US Reinstates Arctic Oil Drilling Regulations - Interior Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - The US Department of the Interior on Friday announced that it would withdraw the Trump-era changes to the Arctic oil extraction regulations to bolster environmental protections in the region.

"The Department of the Interior is committed to a careful, responsible approach in managing America's offshore resources. The Arctic exploratory drilling regulations released in 2016 are critical to ensuring adequate safety and environmental protections for this sensitive ecosystem and Alaska Native subsistence activities," a spokesperson for the Department said.

By reverting to the original 2016 Arctic Exploratory Drilling Rule, several offshore oil and gas safety regulations, which were rolled back by the Trump administration's 2020 Proposed Arctic Exploratory Drilling Rule, will now be reinstated, the Interior Department said.

The Biden administration said the regulations are aimed at protecting the resource-rich environment of the Arctic Outer Continental Shelf from unsafe exploratory drilling.

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US Justice Dept. Proposes New Definitions of Firearm Parts to Combat 'Ghost Guns'

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - The US Department of Justice announced on Friday that it has proposed an update to the definitions of a "firearm" and related parts for the first time in more than 50 years in an effort to crack down on the use of so-called "ghost guns."

"The proposed rule would modernize the definition of 'frame or receiver' and help close a regulatory loophole associated with the un-serialized privately made firearms that are increasingly being recovered at crime scenes across the country," the Justice Department said. The change in the definitions, last updated in 1968, comes amid an alleged increase in these untraceable weapons that arm criminals who otherwise would not have access to guns. Such firearms are often assembled using kits that are purchasable without the same background check process that would normally occur during the sale of a gun.

The Justice Department said more than 23,000 of the unserialized firearms were recovered by police at crime scenes connected with 325 homicides or attempted homicides in the past four years.

The proposed rule would combat this problem by making clear to retailers that they must run background checks before selling kits that allow people to readily assemble a gun, requiring that manufacturers include a serial number on the frame or receiver found in easy-to-build firearm kits, and requiring federally licensed firearms dealers to have a serial number added to 3D printed guns or other unserialized firearms they acquire.

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US Allows International Travelers to Use Self-Tests for Coronavirus - CDC

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced on Friday that international air travelers wishing to enter the United States can use certain types of self-tests to prove that they are not infected with the novel coronavirus. "International air passengers traveling to the United States can use a self-test (sometimes referred to as home test) that meets the following criteria," the CDC said on its website. The test must have emergency use authorization from the US Food and Drug Administration. The testing procedure must include a telehealth service affiliated with the manufacturer of the test. The telehealth provider must confirm the person's identity, observe the specimen collection and testing procedures, confirm the test result and issue a report that meets the CDC requirements. Airlines and other aircraft operators must be able to review and confirm the person's identity and the test result details. The passenger must also be able to present the documentation of test results to US officials, if requested. Since January 12, 2021, CDC has been requiring air passengers arriving in the United States to get tested no more than three days before their flight. Passengers must present the negative result or documentation of having recovered from COVID-19 to the airline before boarding.

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US Economy Not Overheating But More Aid Needed for Job Growth - Biden

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden said on Friday that a disappointing jobs report for April showed the US economy wasn't overheating even as it rebounding from the coronavirus pandemic, and that more financial aid was needed to fix the country's employment crisis. "The US economy is moving in the right direction, but there's still a long way to go," Biden told reporters after the Labor Department reported jobs growth for April at just about a quarter of expectations. "This report shows the economy is not overheating. But it also shows there's a much bigger problem and more assistance is needed." The United States added 266,000 jobs in April versus 916,000 in March, the Labor Department said. Economists polled by US media had expected as many as 1 million new jobs for last month. The sharp contraction in labor market growth led both Biden and US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi - the US president's top political ally in Congress - to push the administration's proposed \$2.3 trillion American Jobs Plan as a long-term fix to the nation's employment crisis. The plan largely involves rebuilding the country's infrastructure, including bridges and roads, which the administration says has been ignored for decades. Biden says it will create tens of thousands of jobs over the coming years. Republican lawmakers argue the program is too costly, lacks focus and would bloat the already high US budget deficit, which was at a record \$1.7 trillion in the first six months of fiscal year 2021.

Biden said the Republicans were underestimating the economic rehabilitation needed for America in the post-pandemic era.

"We're still digging our way out of a very deep hole we've been put in. No one should underestimate how tough this battle is," the president said.

The United States lost more than 21 million jobs between March and April 2020, at the height of business lockdowns forced by COVID-19 pandemic. More than 8 million of those jobs have not returned, officials say.

The US economy itself shrank 3.5 percent in 2020, although it grew by 6.4 percent in the first quarter of this year. The Federal Reserve has forecast an economic growth of 6.5 percent for all of 2021 although it said it does not expect "full employment" - defined by a monthly unemployment rate of 4.0 percent or lower - before 2023. Unemployment stood at 6.1 percent in April.

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**Trudeau Top Aide Dodges Questions on Decision to Keep Him in Dark About Misconduct Claims**

TORONTO, May 7 (Sputnik) - Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's top aide, Katie Telford, dodged questions from the parliamentary defense committee on Friday about who made the decision to keep Trudeau out of the loop about sexual misconduct allegations about the country's former top soldier and why.

Trudeau as well as senior members of his cabinet and office are facing intense backlash following months of political turmoil after multiple allegations of sexual misconduct were leveled at the country's former Chief of Defense Staff Gen. Jonathan Vance and his successor, Adm. Art McDonald, who was forced to temporarily step down from his post last amid a probe into misconduct allegations dating back to 2010.

Trudeau has repeatedly stated he first learned about the allegation when the initial reports surfaced in the media earlier this year.

"I want to remind you about what we did and did not know at the time, which is we didn't know anything about this complaint," Telford repeatedly said during the Standing Committee on National Defense hearing when asked about who made the decision to keep Trudeau out of the loop and why.

The committee had previously heard from former military ombudsman, Gary Walbourne, that he informed Minister of National Defense Harjit Sajjan about the allegations against Vance during a "hostile" closed-door meeting three years ago. Additionally, Elder Marques, a former top advisor to Trudeau, told the committee last month that he was asked by Telford or her assistant to refer the allegations to the country's bureaucratic body, the Privy Council Office (PCO), a day after the allegations were shared with Sajjan.

Telford testified that she took the complaint seriously and worked to ensure the safety of the complainant, but did not pursue the matter further as she felt it was inappropriate to do so as a political figure.

Telford also defended the government's performance management process, in response parliamentarian's inquiries regarding the Prime Minister's decision to extend Vance's contract after the allegations had been brought forward.

Friday's hearing was fraught with delays, as members of Trudeau's Liberal caucus repeatedly stopped the hearing, arguing that Telford wasn't being given a proper opportunity to answer, while opposition counterparts attempted to drill into the particulars of the case.

Telford was pressed to testify by Canada's main opposition parties for weeks, who accused Trudeau's Chief of Staff of concocting cover up, with the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) giving into the demand late Thursday evening, despite initial stonewalling attempts.

The political firestorm has forced the government to launch an independent review of sexual misconduct in the Canada's armed forces.

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Two US States File Motion to Halt Guidance Limiting Deportations - Filing

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - The US states of Arizona and Montana on Friday filed a motion to halt interim guidance that would limit enforcement actions targeting certain groups of illegal immigrants.

In February, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) issued a memorandum that prioritized for removal only perceived national security threats, aggravated felons, and recent illegal border-crossers.

"Plaintiffs [States of Montana and Arizona] respectfully request that the Court issue a preliminary injunction preventing Defendants from implementing the Interim Guidance as it relates to removals," the motion said.

Congress, the document said, has directed the US Homeland Security Department to remove illegal aliens within 90 days of a final order of removal to protect states from the costs of illegal immigration. The law, the states argued, does not carve out categories of aliens for whom removal is "presumptively unwarranted."

The plaintiffs in the motion claim that the interim guidance became the reason the number of removals dropped by 50 percent to less than 3,000 per month, the lowest level of removals recorded.

The plaintiffs pointed out that "a near absolute" prohibition of removals was in fact enacted by the Acting ICE Director Tae Johnson on February 4 when he emailed senior staff a document with the updated removal priorities due to "limited resources."

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US to Launch Missile Detection, Early Warning Satellite on May 17 - Space Launch Company

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - The United States is slated to launch an advanced missile warning satellite, SBIRS GEO-5, on May 17, the United Launch Alliance (ULA) said on Friday. "The fifth Space Based Infrared System Geosynchronous Earth Orbit (SBIRS GEO-5) satellite was hoisted atop the Atlas V this morning at the Vertical Integration Facility adjacent to the Space Launch Complex-41 pad at Cape Canaveral Space Force, Florida," the ULA said in a press release. "The combined rocket and payload, standing 194 feet (59 meters) tall, are scheduled for launch May 17 at 1:35 pm EDT."

The GEO-5 satellite, built by Lockheed Martin, will enhance the global SBIRS constellation of surveillance to detect missile threats, the release said. It is equipped with powerful scanning and infrared sensors to spot and track missile launches, the release added.

The GEO-5 satellite features greater resiliency and cyber-hardening; enhanced spacecraft power, propulsion and electronics; common components and procedures to streamline manufacturing; and a flexible design that reduces the cost to incorporate future, modernized sensor suites, according to Lockheed Martin.

The United States plans to launch a sixth SBIRS satellite, the GEO-6, but no date has been locked in yet.

The SBIRS satellites launched earlier detected more than 1,000 missile launches in 2019 alone.

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US Has No Update on Processing Special Visas for Afghans Before Pullout - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - The US administration does not have an update on what it is considering to do to meet a deadline to process special immigrant visas for Afghans who served as interpreters and in other roles for the US government, State Department Deputy Spokesperson Jalina Porter said on Friday.

"You specifically mentioned deadlines, I don't have anything to announce specific to that or any specific details now," Porter said during a telephone press briefing when asked what the US administration is considering to do to process special immigrant visas for Afghans before the US military completely withdraws from Afghanistan.

Porter said the administration is aware of the threat these Afghans face in the country for helping US forces.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has previously said that the United States remains committed to processing visas for asylum-seeking Afghans under a Special Immigrant Visa Program.

The United States and NATO began withdrawing their ground forces in Afghanistan on May 1 and aim to be complete by September 11.

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US National Security Adviser, Caribbean Leaders Discuss COVID-19 Response - White House

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) – US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan held a virtual discussion on Friday with Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretary General Irwin LaRocque and leaders from regional states to discuss COVID-19, climate change and other issues, White House National Security Council spokesperson Emily Horne said in a statement. "Mr. Sullivan reaffirmed the Biden-Harris administration's unwavering commitment to work together with the Caribbean region on managing the COVID-19 pandemic, advancing economic recovery, addressing climate change, and strengthening regional democracy and security," Horne said.

Sullivan proposed regular high-level US-CARICOM engagement, which includes a meeting between President Joe Biden and CARICOM leaders, she added.

On Wednesday, Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) Director Carissa Etienne said COVID-19-related hospitalizations and deaths are surging among the region's youth with Brazil seeing a doubling in mortality rates among those under 40.

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US Deeply Concerned About Tensions in Jerusalem - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - The US State Department voiced on Friday its concerns about Israel's plans to evict Palestinian families from homes in a Jerusalem neighborhood and urged it to refrain from unilateral steps that may further enflame tensions.

Eviction plans in the disputed Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood led to violent clashes between Israelis and Palestinians in Jerusalem and threaten to spill over to the West Bank and Gaza.

"We are deeply concerned about the heightened tensions in Jerusalem. As we head into a sensitive period in days ahead it will be critical for all sides to ensure calm and act responsibly, to deescalate tensions and avoid confrontations," State Department Principal Deputy Spokesperson Jalina Porter told reporters during a briefing. "It's critical to avoid unilateral steps that will exacerbate tensions or take them further away from peace that included evictions, settlements activity and home demolitions."

Porter expressed US concerns about "potential eviction of Palestinian families" and noted that many of them "lived in their homes for generations."

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UPDATE 2 - US Adds 266,000 Jobs in April, But Unemployment Edges Up to 6.1% - Labor Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - The US unemployment rate rose to 6.1 percent in April as the country added a sharply lower-than-forecast 266,000 jobs in a pandemic-suppressed market, the Labor Department announced on Friday.

"Total nonfarm payroll employment rose by 266,000 in April, and the unemployment rate was little changed at 6.1 percent," the Bureau of Labor Statistics, an unit within the Labor Department, said in a statement. In March, there were 916,000 job additions, while the unemployment rate was at 6 percent.

Economists polled by US media had expected as many as 1 million new jobs for April, making what the Labor Department reported disappointing for many.

"This is a big surprise," economist Adam Button said in a comment on ForexLive. "The economy reopened in a big way in April and other indications showed much better hiring than this."

Indeed, the Labor Department said there were notable job gains last month in the leisure and hospitality industry and local government education and other services, but these were partially offset by losses in temporary help services and in couriers and messengers.

"There's a bit of disbelief around this number," Button added. "I wonder if this is a game-changer and shifts the conversation towards the Fed[ederal Reserve]'s baseline about rates staying very low for a very long time along with only-transitory inflation."

The Federal Reserve, has kept US interest rates at between zero and a quarter percent since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic last year, with Chairman Jerome Powell arguing that the rise in price pressures in recent months were temporary trends that would abate over time. A rash of US economic data, from consumer spending to home sales, have exceeded forecasts lately, putting upward pressure on prices. That trend continued on Friday, with US wholesale inventories, which indicate the amount of time goods stay on store shelves before they are replaced by new merchandise, rising by 4.6 percent in March versus expectations for a 1 percent growth.

More than a year into the coronavirus crisis, restoring job growth remains one of the biggest challenges of US policy makers.

US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said on Friday the slowdown in jobs growth in April underscored the need to pass President Joe Biden's \$2.3 trillion American Jobs Plan, which largely involves rebuilding the country's infrastructure, including bridges and roads, that the administration says has been ignored for decades.

The United States lost more than 21 million jobs between March and April 2020, at the height of business lockdowns forced by the coronavirus. More than 8 million of those jobs have yet to return, officials say.

The economy itself shrank 3.5 percent in 2020, although first quarter data for 2021, released last week by the Commerce Department, showed a dynamic rebound of 6.4 percent.

The Fed has forecast an economic growth of 6.5 percent for all of 2021 although Chairman Powell said he did not expect "full employment" - defined by a monthly unemployment rate of 4.0 percent or lower - to return before 2023.

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US Nuclear Commander Sees Growing Risks, Calls for Confidence-Building With Russia, China

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - US Strategic Command chief Adm. Charles Richard on Friday called for establishing a dialogue with Russia and China on nuclear armaments as well as on boosting mutual transparency and building confidence to mitigate risks that he said are rapidly expanding.

"Even before we get after specific numbers [of further arms reductions] just the conversations are important, the transparency, the confidence-building. [I] would really like to have those types of conversations with China," Richard said during a webinar at the Brookings Institution.

Richard said the non-treaty accountable weapons would make a "good starting point" for a conversation with Russia following the extension of the New START accord. China has so far rejected all US attempts to engage it in nuclear arms control talks.

"One thing you can say about the US and Russia, even all the way through the Cold War as tense as that was at certain points we talked all the way through and there was great value in that. So starting the communications, bringing the threat down to mutual benefit towards an ultimate goal of elimination on this class of weapons I think is good path to go down," Richard said.

Richard noted that the US strategic deterrence is "fully mission capable," but admitted that risks are on the rise.

"The threat is expanding rapidly and, in particular, it's China. China has hit some sort of what I would describe as an inflection point or an acceleration with their strategic nuclear capabilities that I describe as the strategic complement to the conventional growth," he said.

"We have never before as a nation had to deter two peer nuclear-capable competitors at the same time... And that is a very different stack of dynamics particularly the fact they have to be deterred differently," Richard said.

The scenario of a sudden all-out nuclear attack against the United States is "very unlikely," but warned against complacency.

The bolt out of the blue is very unlikely because we made unlikely. We took actions, we literally invented the ballistic missile submarines to provide a survivable second strike, invented launch-under-warning and launch-under-attack capabilities," Richard said.

"Competitors are deterred from doing that. So I just invite caution as we think our way through this. If we are not careful we could actually go make it likely again... if we forget why it's unlikely today," he said.

Richard emphasized that he has "fabulous confidence" in command and control capabilities of the US nuclear forces and their resilience to potential cyberattacks.

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Two Russians Plead Guilty in 'Bulletproof Hosting' Cybercrime Scheme - US Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - Two Russians pleaded guilty to conspiring to provide hosting services to cybercriminal clients who attacked US companies and financial institutions, the Justice Department said on Friday.

"Four Eastern European nationals have pleaded guilty to conspiring to engage in a Racketeer Influenced Corrupt Organization (RICO) arising from their providing 'bulletproof hosting' services between 2008 and 2015, which were used by cybercriminals to distribute malware and attack financial institutions and victims throughout the United States," the department said in a release. "Each defendant faces a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison."

Aleksandr Grichishkin and Andrei Skvortsov from Russia, Aleksandr Skorodumov from Lithuania, and Pavel Stassi from Estonia were members of a hosting organization that allegedly helped a number of cybercriminals evade detection by US law enforcement after they caused millions of dollars in losses to American victims, the release said.

Grichishkin and Skvortsov were founding members and proprietors of the organization while Skorodumov was one of the organization's lead systems administrators and Stassi was responsible for various administrative tasks, the release added.

According to the release, Stassi, Skorodumov, and Grichishkin pleaded guilty in February and March 2021 to one count of a Racketeer Influenced Corrupt Organization (RICO) conspiracy, while Skvortsov pleaded guilty to the same charge on Friday.

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**Biden Sets Up US Climate Change Support Office in State Dept. - White House**

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden has set up through an Executive Order a new federal government office to offer support on climate change policies and issues at the US Department of State, the White House announced on Friday.

"By the authority vested in me as President... There is established within the Department of State, in accordance with section 3161 of title 5, United States Code, a temporary organization to be known as the Climate Change Support Office (CCSO)," the Executive Order said.

The CCSO will be headed by a director selected by the Secretary of State and it will support bilateral and multilateral engagement to advance US initiatives to address the global climate crisis, the order continued.

"The CCSO shall support the Department of State, including the Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, in United States efforts to elevate and underscore the commitment my Administration will make towards addressing the global climate crisis," Biden's order said.

The CCSO will also support climate work currently carried out by a wide range of international fora that address clean energy, aviation, shipping, the Arctic, the ocean, sustainable development, and migration, the order added.

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**Russian-Donated Monument to French Pilot, Soviet Hero Marcel Albert Unveiled in Florida**

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - The unveiling ceremony of a monument donated by Russia to French pilot and Hero of the Soviet Union Marcel Albert took place on Friday at his burial place in the US state of Florida.

Albert (1917-2010) was a French pilot who flew for the legendary Normandie-Niemen air regiment during World War II. In November 1944, he was awarded the Soviet Union's highest decoration, the Gold Star and title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

"The life of this man is an example of unprecedented courage, self-sacrifice and heroism. He was one of the first French pilots who arrived in the USSR at the end of 1942," the Russian ambassador to the US Anatoly Antonov said in his remarks to the audience. "As the hero himself recalled, the volunteers asked General Charles de Gaulle, the leader of the Fighting France committee, to send them to the Eastern Front, 'since the Russians were fighting a real fight.'"

By the end of the war, Albert had 193 combat missions and shot down 23 enemy aircraft, he added.

Memorials in honor of French pilots, who help the Soviet troops during the World War II, have been erected in five Russian cities, the ambassador noted.

During the World War II hostilities on the Soviet-German front, pilots of the Normandie-Niemen regiment made more than 5,000 sorties, conducted 869 air battles and destroyed 273 enemy aircraft. There were 97 pilots in the air regiment and 42 of them were killed. Four French pilots were awarded the title of heroes of the Soviet Union, the distinction that was rarely given to citizens of foreign countries.

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US Does Not Seek to Contain Russia or China - Deputy Secretary of State

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is not trying to contain Russia and China and will seek cooperation with both countries when it is their mutual interest to do so, Deputy US Secretary of State Wendy Sherman said on Friday.

"Our effort is not to contain Russia or China. They have a place in the world," Sherman told a forum on US-European Union cooperation organized by the Atlantic Council. "We are cooperating where it is in our interest to do so. We are competing effectively. We know there are areas where we need to cooperate with China."

Sherman listed key areas of mutually beneficial cooperation with Beijing included health, nuclear arms control and climate. The United States also wanted to maintain diplomatic communications with Russia and continued to work with the Kremlin in other key areas, she added.

"We want to maintain a dialogue with Russia. ...We are also working on Russia where the Arctic is concerned. There will be an Arctic Council meeting Secretary of State [Antony] Blinken will be attending. We were very glad on climate change that President [Vladimir] Putin and Xi [Jinping] attended [the recent international meeting]," she said.

Sherman noted that Russia and China understood that the current global coronavirus pandemic was in some measure connected to climate change.

She also cautioned that there remained areas where Washington and Beijing so would continue to be adversaries including the South China Sea, Hong Kong and the status of the Uighurs in Xinjiang.

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#### White House Says No Predetermined Component to Biden-Putin Meeting

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - There is no predetermined component to a potential Biden-Putin summit this summer and not all bilateral issues need to be resolved in advance of the meeting, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said on Friday.

"Their invitation to have a discussion, to have a meeting was not offered with the prerequisite that every issue was resolved in advance, we expect we will continue to have disagreements," Psaki said during a press briefing. "That wouldn't be a predetermined component of it but certainly we will continue to voice concern and we will put in place consequences as actions warrant."

Bilateral issues include matters concerning human rights, freedom of speech and freedom of expression, Psaki said.

President Joe Biden said in earlier remarks that he is confident a summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin will be possible in June, but the date and location have yet to be determined. Earlier on Friday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said during a UN Security Council meeting the attempts by the European Union and the United States to impose totalitarianism are unacceptable. Lavrov urged all nations to fully abide by the United Nations Charter when forming their foreign policies.

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#### Biden Believes Meeting With Putin 'Step Forward' to Deescalate US-Russia Tensions - Psaki

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden believed that a possible meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin would be a positive step forward in the US-Russia bilateral relations to both ease tensions and have more stable ties, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said on Friday.

"Obviously, the President, our President invited him to participate in that meeting because he thinks it would be a good step forward in the relationship to deescalate, to ensure we have a more stable relationship moving forward, but there is no meeting to confirm at this point in time," Psaki said at a press briefing.

Psaki, however, also said no meeting has been set yet between Putin and Biden.

"There is not a meeting with the president locked in yet," Psaki said, when asked whether she could confirm that Putin and Biden would hold a summit next month.

Psaki said discussions at a staff level about what a meeting might look like, where, the timing as well as the components of an agenda are still ongoing.

US President Joe Biden said on Friday a tentative meeting between him and Russian President Vladimir Putin was being arranged for June.

The White House has recently announced that Biden invited Putin to meet in a European country. Biden said earlier this week that he was hoping to meet with Putin in June. The Kremlin reported that a possible date for the meeting is being discussed.

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**Biden Says Believes Iran Serious on Vienna JCPOA Talks, But Unclear What Tehran May Do**

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden said on Friday that he believes Iran has shown to be serious in the ongoing negotiations to revive the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in Vienna, but it is unclear what Tehran will do to return to full compliance with the nuclear agreement.

"Yes, but how serious and what they're prepared to do is a different story, but we're still talking," Biden said when asked if he believes Iran has taken seriously the ongoing negotiations in Vienna.

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said in later remarks that the Biden administration considers it a good sign that discussions with Iran are continuing and progress was made during the latest round of talks Vienna.

Following the latest round of talks in Vienna, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi said the parties agreed to begin holding expert and technical consultations, as well as drafting an agreement.

In 2015, Iran signed the JCPOA with the United States, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United Kingdom as well as the European Union. The deal required Iran to scale back its nuclear program and considerably downgrade its uranium reserves in exchange for sanctions relief.

In 2018, the United States withdrew from the JCPOA and implemented hard-line policies against Tehran, which retaliated by gradually abandoning its commitments under the deal a year later.

The Austrian capital has been hosting the in-person meetings of the committee, as well as informal meetings in between. So far, three working groups have been created, with two of them working on lifting the US sanctions and the nuclear issues, while the third is looking into the sequence of steps necessary to restore the nuclear deal.

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PRT - Alberta Truck Drivers to Get Coronavirus Vaccines in US State of Montana - Premier

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - About 2000 commercial truck drivers from Canada's province of Alberta will be able to get the one-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine in the US state of Montana between May 10 and 23 as per a new agreement between the two entities' governments, Alberta Prime Minister Jason Kenney announced on Friday.

"Starting next Monday, May 10, the government of Montana will be providing vaccines to truckers entering the state at a rest stop near Conrad, Montana. About 2000 Alberta truckers are eligible to receive a vaccination in this program," Kenney said. "Montana will be providing the Janssen vaccine produced by Johnson & Johnson during the program which only requires one dose."

Kenney also said the truck drivers will not be required to make a vaccination appointment ahead of time and can just pull over at the station to get a shot.

There is a chance the vaccination program for the Albertian truck drivers will be expanded in case of excessive demand, Kenney added.

Kenney pointed out that about 800 commercial carriers cross the Montana-Alberta border every day to keep essential goods moving between the US and Canada.

Similar agreement exist between the provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan and the state of North Dakota with respect to vaccinating truck drivers.

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US Capitol Police Bolsters Security Policies Following Inspector General's Recommendations

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - The US Capitol Police announced on Friday that it has begun implementing the recommendations detailed in an Office of Inspector General's counter-surveillance and threat assessments.

"The United States Capitol Police has already taken significant steps to implement the recommendations detailed in the Office of Inspector General's (OIG) third flash report on counter-surveillance and threat assessments," Capitol Police said.

The Capitol Police said it has already documented training requirements for its agents and analysts, as well as reworked the intra-agency information sharing systems.

The OIG recommended the Capitol Police reform their threat assessment section to be more like that of the US Secret Service. Whereas the Capitol Police has about 30 analysts and agents working roughly 9,000 cases a year, the Secret Service has more than 100.

The Capitol Police said fully implementing such a recommendation would necessarily require additional resources for new employees, training and equipment, as well as approval from Congressional stakeholders.

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White House Says 'Good Sign' US-Iran Talks Continuing, Progress Made

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - The White House considers it a good sign that discussions with Iran are continuing and progress was made during the Vienna talks, spokesperson Jen Psaki said in a press briefing on Friday.

"We always knew that this would be a long process and challenging but we also feel that it has been a good sign that there have been diplomatic engagements over the past several weeks even through indirect channels with the Iranians. Some progress has been made and we have a better idea of what we need to do moving forward," Psaki said. "The talks are continuing, that is a good sign."

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#### White House Says No Predetermined Component to Biden-Putin Meeting

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - There is no predetermined component to a potential Biden-Putin summit this summer and not all bilateral issues need to be resolved in advance of the meeting, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Friday.

"Their invitation to have a discussion, to have a meeting was not offered with the prerequisite that every issue was resolved in advance, we expect we will continue to have disagreements," Psaki said during a press briefing. "That wouldn't be a predetermined component of it but certainly we will continue to voice concern and we will put in place consequences as actions warrant."

Bilateral issues include matters concerning human rights, freedom of speech, freedom of expression, Psaki said.

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#### White House Says There is No Meeting Between Putin, Biden Locked In Yet

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - No meeting has been set yet between Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President Joe Biden, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said in a statement on Friday.

"There is not a meeting with the president locked in yet," Psaki said, when asked whether she could confirm that Putin and Biden would hold a summit next month.

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#### Biden Believes Meeting With Putin 'Step Forward' to Deescalate US-Russia Tensions - Psaki

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden believed that a possible meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin would be a positive step forward in the US-Russia bilateral relations to both ease tensions and have more stable ties, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said in a statement on Friday.

"Obviously, the President, our President invited him to participate in that meeting because he thinks it would be a good step forward in the relationship to deescalate, to ensure we have a more stable relationship moving forward, but there is no meeting to confirm at this point in time," Psaki said.

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Yemen's Houthis Passed Up Opportunity to Demonstrate Commitment to Peace - US State Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - Yemen's Houthi movement has failed to take advantage of the opportunity to show commitment to peace when it declined a meeting with UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths, the US State Department said in a release on Friday.

"The Houthis passed up a major opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to peace and to make progress on this proposal by refusing to meet with UN Special Envoy Griffiths in Muscat - especially given the Republic of Yemen Government's stated readiness to reach an agreement to end the conflict," the release said.

The State Department pointed out that the Houthis act contrary to their statements about the humanitarian situation in Yemen and make the situation worse by continuing attacking Marib.

"With the growing international consensus and momentum toward ending the conflict in Yemen without further delay, all parties must engage with the UN Special Envoy and address the proposal that is on the table, for the sake of the Yemeni people," the release said.

The statement comes upon the conclusion of US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking's trip to the Middle East.

The State Department said Lenderking met in Saudi Arabia with senior government officials, including Crown Prince Mohamed bin Salman.

"Separately, US Special Envoy Lenderking and UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths met twice with the P5 Ambassadors to Yemen, at the beginning and the end of the trip," the release said. "They agreed that enabling the free flow of goods and commodities into and through Yemen, achieving a nationwide ceasefire, and swiftly transitioning to political talks is the only way to bring lasting relief to the Yemeni people and provide the basis for a stable, unified Yemen in the future."

In Muscat, Lenderking was joined by US Senator Chris Murphy and met with Omani Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr al-Busaidi, the release said.

"They all agreed on the need for an immediate ceasefire and committed to work with the parties to bring a peaceful resolution to the conflict," it said. "The Omani Foreign Minister and the U.S. Special Envoy expressed their mutual desire to see the Safer oil tanker crisis resolved in order to prevent an environmental and humanitarian catastrophe in the Red Sea."

Following his Oman trip, Lenderking visited Jordan as part of a senior US government interagency delegation, the release said.

"The delegation met with His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan and other Jordanian government officials to discuss regional issues, including the growing regional consensus on the need to end the Yemen conflict," it said. "US Special Envoy Lenderking and US Senator Murphy also held a separate meeting with UN Special Envoy Griffiths and the EU, German, and UK Ambassadors to Yemen to discuss the urgency of an immediate halt to the Houthi offensive in Marib and the transition to a political process."

The State Department said Lenderking then returned to Riyadh for another round of meetings with senior officials from Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

Yemen has been gripped by an internal conflict between the government forces and the Houthi movement for over six years. Since 2015, the Saudi-led coalition fighting on the government's side has been conducting air, land and sea operations against the rebels, who control the capital of Sanaa and large areas in north and west of Yemen. The Houthis often retaliate by firing projectiles and bomber drones on Saudi territory.

On March 22, Saudi Arabia proposed a comprehensive UN-sponsored ceasefire in Yemen, but the Houthis demanded that Riyadh first lift the economic blockade of Yemeni ports and airports.

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#### Canada Welcomes US Support for Waiving Coronavirus Vaccine Patents - Trudeau

TORONTO, May 7 (Sputnik) - Canada welcomes the Biden administration's support for waiving intellectual property protections for coronavirus vaccines due to the global emergency triggered by the pandemic, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Friday.

"We welcome the shift in position the United States has brought," Trudeau told reporters.

However, the Prime Minister sidestepped questions about the Canadian government's stance on the issue, only saying that Canada is not interfering or blocking the push to waive vaccine patents.

Trudeau's reluctance to publicly state his government's position regarding the international push is drawing criticism from opposition parties and even some members of his own Liberal caucus.

"It's astonishing to me that the President of the United States, usually a government that is a champion of the hegemony of things like TRIPS rules, be ahead of us," Green Party Leader Elizabeth May said during a virtual press briefing on Friday, which also featured New Democrat Don Davies, Bloc Quebecois Member of Parliament Luc Theriault and Liberal Marcus Powlowski.

TRIPS refers to the World Trade Organization Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights.

"We are dragging our feet... I hope that within hours, the Canadian government will agree that it's time to suspend TRIPS rules, temporarily, in light of this pandemic crisis," May said.

Some countries, including India and South Africa, have urged World Trade Organization members to waive certain TRIPS provisions.

On Thursday, President Vladimir Putin said Russia would back the proposal to waive intellectual property rights for coronavirus vaccines. China also expressed willingness to back the patent waiver.

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Amazon Pauses Prime Day in Canada, India Amid Resurgent Pandemic - Company  
TORONTO, May 7 (Sputnik) – Global technology giant Amazon is delaying its flagship sales event in Canada and India as both countries labor through an intense so-called "third wave" of the coronavirus pandemic, the company told Sputnik on Friday.

Amazon will be pausing its annual Prime Day sale in both countries due to the increased effect of the coronavirus pandemic, the company said while declining to offer a rescheduled date. Prime Day is Amazon's flagship sales event, which began in 2015 coinciding with the company's 20-year anniversary and has since become one of the most anticipated annual sales events of the calendar year during which 200 million global Amazon Prime members are offered deals exclusive deals.

Amazon did not offer details about how many of its Canadian employees have contracted the novel coronavirus or how it has impacted operations in the country, albeit noting that several fulfillment centers are located in the Toronto region, which is experiencing some of the highest community transmission rates in the country.

Both Canada and India have reported increasing number of people who have tested positive for the coronavirus. A number of Canadian jurisdictions reported their highest daily caseloads since the onset of the pandemic, while Indian public health officials are recording over 400,000 new cases daily.

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US Releases \$21.6Bln in Funding to Help Prevent Evictions Amid COVID-19 - Treasury

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - The US government is allocating \$21.6 billion to help residents in need pay rent, preventing them from being evicted during the novel coronavirus pandemic, the Treasury Department said in a press release on Friday.

"Today, the US Department of the Treasury, in coordination with the White House American Rescue Plan Implementation Team and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, announced the allocation of an additional \$21.6 billion under the American Rescue Plan for Emergency Rental Assistance, which will help prevent evictions and ensure basic housing security for millions of Americans impacted by the affordable housing challenges exacerbated by COVID-19," the release said.

The Treasury Department also updated its guidance policy that makes it easier to provide the funds directly to renters when landlords do not accept direct payment.

Moreover, the Treasury Department said it reduced the documentation requirements and wait times for renters applying for rental assistance.

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**Biden Says White House Working on Arranging June Meeting With Putin**

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Friday a tentative meeting between him and Russian President Vladimir Putin was being arranged for June.

"I'm confident we'll be able to do it. We don't have a specific time and place. That's being worked on," Biden told reporters at the White House when asked about the possibility for such a meeting to be held in June.

Asked whether Russian troops at the border with Ukraine would deter him from having the meeting, Biden replied: "It does not impact my desire to have a one-on-one meeting and if you notice, he had more troops before, he's withdrawn troops. There are still troops amassed but significantly less than a month ago."

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**UN Assesses At Least 774 People Killed in Myanmar Since February 1 - Spokesman**

UNITED NATIONS, May 7 (Sputnik) - At least 774 people, including women and children, have been killed by the security forces in Myanmar since the February 1 military coup, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Friday.

"According to the best available data, at least 774 women and children and men have been killed across Myanmar between February 1 and May 6," Dujarric said. "The vast majority of those who were killed died of gunshots."

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UPDATE: US Calls on WHO to Invite Taiwan to Participate in World Health Assembly - Blinken

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - The United States is urging the World Health Organization (WHO) to extend an invitation to Taiwan to take part in the Health Assembly, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement on Friday.

"There is no reasonable justification for Taiwan's continued exclusion from this forum, and the United States calls upon the WHO Director-General to invite Taiwan to participate as an observer at the WHA - as it has in previous years, prior to objections registered by the government of the People's Republic of China," Blinken said.

Blinken noted that the Health Assembly, which will be held virtually on May 24, would set the agenda for boosting international collaboration to end the coronavirus pandemic and advance global health as well as global health security matters.

"And yet, unless the Organization's leadership takes appropriate action, the Assembly will once again exclude the vital participation of Taiwan," he said. "Global health and global health security challenges do not respect borders nor recognize political disputes. Taiwan offers valuable contributions and lessons learned from its approach to these issues, and WHO leadership and all responsible nations should recognize that excluding the interests of 24 million people at the WHA serves only to imperil, not advance, our shared global health objectives." Beijing strongly opposes Taiwan's bid to gain an observer status at the WHO, saying the attempt it as a violation of the "One China" policy.

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Number of Americans With at Least 1 Vaccine Shot to Reach 150Mln on Friday - White House

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - The number of Americans who have received at least one coronavirus vaccine dose will reach 150 million on Monday while the number of those who are fully vaccinated will amount to 110 million, the White House COVID-19 response coordinator Jeff Zients said on Friday.

"Overall, by the end of today, we will hit two significant milestones in our vaccination program: 150 million Americans with at least their first shot, and 110 million Americans fully vaccinated," Zients said during a briefing.

Zients pointed out that meeting President Joe Biden's goal of vaccinating 70 percent of adult Americans with at least one dose by July 4 will require another 13 percent of adults Americans receiving a vaccine.

With respect to the US support of the international vaccination effort, Zients noted that the US continues to work with the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue partners to expand vaccine manufacturing facilities in India while Washington provides the most funding to COVAX program.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Rochelle Walensky pointed out that only about one-fifth of 18 to 29 year olds and less than one-third of 30 to 39 year olds are fully vaccinated at present.

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US Seeks Int'l. Effort to Address Root Causes of Migration From Central America - Harris

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - The United States seeks international effort to eradicate root causes of mass migration from the Northern Triangle countries of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, US Vice President Kamala Harris said on Friday.

"It is our intention and it has been a guiding principle of ours that we are going to do this work in a way that internationalizes our approach, that reaches out to allies, to our friends around the globe. Our approach is to work with international institutions, to work with nations worldwide, the private sector and community organizations," Harris told Mexico's President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador during their virtual meeting.

Harris is in charge of US government efforts to contain illegal migration that has been on the rise since the election of President Joe Biden on pledges of less stringent entry regulations.

"In our countries' mutual interests to provide immediate relief to the Northern Triangle and to address the root causes of migration... Most people don't want to leave home. And when they do it is because they are fleeing some harm or they are forced to leave because there is no opportunity in their home," Harris said.

"I believe there is one more thing that our nations share. And it is the belief that together we can make progress and we can create and build a sense of hope for the people of the Northern Triangle for the future," she added.

Obrador said that he has "a specific proposal" to discuss, but did not disclose it in opening remarks. He earlier suggested that the US may offer work visas and eventually citizenship to those who take part in an ambitious tree planting program he hopes to expand to Central America.

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Outbreak of More Than 200 COVID-19 Cases at US Diplomatic Mission in India - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - There has been an outbreak of more than 200 novel coronavirus cases among the workforce at the US diplomatic mission in India, which includes the US embassy in New Delhi and consulates across the country, CNN reported on Friday citing sources.

The State Department has conducted a medical evacuation for American citizens working for the US mission to India, the report said.

The report noted that it is unclear which US diplomatic facilities in India have been affected or if the number of positive cases has increased.

The Indian Ministry of Health said on Friday that the country has registered 414,188 new COVID-19 cases within the past 24 hours, marking the largest daily increase since the start of the outbreak.

The total number of those who tested positive for the coronavirus in India has reached 21,491,598. The death toll has risen by 3,915 to 234,083 people. More than 17.61 million patients have recovered since the start of the epidemic.

India comes second in terms of the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases, following the United States with more than 32.6 million patients.

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**Biden's \$2.3 Trillion Infrastructure Plan Needed as US Jobs Growth Slows - Pelosi**

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi on Friday pushed for the passing of President Joe Biden's \$2.3 trillion American Jobs Plan after data showed a sharp slowdown in the country's employment growth in April.

"The disappointing April jobs report highlights the urgent need to pass President Biden's American Jobs and Families Plan," Pelosi said in a statement via Twitter. "We need to take bold action to 'Build Back Better' from this crisis by investing in our nation, our workers and our families."

The US unemployment rate rose to 6.1 percent in April as the country added a sharply lower-than-forecast 266,000 jobs in a pandemic-suppressed market, the Labor Department announced on Friday.

Economists polled by US media had expected as many as 1 million new jobs for April, making what the Labor Department reported disappointing for many.

The United States lost more than 21 million jobs between March and April 2020, at the height of business lockdowns forced by the coronavirus. More than 8 million of those jobs have not returned, officials say.

Biden's Jobs Plan largely involves rebuilding the country's infrastructure, including bridges and roads, that the administration says has been ignored for decades. The president's Democratic Party, which has a razor-thin majority in Congress, however, faces stiff opposition from rival Republicans who say much of the plan is wasteful spending that would unnecessarily add to the nation's budget deficit.

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Yemen's Houthis Passed Up Opportunity to Demonstrate Commitment to Peace - US State Dept

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Pfizer Seeks Full FDA Approval for Its COVID-19 Vaccine - Company Statement

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - Pfizer and its partner BioNTech SE said on Friday that they have begun the process of seeking full authorization from the US Food and Drug Administration for their coronavirus vaccines for individuals aged 16 and above, making them the first companies to apply for full regulatory approval.

"Pfizer Inc. and BioNTech SE today announced the initiation of a Biologics License Application (BLA) with the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for approval of their mRNA vaccine to prevent COVID-19 in individuals 16 years of age and older," the companies said in a joint statement.

Pfizer and BioNTch obtained emergency use authorization for the COVID-19 vaccine on December 11, and has delivered more than 170 million doses since then.

The FDA has so far only granted emergency use authorization for vaccines being used in the United States.

Data to support the so-called BLA will be submitted to the agency "on a rolling basis" over the coming weeks, with request for a priority review, the statement said.

The target date for acceptance will be decided by the agency once the BLA submissions were complete and formally reviewed, the statement added.

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#### US Jury Indicts 4 Former Minneapolis Officers for Violating George Floyd's Civil Rights

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - A federal grand jury has charged all four former Minneapolis police officers involved in George Floyd's arrest resulting in his death with civil rights violations, including violating his constitutional rights, the US Justice Department said on Friday.

"A federal grand jury in Minneapolis, Minnesota, returned two indictments that were unsealed today. The first indictment charges former Minneapolis Police Department officers Derek Chauvin, 45; Tou Thao, 35; J. Alexander Kueng, 27; and Thomas Lane, 38, with federal civil rights crimes for their roles in the death of George Perry Floyd Jr.," the Justice Department said in a release.

According to the indictment, all four face constitutional rights violations for willfully depriving George Floyd of his rights while acting under color of law. Thao and Kueng are also facing charges of failing to intervene and stop Chauvin from exercising unreasonable use of force. The third charge, which applies only to Chauvin, concerns a separate case in September of 2017 in which Chauvin is accused of depriving a 14-year-old person of the constitutional right to be free from the use of unreasonable force.

Last month, Chauvin was found guilty of second- and third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter in Floyd's death last month. Chauvin said he plans to appeal the case.

Following the indictments, the officers will be tried in US federal court for the charges brought against them.

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#### Canada Loses Over 200,000 Jobs in April, Unemployment Climbs Amid 'Third Wave'

TORONTO, May 7 (Sputnik) - The Canadian economy lost 207,000 jobs in March, raising the country's unemployment rate by 0.6 percent as the country labors through the so-called "third wave" of the coronavirus pandemic, the state statistics agency said on Friday.

"Employment fell by 207,000 (-1.1 percent) in April and the unemployment rate rose 0.6 percentage points to 8.1 percent," Statistics Canada said in its monthly Labor Force Survey. The job losses were most pronounced in the provinces of British Columbia and Ontario, which have been hit the hardest by the latest wave of the pandemic, the agency said. Employment declined in both full-time and part-time work, with 129,000 full time workers losing their job, Statistics Canada said. Most of the losses were in the retail trade, accommodation and food services, and information, culture and recreation sectors.

By contrast, the US Labor Department announced that the country's economy added 266,000 jobs in April, although this was seen as a disappointment with many economists anticipating as many as 1 million new jobs in advance of the jobs report.

Conservative Party Leader Erin O'Toole blamed Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his government for the job losses, admonishing the Canadian leader for a faltering vaccination regime that he says spurred the latest wave of the pandemic and is not being felt in countries like the United States and the United Kingdom.

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US Jury Indicts 4 Ex-Officers for Violating George Floyd's Civil Rights - Justice Dept.

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Russia Calls on All States to Unconditionally Adhere to UN Charter - Lavrov

UNITED NATIONS, May 7 (Sputnik) - Russia urges all nations to fully abide by the United Nations Charter when forming their foreign policies, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said during a virtual high-level UN Security Council meeting on Friday.

"Russia calls on all states to unconditionally adhere to the purposes and principles of the UN Charter when forming their foreign policy, ensuring respect for sovereign equality of states, non-interference in their internal affairs, the settlement of disputes through political and diplomatic means and the rejection of the threat of force or the use of force," Lavrov said.

Lavrov emphasized this is particularly important in the current albeit complex stage of forming the multipolar system of international relations.

"Given the objective growth of new centers of economic financial developments and political influence, it's necessary to preserve the international legal basis to draw a resilient balance of interests that corresponds to these new realities," Lavrov said. "Unfortunately, not all of our partners are guided by the imperative of working honestly to establish genuine multilateral cooperation. They've come up against the possibility of advancing the unilateral or block priorities within the United Nations."

Lavrov went on to say that the leading western countries are now trying to roll back the process of establishing a multipolar world and trying to restrain the course of history.

"This includes the concept of the so-called rules-based order, a concept that was thought up as a way to replace international law," he said. "I don't need to recall that international law is already made up of a set of rules, but these are rules that were agreed at universal platforms that reflect the consensus of broadest possible consent."

Lavrov explained that these rules are developed in closed formats and then imposed on everyone else.

Russia considers such actions in circumvention of the United Nations to be harmful as they aim to usurp the decision-making processes, he added.

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US Adds 266,000 Jobs in April, But Unemployment Edges Up to 6.1% - Labor Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - The US unemployment rate rose to 6.1 percent in April as the country added a sharply lower-than-forecast 266,000 jobs in a pandemic-suppressed market, the Labor Department announced on Friday.

"Total nonfarm payroll employment rose by 266,000 in April, and the unemployment rate was little changed at 6.1 percent," the Bureau of Labor Statistics, a unit within the Labor Department, said in a statement. In March, there were 916,000 job additions, while the unemployment rate was at 6.0 percent.

Economists polled by US media had expected as many as 1 million new jobs for April, making what the Labor Department reported disappointing for many.

"This is a big surprise," economist Adam Button said in a comment on ForexLive. "The economy reopened in a big way in April and other indications showed much better hiring than this."

Indeed, the Labor Department said there were notable job gains last month in the leisure and hospitality industry and local government education and other services, but these were partially offset by losses in temporary help services and in couriers and messengers.

"There's a bit of disbelief around this number," Button added. "I wonder if this is a game-changer and shifts the conversation towards the Fed's baseline about rates staying very low for a very long time along with only-transitory inflation."

The Fed, or Federal Reserve, has forecast an economic growth of 6.5 percent for all of 2021 although Jerome Powell, chairman of the central bank, said he did not expect “full employment” — defined by a monthly unemployment rate of 4.0 percent or lower — to return before 2023. More than a year into the COVID-19 crisis, restoring job growth remains one of the biggest challenges of US policy makers.

The United States lost more than 21 million jobs between March and April 2020, at the height of business lockdowns forced by the coronavirus. More than 8 million of those jobs have yet to return, officials say.

The economy itself shrank 3.5 percent in 2020, although first quarter data for 2021, released last week by the Commerce Department, showed a dynamic rebound of 6.4 percent.

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Moscow Views EU, US Steps to Impose Totalitarianism Unacceptable - Lavrov

UNITED NATIONS, May 7 (Sputnik) - Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov during a UN Security Council meeting on Friday denounced attempts by the European Union and the United States to impose totalitarianism as unacceptable.

“We believe that the steps to impose totalitarianism in global affairs are unacceptable, but they are being used more and more widely by our Western colleagues, chiefly the European Union, the United States and other allies, rejecting all the principles of democracy and multilateralism in the international arena,” Lavrov said during the virtual high-level meeting.

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Blinken Admits US Actions Have Undermined World Order in Recent Years

UNITED NATIONS, May 7 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told the UN Security Council on Friday Washington has in recent years undermined the rules-based international order but pledged that the current administration would take a different course.

“I know that some of our actions in recent years have undermined the rules-based order and led others to question whether we are still committed to it,” Blinken said. “Rather than take our word for it, we ask the world to judge our commitment by our actions.”

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Russia Hopes P5 Summit Will Take Place Once Epidemiological Situation Allows - Lavrov

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - Moscow is hopeful that the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council — the United Kingdom, China, Russia, the United States and France — will hold a leaders summit once the epidemiological situation permits, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on Friday.

“President Putin proposed the convening of a summit of the leaders of the P5, and we hope that this idea will become a reality once the epidemiological situation around the world has been normalized,” Lavrov said during a high-level Security Council meeting.

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Russia Calls on All States to Unconditionally Adhere to UN Charter - Lavrov

UNITED NATIONS, May 7 (Sputnik) - Moscow urges all nations to abide by the United Nations Charter without any conditions when they form their foreign policies, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said during a high-level UN Security Council meeting on Friday.

“Russia calls in all states to unconditionally adhere to the purposes and principals of the Charter when forming their foreign policy, ensuring respect for sovereign equality of states, non-interference in their internal affairs, the settlement of disputes through political and diplomatic means and the rejection of the threat of force or the use of force,” Lavrov said during the virtual meeting.

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US to Push Back Forcefully When It Sees Countries Undermine International Order— Blinken

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) – The United States is ready to “push back forcefully” if countries undermine international order, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Friday.

“We will continue to push back forcefully when we see countries undermine the international order,” Blinken said during UN Security Council virtual meeting.

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US to Work Through Multinational Institutions to Stop COVID-19, Climate Crisis – Blinken

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) – The United States will work with all countries through international organizations on preventing spread of the novel coronavirus disease and combating the climate crisis, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Friday.

"The United States will work through multilateral institutions to stop COVID-19 and tackle the climate crisis," Blinken said during UN Security Council virtual meeting.

The US will work on these issues with all countries, including those with whom it has serious differences, he added.

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US Airports Screen Highest Number of Passengers Since Pandemic - Transportation Agency

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - US airports screened a record 1.64 million passengers on Thursday, the highest number of passengers on a single day since the start of the pandemic, TSA Spokesperson Lisa Farbstein said on Friday.

"TSA screened 1,644,050 people at security checkpoints yesterday, Thursday, May 6,"

Farbstein said. "It's the highest checkpoint throughput since the start of the pandemic."

Farbstein noted that on the same day in 2019, before the start of the pandemic, TSA screened 2,555,342 people, an indication that air passenger traffic has not yet fully rebounded.

The statement follows Farbstein's announcement on Monday that the number of screened passengers topped 1.6 million in a single day for the first time since March 2020, when the coronavirus pandemic sharply reduced traffic at airports across the country.

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