

10/14/20 Wires

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Trump Considers Giving Foreign Policy Speech Before November 3 Election - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump is considering giving a public speech on his administration's foreign policy before the November 3 election, NBC News reported on Wednesday citing two senior administration officials.

Trump's speech would focus on the administration's policy on China, nuclear arms control talks with Russia and his strategy for the United States to compete with other world powers, the report said.

Trump's speech would also highlight his administration's work in the Middle East, such as the recent peace agreements between Israel and several Arab countries, the report said.

Trump also wants to highlight that he has not involved the United States in a new military conflict, the report added.

The report said Trump is pressuring his national security team to speed up certain initiatives that he could highlight during his speech. The administration wants to draw down the number of US forces in Afghanistan to at 3,000 by early 2021, according to the report.

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US Fines Brazilian Investment Firm \$256Mln for Bribing Gov't Officials - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - The Brazilian firm J&F Investimentos has pleaded guilty to charges of bribing officials in Brazil with US-based assets and accepted a \$256 million penalty, the Justice Department said in a press release on Wednesday.

"As part of this scheme, executives at the very highest levels of the company used US banks and real estate to pay tens of millions of dollars in bribes to corrupt government officials in Brazil in order to obtain hundreds of millions of dollars in financing for the company and its affiliates," Acting Assistant Attorney General Brian Rabbitt said in the release.

Between 2005 and 2017, the company conspired with others to violate the US Foreign Corrupt Practices Act by paying bribes to Brazilian government officials to ensure that Brazilian state-owned and state-controlled banks would enter into debt and equity financing transactions with J&F Investimentos and J&F Investimentos-owned entities, the release said.

In one scheme, the firm paid more than \$148 million to Brazilian officials, including an executive of a state-owned bank, in exchange for hundreds of millions of dollars in loans, the release added.

The plea agreement requires J&F Investimentos to continue to cooperate with the US government in any ongoing or future criminal investigations concerning the company, its

executives, employees for the next three years and report on the implementation of an enhanced compliance program, according to the release.

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Texas Early Voting Turnout Breaks Record on First Day - Secretary of State

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - The US state of Texas has had a record turnout on the first day of early voting this week, the Office of the state's Secretary of State revealed in data on Wednesday.

Texas marked a 31 percent increase on the first day of early voting on Tuesday compared to the first day of early voting in the 2018 midterm election, according to data updated mid-day Wednesday.

A total of 907,054 votes were counted for Tuesday and 691,770 votes were counted on the first day of early voting in the 2018 midterm election, the data shows.

In the 2016 presidential election, Texas had 576,416 votes counted on the first day of early voting.

A Quinnipiac University Poll revealed in late September that US President Donald Trump is up by 5 percent among likely voters.

Texas is the second most populous state in the United States with the second largest number of votes in the Electoral College only behind California.

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Trump Admin. Submits Report to Congress on Officials Who Erode Freedoms in Hong Kong

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - The Trump administration has submitted a report to Congress identifying ten officials who it considers undermining fundamental freedoms in Hong Kong, State Department spokesperson Morgan Ortagus said in a statement on Wednesday.

"This year's report includes ten PRC [People's Republic of China] and Hong Kong officials whose actions have undermined freedoms of assembly, speech, press, or the rule of law, or whose actions have reduced the high degree of autonomy of Hong Kong," Ortagus said.

All ten individuals, including the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative region Carrie Lam, the Secretary General of the Committee for Safeguarding National Security and other officials, have been designated by the US government earlier August.

"Section 5(b) of the HKAA [Hong Kong Autonomy Act] requires the Secretary of the Treasury, in consultation with the Secretary of State, to submit a report to Congress 30–60 days after the Section 5(a) Report is submitted, identifying any foreign financial institution (FFI) that knowingly conducts a significant transaction with a foreign person identified in the Section 5(a) Report," the US Treasury Department said in a separate notice.

Ortagus has accused the Chinese government of crippling democratic institutions, human rights, judicial independence and individual freedoms in Hong Kong.

"The release of this report underscores our ongoing objection to Beijing's actions that are intentionally designed to erode the freedoms of the people of Hong Kong and impose the CCP's [Chinese Communist Party] oppressive policies," she said.

The Trump administration condemns "problematic actions" taken by China and local Hong Kong authorities, Ortagus added.

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US Made Over 5,000 Arrests Since July in Federal Crime Crackdown - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - More than 5,000 suspects have been arrested including almost 250 on homicide charges as part of Operation Legend, the Justice Department said on Wednesday.

"Since Operation Legend's launch in July 2020, more than 5,000 arrests – including approximately 247 for homicide – have been made; more than 2,000 firearms have been seized," the release said.

Authorities also seized nearly 500 pounds of drugs including heroin, fentanyl, methamphetamine and cocaine in addition to more than \$7.3 million in narcotics proceeds, the release added.

Of the more than 5,000 individuals arrested, approximately 1,057 have been charged with federal offenses. Some 568 of those defendants have been charged with firearms offenses, while approximately 411 have been charged with drug-related crimes, the release said.

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Another Republican Member of US Congress Tests Positive for COVID-19 - Statement

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - Republican Congressman Bill Huizinga on Wednesday said he tested positive for COVID-19 and has chosen to go into self-isolation.

"Earlier today, I was expected to appear with the Vice President," Huizinga said. "While taking part in offsite testing protocols, I took a rapid test that came back positive for COVID-19."

At least 19 members of Congress have now tested positive for COVID-19, including 15 Republicans and 4 Democrats, according to data posted on [govtrack.com](https://www.govtrack.com) as of Wednesday.

Huizinga said he was awaiting the results of a Polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test and was self isolating until he had confirmed the results.

Including Huizinga, so far 75 representatives and senators have self-quarantined or have taken other action, or no action, after coming in contact with someone with COVID-19 or testing positive for COVID-19 themselves, some of them multiple times, according to govtrack.com.

President Donald Trump, a Republican, recently tested positive for the coronavirus as well. The Republican Party, overall, has had a less cautious attitude towards the pandemic than their Democratic rivals including in terms of social distancing and mask wearing.

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Democrats Outpacing Republicans in Early Voting in Toss-Up State Florida - Elections Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - Early voting numbers for mail-in ballots received in the battleground state of Florida for the November election show Democrats have come out in greater numbers than Republicans, the state's Elections Division revealed in data on Wednesday.

Data shows Democrats have 402,633 more votes than Republicans as of late Wednesday morning. Republicans have 564,455 votes and Democrats have 967,088 votes so far, the data shows.

A total of 363,764 votes counted had no party affiliation, according to the data.

In 2016, then-Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton beat then-Republican presidential nominee Trump by less than 247,000 in early ballots case. However, on Election Day, Trump won Florida by about 113,000 votes, just over 1 percent of the total.

According to poll aggregator Realclearpolitics.com (RCP), Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden grew his lead over President Donald Trump in Florida by 1.7% within the past week and is now ahead by a 3.7-margin (48% to 44.3%). It is important to note, however, that Biden's lead is almost within the 3.5-percent average margin of error of the ten polls used in the RCP average.

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Trump-Russia Probe Suspect Ohr Resigns from US Justice Department - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - US Justice Department official Bruce Ohr, who is suspected of helping to compile an anti-Trump dossier, has retired and is awaiting a final decision on a disciplinary review, department spokesperson Kerri Kupec said on Wednesday.

"Bruce Ohr retired from the Department of Justice on Sept. 30, 2020. As such, he is no longer an employee of the department. Mr. Ohr retired after his counsel was informed that a final decision on a disciplinary review being conducted by department senior career officials was imminent," Kupec said as quoted by FOX News.

Ohr was accused of helping former British intelligence agent Christopher Steele find dirt on candidate and later President Donald Trump for a fabricated dossier on Trump's behavior during a trip to Russia.

Ohr's wife, Nellie, worked for Fusion GPS, a consulting firm that commissioned the Steel dossier, and Ohr allegedly continued to serve as an unofficial conduit between Steel and the Justice Department after the dossier was shown to be fake.

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US, Israeli Air Forces Conduct Joint F-35 Exercise - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - The US and Israeli air forces conducted a joint exercise this week involving F-35 fighter jets targeting both air and surface threats, the US Defense Department said in a press release on Wednesday.

"US Air Forces Central and the Israeli Air Force conducted exercise Enduring Lightning III... in the skies over Israel," the release said. "Both US and Israeli F-35s faced exercise surface and air adversaries with the goal of achieving an objective at a simulated target area."

The Israeli Air Force's 116th Squadron trained alongside the US Air Expeditionary Wing's 421 Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, which also operates the F-35. Israel's 115th Squadron provided a simulated enemy force with F-16 aircraft, the release added.

Monday's drill marked the third joint exercise between the two countries involving the F-35 Lightning, according to the release.

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IMF Ready to Engage With Lebanon, Waits for New Government - Managing Director

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is ready to work with Lebanon but is waiting for a formation of the new government, the fund's Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on Wednesday.

"We are ready and very willing to help Lebanon, but we need to get a partner," Georgieva said during a virtual event on the sidelines of the IMF and World Bank meetings.

Lebanon is currently fragmented, and this fragmentation is holding it back, she added.

"At the moment, it is difficult to compose the government and have a clarity who is responsible for the interactions with the IMF," Georgieva said. "We have to put a credible economic plan for investors and creditors, so we can restructure the Lebanese debt. It is possible."

Mustafa Adib, who was appointed Lebanon's prime minister in late August, has not yet been able to present a new cabinet, despite the conditions of French President Emmanuel Macron, under which a new government was to be formed in Lebanon by mid-September. Macron pledged to hold a conference on aid to Lebanon in Paris in October if the condition was met.

The process of forming a government in Lebanon became more difficult after the United States imposed new unilateral sanctions against two former Lebanese ministers, whom the US administration has accused of being connected with the Shiite movement, Hezbollah.

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COVID-19 Leads to 60% Increase in Children Needing Aid in West Africa - Humanitarian Group

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - Lockdowns in four West Africa nations to mitigate the coronavirus pandemic have lead to a 60 percent increase in hunger, with an estimated \$4.8 million children requiring outside aid to survive, Save the Children said on Wednesday. "COVID-19 has deepened a food, education and healthcare crisis affecting the poorest and most vulnerable communities in four countries in West Africa. An estimated 4.8 million children under 15 in Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Chad, need help to survive and stay in school. This marks a 60 percent increase since the coronavirus pandemic swept the world," the humanitarian organization aid in a statement.

Families already struggling were forced into difficult choices, "like reducing their exposure to coronavirus by staying at home and going hungry, or going out to find work and feeding their families," the release said.

The number of affected children in the two worst affected countries, Niger and Chad increased 176 percent and 169 percent respectively due to the COVID-19 crisis, according to the release. Save the Children called for an urgent scaling up of basic humanitarian services in the region, including food and healthcare for vulnerable communities. Failure to act could lead to hundreds, potentially thousands, of preventable child deaths, the agency warned.

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US Imposes Sanctions on Hong Kong's Chief Executive, 9 Others - Treasury

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - The United States imposed sanctions against the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative region Carrie Lam and nine other officials, U Department of Treasury said on Wednesday.

The list of designated individuals includes the Secretary General of the Committee for Safeguarding National Security, the secretaries of justice, security, constitutional and Mainland affairs, the police commissioner and other officials.

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UN Fully Committed to Supporting Lebanon-Israel Maritime Boundary Talks - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, October 14 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is committed to supporting the discussions between Israel and Lebanon on the delineation of their maritime boundary, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Wednesday.

"The United Nations through its representatives is fully committed to supporting the parties in the discussions, as requested by them, as they work towards a final agreed outcome," Dujarric said.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has welcomed the launching of the US-mediated negotiations earlier in the day at the United Nations' headquarters in the southern Lebanese town of Naqoura.

The talks seek to resolve an overlap between the two rivaling nations' territorial waters and exclusive economic zones by an area of roughly 330 square miles that is situated over large oil and gas deposits beneath the Mediterranean seabed.

Earlier on Wednesday, a Lebanese military source told Sputnik that the next round of negotiations would take place on October 28.

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US Economy Likely Needs 'Another Year' to Reach Pre-Pandemic Level - Federal Reserve

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - The US economy will likely take another year to recover to the pre-pandemic levels of 2019, Federal Reserve Vice Chairman Richard Clarida said in the organization's US Economic Outlook and Monetary Policy on Wednesday.

"The COVID-19 recession threw the economy into a very deep hole and it will take some time, perhaps another year, for the level of GDP to fully recover to its previous 2019 peak," Clarida said. "It will likely take even longer than that for the unemployment rate to return to a level consistent with our maximum-employment mandate."

US GDP shrank at its fastest pace in history in the second quarter of 2020, contracting by 31.4 percent after a drop of 3.4 percent in the first three months of the year amid widespread lockdowns imposed due to the novel coronavirus outbreak. In 2019, GDP rose by 4.1 percent. More than 21 million jobs were lost between March and April at the height of lockdowns. A rebound of 2.5 million jobs was logged in May and 4.8 million in June, before the recovery began slowing. Latest labor statistics for September showed a gain of 661,000 jobs.

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NASA Awards 14 Companies \$370M In for Moon Operations Technology

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - NASA selected more than a dozen companies to develop technology to sustain US Moon operations, Administrator Jim Bridenstine said at a virtual consortium on Wednesday.

"Together, NASA and industry are building up an array of mission-ready capabilities to support a sustainable presence on the Moon and future human missions to Mars," Bridenstine said.

"These types of companies and capability they've developed are going to be transformational for how we explore space."

The awards totaled \$370 million, about \$270 of which will go to four companies that are developing cryogenic fluid management technologies needed for rocket fuel: one small business, Eta Space, plus three corporate giants, Lockheed Martin, SpaceX and the United Launch Alliance (ULA), NASA said in a press release.

Ten of the selections will support the development and demonstration of technologies including the separation of lunar ice into oxygen and hydrogen for rocket fuel plus oxygen to sustain human life, as well as power generation, energy storage and communications, the release said. Bridenstine said NASA plans the first human lunar settlement in 2028, four years after a scheduled visit to the Moon's south pole by two American astronauts in 2024.

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US Thanks Oman, Saudi Leaders for Help Freeing 2 American Hostages in Yemen

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - The White House credited the king of Saudi Arabia and the Sultan of Oman for arranging the release of two Americans held by Houthi rebels in Yemen and for repatriating the remains of a third US captive, National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien said on Wednesday.

"We extend our sincerest thanks to Sultan Haitham bin Tariq of Oman and King Salman of Saudi Arabia for their efforts to secure the release of our citizens," O'Brien said via Twitter. O'Brien welcomed the release US citizens Sandra Loli and Mikael Gidada from Houthi custody and sent condolences to the family of Bilal Fateen.

O'Brien noted that the Trump administration has brought back to the United States more than 50 hostages and detainees from 22 countries.

A Royal Oman Air Force plane with the US hostages and the remains of a third American left the Houthi-controlled capital of Sanaa hours after the arrival of more than 200 hundred militants who had been stranded in Oman, according to media reports.

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UN Special Representative for Central Asia to Travel to Kyrgyzstan Thursday - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, October 14 (Sputnik) - UN Special Representative for Central Asia Natalia Gherman will travel to Kyrgyzstan on Thursday to meet with the relevant actors in the country amid the ongoing political crisis, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a statement.

"The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Central Asia, Natalia Gherman, is due to arrive in Bishkek tomorrow evening, to engage with relevant actors," Dujarric said on Wednesday.

Gherman will meet with outgoing President Sooronbay Jeenbekov, Foreign Minister Chingiz Aidarbekov, the chair of the country's Central Electoral Commission, the leaders of Parliament and representatives of civil society organizations, Dujarric said.

The United Nations remains concerned about the developments in Kyrgyzstan with no political agreement having been reached since protests erupted last week.

Protests started in Kyrgyzstan after the October 4 parliamentary election. Supporters of the political parties that did not make it to parliament charged election fraud, clashed with law enforcement officers and seized the parliament building. More than 1,200 people were injured in the clashes and one was killed. Several high-ranking officials, including Prime Minister Kubatbek Boronov, have resigned.

Earlier on Wednesday, Kyrgyz president's spokeswoman Tolgonay Stamalievna told Sputnik that Jeenbekov announced that he would step down after holding parliamentary elections.

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US Senior Official Heading to Albania for Talks on Education, Culture - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - US Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs Marie Royce is traveling to Albania for talks with government officials on education and culture, the State Department said on Wednesday.

"While in Albania, Assistant Secretary Royce will meet with senior members of the Albanian government to discuss U.S.-Albanian bilateral cooperation in the fields of education and culture," the department said in a statement. "In addition, she will discuss our ongoing cooperation with Albania in cultural heritage and will visit an Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation project."

The State Department said Royce will present the International Visitor Leadership Program #FacesofExchange Award to Albania's recipient to mark the 80th anniversary of the program.

"Finally, she will meet with several alumni and participants of US Government programs in Albania," the release added.

Royce's trip to Tirana, Albania, will last from October 14-17.

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WHO Regional Director Says Canada Facing COVID-19 Second Wave

TORONTO, October 14 (Sputnik) - Canada is on the precipice of the second wave of the novel coronavirus pandemic, the WHO's regional director for the Americas Dr. Carissa Etienne said during a press briefing on Wednesday.

"Canada is currently facing its second wave," the head of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) said.

Etienne's statement echoes that of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau who said last week, "we're at a tipping point in this pandemic, not only is the second wave underway, yesterday we hit the highest daily recorded cases – well above what we saw this spring."

On Wednesday, Canada's public health agency reported 4,042 new COVID-19 infections, smashing the previous record set just days earlier.

A combined 1,565 new cases in Ontario and Quebec pushed Canada's tally to 188,446 on Wednesday with at least 9,654 virus-related deaths, according to data released by provincial health agencies. There are 19,741 active cases throughout the country, the Public Health Agency of Canada says.

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US May Advise Against COVID-19 Vaccine for Children at First - Disease Control Agency

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - US health officials may initially advise against children receiving COVID-19 vaccines once they are available, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said on Wednesday.

"At first, COVID-19 vaccines may not be recommended for children," the CDC said in an advisory message. "In early clinical trials for various COVID-19 vaccines, only non-pregnant adults participated."

At least one, possibly several, COVID-19 vaccines may be available for the US public before the end of 2020.

Clinical trials continue to expand the categories of those recruited to participate and the parameters for groups recommended to receive the vaccines could change in the future, the CDC acknowledged.

In the United States, there is currently no authorized or approved vaccine to prevent COVID-19 but the CDC is focused on vaccine planning, working closely with health departments and partners to get ready for when one or more of them are available, the advisory added.

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World Bank Proposes \$25Bln COVID-19 Emergency Package to Support Poorest Nations - Malpass

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - The World Bank should provide additional \$25 billion in emergency support for poorest countries to manage the novel coronavirus pandemic, World Bank President David Malpass said on Wednesday.

"The scale of the challenges ahead is staggering, so we need to do more. We are proposing to IDA [International Development Association] Deputies later this month a \$25 billion supplemental COVID Emergency Financing Package," Malpass said at the annual virtual meeting of finance ministers and central bank governors from the Group of 20 (G20) nations. On Tuesday, the World Bank announced an assistance package in the amount of \$12 billion for developing nations to acquire coronavirus vaccines, tests and finance treatments for their citizens.

IDA, the arm of the World Bank that helps the world's poorest countries, is overseen by 173 shareholder nations.

IDA offers no interest or low-interest loans and grants for programs that boost economic growth, reduce inequality and improve living conditions.

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UN Concerned About 125,000 People in Libya's Sirte Amid Military Buildup - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, October 14 (Sputnik) - Some 125,000 people that live in and around the Sirte province in Libya remain at risk amid the ongoing escalation and a potential for armed confrontation in the area, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Wednesday.

"The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs says humanitarian partners are concerned about the fragile situation and a possible humanitarian disaster should the current escalations and mobilizations around Sirte lead to military operations," Dujarric said. "The lives of more than 125,000 people in and around Syria remain of great risk."

Libya has been split between two rival governments since the 2011 overthrow and assassination of the country's long-time leader Muammar Gaddafi. The western part of the country, including the capital of Tripoli, is controlled by the Government of National Accord (GNA), while the eastern part is held by the Tobruk-based parliament, which is supported by the Libyan National Army.

In mid-August, the United Nations-backed GNA announced an immediate ceasefire, which the eastern parliament welcomed and supported, and vowed to create demilitarized zones in the strategic areas of Sirte and Jufra.

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UN Spokesman Says Important That Russia's Sputnik-V Vaccine Cleared by WHO

UNITED NATIONS, October 14 (Sputnik) - Any vaccine for the coronavirus disease, including Russia's Sputnik-V vaccine, must be cleared by the World Health Organization, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Wednesday.

In September, Russian President Vladimir Putin in his speech at the UN General Assembly offered to provide free Sputnik-V vaccines to all UN staff worldwide.

"Those discussions are ongoing," Dujarric said when asked about Russia's offer. "For us, it's important that any vaccine be cleared by the WHO, but discussions are ongoing."

In August, Russia became the first country in the world to register the vaccine against COVID-19, created by the Gamaleya Institute. Phase 3 clinical trials were launched in Moscow on September 7. A total of 40,000 volunteers are due to take part in the tests and as many as 10,000 of them will receive a placebo.

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Sikorsky-Boeing SB-1 Defiant Helicopter Reaches 230 Knots in Recent Test Flight - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - The Sikorsky-Boeing SB-1 Defiant coaxial demonstrator helicopter reached a speed of 232 knots during a test flight earlier this month, Defense News reported on Wednesday citing a statement from the team developers.

The report said that on October 12 the aircraft reached 232 knots in a decent and 211 knots in a level flight.

The performance meets the US Army's speed requirements as it plans to field the aircraft by 2030, the report said.

The aircraft previously reached a speed of 100 knots during a test flight in January and 205 knots in a test flight in June, the report added.

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Global Energy Consumption Projected to Increase Nearly 50% By 2050 - US Energy Agency

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - Global energy use is expected to increase almost by half over the next 30 years with India and Africa accounting for most of the raise in consumption, US Energy Information Administration (EIA) chief Linda Capuano said in EIA's International Energy Outlook 2020 on Wednesday.

"Global energy consumption would rise nearly 50 percent by 2050, with most of the increases coming from the rapidly developing regions, India and Africa," Capuano said. "We have projected renewable energy to grow to almost a 30 percent share in 2050, since the majority of renewable energy is used in electricity markets."

Capuano said electric power generation was expected to be the primary energy consumed, increasing to nearly 50 percent, making the electricity sector a major driver of global trade.

"The generation fuel mix is also rapidly changing," she said. "We project that by 2050, solar and wind renewables [will] become the largest energy source, while natural gas grows slowly and coal consumption is nearly flat."

Capuano said as energy use grew in Asia, some cases indicate that more than 50 percent of electricity could be generated from renewable sources by 2050.

Africa could meet its electricity needs in different ways depending on whether development came as an expansion of the central grid or as off-grid systems, she added.

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US Unilateral Sanctions Dealing Serious Blow to American Companies in Russia - Mishustin

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - The unilateral sanctions the United States has imposed against Russia are dealing a serious blow to American companies operating in the country, Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin said in his address to participants of the US-Russia Business Council meeting on Wednesday.

"Unfortunately, unilateral sanctions imposed by the US leadership against our country have significantly reduced opportunities for practical cooperation between us," Mishustin said. "A serious blow has been primarily dealt to American businesses operating in Russia, they have sustained considerable losses. Today, they are being actively replaced by companies from other countries interested in mutually beneficial cooperation with Russia."

Mishustin emphasized that Russia is open to building multifaceted interaction with all members of the international community and is shaping its market to be an attractive environment for foreign economic entities.

"We hope that in the future, Russian-US business ties will rebound to their pre-crisis levels," Mishustin said.

The Russian prime minister noted that the US-Russia Business Council is making a significant contribution to promoting bilateral trade, economic and investment cooperation.

The Business Council is also facilitating the launching and implementation of "promising joint projects with a special focus on creating new jobs and stimulating economic growth in Russia and the United States," Mishustin said.

In addition, Mishustin urged joining efforts amid the novel coronavirus crisis in order to protect lives and overcome the negative economic consequences stemming from the pandemic.

"Given these circumstances it is important I believe that the US-Russia Business Council has an active role to play in these processes," he said.

Relations between Russia and the United States deteriorated in 2014 under then-US President Barack Obama during the crisis in Ukraine, when Washington meddled in Ukraine's affairs while accusing Moscow of the same and imposed sanctions.

Since, the United States has expanded and tightened the sanctions regime following accusations of Russia's alleged meddling in the 2016 US presidential election.

Russia has repeatedly denied interfering in Ukraine and in the US political system.

US President Donald Trump has repeatedly said he would like to normalize US-Russia relations and expressed his intention to develop cooperation in various areas of mutual interest.

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Trump Pledges to Reduce Drug Prices in US by 50-90%

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump said on Wednesday he will further lower the cost of prescription drugs by fifty to ninety percent.

"We will... further reduce the cost of prescription drugs. Your drug prices will be reduced by 50, 60, 70, 80, 90 percent," Trump said in his remarks to the New York Economic Club.

In September, Trump signed an executive order targeting the pharmaceutical industry in a bid to reduce prices on drugs in the United States.

The Trump administration has repeatedly vowed to address the issue of bloated drug prices, including as part of its effort to combat the coronavirus pandemic.

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Argentina Must Balance Supporting Economy With Macroeconomic Stability - IMF

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - Argentina's government should balance supporting the local economy and maintaining macroeconomic stability to ensure successful recovery, International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva told reporters on Wednesday.

"Argentina faces dramatic challenges," Georgieva said during virtual press briefing. "The country is in the point when top priority ought to be to put in place a credible and comprehensive economic agenda that balances supporting the economy and people in this very difficult time with making sure that we have macroeconomic stability."

The nation's authorities should provide international community a roadmap for understanding in what direction they are moving and how they are going to reach goals, she added.

The IMF wants to be a partner for Argentina, while its mission returns to Buenos Aires in November, Georgieva said.

The Argentine authorities this past August agreed to a restructuring deal with private creditors on \$65 billion of sovereign debt; an agreement that allowed the country to formally exit its ninth default.

Argentina's GDP is expected to drop by 11.8 percent in 2020 due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the country's Central Bank.

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Trump Focused on Arms Control Talks With Russia, Hopeful Deal is Possible - Pompeo

(Updates with additional information in paras 3-5; background in paras 6, 7)

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - US Secretary Mike Pompeo told reporters that he discussed with President Donald Trump on Wednesday the ongoing arms control negotiations and said the US president is focused on the issue and would welcome an agreement with Russia.

"I spoke to President about this issue this morning as well. He is focused on this too," Pompeo said during a press briefing. "We would welcome the opportunity to complete an agreement based on understandings that were achieved over the last couple of weeks about what the range of possibilities look like for an extension the New START [New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty]."

Pompeo praised US Special Envoy for Arms Control Marshall Billingslea for working hard on securing an arms control deal and expressed optimism that an agreement can be reached.

"I am hopeful that the Russians will find a way to agree to an outcome that, frankly, I think is in their best interests and in our best interests," Pompeo said.

The United States also hopes that China, who has so far refused to participate in the arms control talks, will ultimately see that negotiating is how mature nations deal with issues like arms control and will join in the talks as well, Pompeo added.

On Tuesday, Billingslea said US negotiators believe that there is an agreement with Russia in principle on the conditions to extend the New START - the last remaining arms control regime between the two countries - that is set to expire next February.

Russian diplomats have denied any breakthroughs in the negotiations. Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov told Sputnik the latest meeting on October 5 in Helsinki demonstrated that huge differences remain, including with regard to central elements of such an agreement.

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WHO Warns Pandemic Puts Progress Against Tuberculosis at Risk - Statement

UNITED NATIONS, October 14 (Sputnik) - The World Health Organization (WHO) in a statement on Wednesday said progress against tuberculosis (TB) is at risk as resources are being reallocated to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Disruptions in services caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have led to further setbacks," the statement said. "In many countries, human, financial and other resources have been reallocated from TB to the COVID-19 response. Data collection and reporting systems have also been negatively impacted."

Three high burden countries - India, Indonesia and the Philippines - reported 25-30 percent drops in TB case notifications, which could lead to a dramatic increase in additional TB deaths, the statement said.

Before the pandemic, many countries were making progress in tackling TB with a nine percent reduction in incidence, a 14 percent decrease in deaths seen between 2015 and 2019.

In 2019, approximately 1.4 million people died from TB-related disease, and of the 10 million people who developed it, some three million were not diagnosed, according to the statement. Funding for TB prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care is a major issue, and in 2020, it has reached \$6.5 billion, representing only half of the \$13 billion target agreed by countries in the UN Political Declaration on TB.

"Accelerated action is urgently needed worldwide if we are to meet our targets by 2022," WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in the statement.

The UN Political Declaration on TB for 2018-2022 aims to treat 40 million people, reach at least 30 million with TB preventive treatment, and mobilize financial resources, including at least \$2 billion annually for research.

The WHO's End TB Strategy aims to reach a 90 percent reduction in TB deaths and an 80 percent reduction in the TB incidence rate by 2030, compared to the 2015 baseline.

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RPT - US Diplomat Seeks Expanded Military Ties With EU Partners - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - US Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs Clarke Cooper is travelling to four nations in Europe for talks on security cooperation and military equipment sales, the State Department said on Wednesday.

"Cooper travels to Greece, Bulgaria, Cyprus and Poland October 14-24, 2020, to meet with US allies and partners on expanding security cooperation and defense trade that enhances our shared security," the release said.

The State Department said Cooper will meet senior officials in Greece to promote stability in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Balkans. He is scheduled to visit the Souda Bay military base, the release said.

In Cyprus, Cooper will review new regulations allowing expanded sales of non-lethal US defense equipment and services that are controlled under the International Traffic and Arms Regulations, the release said.

In Bulgaria, Cooper will discuss with officials the more than \$100 million in US military sales in the past two years to improve Bulgaria's combat effectiveness and interoperability with US forces and other NATO allies, the release said.

Cooper's visit to Poland will include discussions on the nation's defense modernization efforts, as well as the recently signed US-Poland Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, according to the release.

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Houthi Rebels in Yemen Free 2 American Hostages - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - Houthi rebels in Yemen released two Americans in exchange for more than 200 of the rebel group's loyalists who had been stranded in Oman, the Wall Street Journal reported on Wednesday.

The deal secured freedom for Sandra Loli, a humanitarian worker who was held hostage by the Houthis for about three years, and Mikael Gidada, a businessman who was held for about a year, Deputy Assistant to the US President Kash Patel was quoted as saying in the report.

A Royal Oman Air Force plane with the US hostages and the remains of a third American flew out of Yemen's Houthi-controlled capital of Sanaa, hours after the jet and a companion flight brought hundreds of militants in Oman back to the country, the report said.

The pact also included the return of the remains of Bilal Fateen, a third American who had been held by the Houthis.

Patel said the Trump administration had been working urgently to secure the deal because Loli's health was in decline. The deal also included delivery of medical aid for Yemen.

The United States worked to ensure that Houthis returning to Yemen did not pose a major risk, the report added.

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Pompeo Says Discussed Situation in Nagorno-Karabakh With Trump Wednesday

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told reporters on Wednesday that he has discussed the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh with US President Donald Trump earlier in the day.

"I spoke with President Trump about this just this morning briefly," Pompeo said. "We are watching what's taking place there."

Fighting between Armenia and Azerbaijan on the line of contact in Nagorno-Karabakh started on September 27. Both countries have accused the each other of starting the hostilities.

Last week, Russian President Vladimir Putin invited the foreign ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia to Moscow and meet with their Russian counterpart in a bid to negotiate a ceasefire.

The negotiation lasted for almost 11 hours and resulted in an agreement on a humanitarian ceasefire beginning on October 10 at noon. The ceasefire deal includes the exchange prisoners and the bodies of killed soldiers as well as provides the basis to negotiate additional details of the pause in fighting.

The international community has strongly condemned the escalation of the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. The co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group have urged the sides to cease fire

and resume dialogue without preconditions. Turkey, in turn, has pledged to provide its full support to Azerbaijan.

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EU Sanctions to Target FSB Chief Bortnikov, Other Senior Russian Officials - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - The European Union is readying to sanction senior Russian officials, including Federal Security Service chief Aleksandr Bortnikov and first deputy chief of staff in the presidential administration Sergei Kiriyenko, over the alleged poisoning of opposition activist Alexey Navalny, the New York Times reported on Wednesday.

The Russian authorities have denied any wrongdoing regarding Navalny and threatened to respond in kind to the potential EU sanctions, which are expected to target one organization and six individuals with asset freezes and travel bans.

"Several of those facing penalties are members of the tight circle of elites who for years have surrounded the Russian president, Vladimir V. Putin: Aleksandr Bortnikov, the head of Russia's domestic spy agency, the Federal Security Service; Sergei Kiriyenko, first deputy chief of staff in the presidential administration; and Andrei Yarin, the head of the presidential administration's domestic policy directorate," the report said citing senior European Union officials.

Others targeted officials include two deputy defense ministers Aleksei Krivoruchko and Pavel Popov and the Russian President's envoy to the Siberian Federal District Sergei Menyaylo.

The European Union is also expected to impose sanctions on the Russian State Research Institute of Organic Chemistry and Technology, which is suspected by Western intelligence services of developing the Novichok nerve agent allegedly used to poison Navalny.

Navalny was transported to Germany after he fell ill on a flight from the Siberian city of Tomsk to Moscow in late August. Following his arrival in Berlin, the German government alleged that traces of a nerve agent from the Novichok group had been found in his system.

Russian doctors who treated Navalny in the city of Omsk have said that no poisonous substances were detected when they undertook tests.

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Trump Focused on Arms Control Talks with Russia, Hopeful Deal is Possible - Pompeo

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based on understandings that were achieved over the last couple of weeks about what the range of possibilities look like for an extension the New START.”

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Governor Extends Virginia Voter Registration Deadline to Thursday Evening - Statement

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - The deadline for voter registration in the US state of Virginia has been extended until Thursday evening after the state’s registration system crashed a day earlier, Governor Ralph Northam said in a statement.

“Virginia's voter registration deadline has been extended until Thursday, October 15 at 11:59 p.m. [3:59 a.m. GMT],” Northam said via Twitter on Wednesday.

Several US lawmakers from Virginia and state officials appealed to Northam to extend the voter registration deadline by 72 hours after the technical problems emerged.

The Virginia Department of Elections said the state’s voter registration system went down on Tuesday - the last day for residents to register before the November 3 presidential and general elections - as a result of a cut cable.

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US Urges Azerbaijan, Armenia Uphold Ceasefire Commitments - Pompeo

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - The United States calls on Azerbaijan and Armenia to observe ceasefire in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told reporters on Wednesday.

“As a co-chair of OSCE Minsk Group, the United States remains committed to helping Azerbaijan and Armenia achieving sustainable settlement to their conflict. We call on both

countries to implement their agreed upon commitments to a ceasefire and stop targeting civilian areas," Pompeo said during a press briefing.

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US Diplomat Seeks Expanded Military Ties With Partner Nations in Mideast, EU - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - US Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs Clarke Cooper is travelling to four nations in the Middle East and Europe for talks on security cooperation and military equipment sales, the State Department said on Wednesday. "Cooper travels to Greece, Bulgaria, Cyprus and Poland October 14-24, 2020, to meet with US allies and partners on expanding security cooperation and defense trade that enhances our shared security," the release said.

The State Department said Cooper will meet senior officials in Greece to promote stability in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Balkans. He is scheduled to visit the Souda Bay military base, the release said.

In Cyprus, Cooper will review new regulations allowing expanded sales of non-lethal US defense equipment and services that are controlled under the International Traffic and Arms Regulations, the release said.

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IMF Expects Debt in US 'Will Continue to Grow' - Fiscal Affairs Director

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) expects that the debt in the United States will continue to grow, IMF Fiscal Affairs Director Vitor Gaspar told reporters on Wednesday.

"In our projections, the debt in the US will continue to grow," Gaspar said during a virtual press briefing.

Gaspar noted that the US government acted quickly to limit economic impact from the novel coronavirus crisis by imposing monetary and fiscal measures that succeeded putting a floor for possible economic disruptions and provided support to people in need.

"The impact in the United States is quite sizable with the public debt-to-GDP ratio increasing by more than 20 percentage points to a level slightly above 130 percent of GDP on international comparable basis," Gaspar said.

The IMF sees that there is additional room for more economic stimulus measures, Gaspar said. "We do see that the United States has room for further fiscal support," Gaspar added.

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Biegun, Indian Officials Discuss Regional Security, Economic Cooperation - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 13 (Sputnik) - US Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun during a visit to New Delhi this week met with senior officials to discuss regional security, the COVID-19 pandemic, economic cooperation and other issues of mutual concern, the State Department said in a press release on Wednesday.

"In his meetings with External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar, National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, Foreign Secretary Harsh Shringla, and Defense Secretary Ajay Kumar, the Deputy Secretary discussed US efforts to work with India and like-minded partners on a range of issues including regional security, economic cooperation, and coordinated efforts to address the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic," the release said.

Biegun also participated in the India-U.S forum during his visit to India's capital from October 12-14, the State Department said.

During the talks, Biegun and India's Foreign Secretary Harsh Shringla emphasized the importance of the US-India partnership and underscored the need for "advancing a free and open Indo-Pacific," the release said.

Biegun also emphasized the work of the so-called Quad group of nations - the US, India, Japan and Australia - to promote peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region, the release said.

"Biegun also underscored enhanced cooperation among the Quad to create resilient supply chains, promote transparency, and increase maritime security, topics most recently discussed in the October 6 meeting of Foreign Ministers attended by Secretary of State Pompeo." it added.

During his New Delhi visit, Biegun also met with Bhutanese Ambassador to India Major General Vetsop Namgyel to reaffirm Washington's close ties with the people of Bhutan.

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IMF Warns Against Premature Fiscal Support Withdrawal After Coronavirus Crisis - Report

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) warned on Wednesday against the premature withdrawal of financial support after the novel coronavirus crisis despite the record levels of debt that are expected to stabilize in five years.

"Public debt is expected to stabilize to about 100 percent of GDP until 2025, benefiting from negative interest-growth differentials," the IMF said in its new Fiscal Monitor report. The IMF said in the report it does not see the high levels as of debt as the greatest immediate risk, and urged countries to stay away from withdrawing fiscal support to the economies. "The near-term priority is to avoid premature withdrawal of fiscal support. Support should persist, at least into 2021, to sustain the recovery and to limit long-term scarring," the report said.

The IMF has projected a significant growth for the number of individuals in need around the world. More than 100 million people expected to enter extreme poverty because of pandemic, the report said.

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US Supports 'Robust' Program of Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia - Pompeo

WASHINGTON, October 13 (Sputnik) - The United States supports a "robust" program to provide weapons to Saudi Arabia, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said during a joint press availability with his Saudi counterparts at the State Department on Wednesday.

"Today, we reaffirmed our mutual commitment to countering Iranian malign activity and the threat it poses to regional security and prosperity and the security of the American people as well," Pompeo said. "The United States supports a robust program of arms sales to Saudi Arabia in line with efforts of the kingdom to protect its citizens and sustain American jobs." The Trump administration has come under fire over its decision last year to approve more than \$8.1 billion in emergency arms sales to Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries in response to the perceived threat posed by Iran.

The State Department's Office of the Inspector General has said that US officials did not fully assess the risks that the weapons would pose to civilians, particularly in Yemen, where Saudi Arabia leads an Arab alliance that has been conducting deadly air raids on Houthi rebels. The emergency arms deal came despite the objections of the US Congress, which sought to block weapons sales to the kingdom and cut diplomatic ties in response to the October 2, 2018 murder of Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud is currently in Washington for the inaugural US-Saudi Strategic Dialogue.

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US to Build New Embassy on 26-Acre Site in Saudi Capital of Riyadh - Pompeo

WASHINGTON, October 13 (Sputnik) - The United States will build a new sprawling embassy complex in the Saudi capital of Riyadh that together with two other US consulates in the

kingdom will cost nearly \$1 billion, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced during a joint press availability with his Saudi counterpart at the State Department on Wednesday.

"The United States is preparing to acquire a 26-acre site for a new US embassy in Riyadh," Pompeo said. "This project along with recent opening of a new consulate in Jeddah and the ongoing construction of a new consulate in Dhahran represents a US investment of over \$1 billion."

Pompeo made the remarks as he welcomed Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud to the State Department for wide-ranging talks.

The talks come within the framework of the inaugural US-Saudi Strategic Dialogue, which will focus on regional security, economic development and other matters of mutual concern, according to the State Department.

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Lebanon, Israel Hold 'Productive' Border Talks on Maritime Border - Joint US-UN Statement

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - Officials from Lebanon and Israel held a "productive" round of talks on their disputed maritime border and reaffirmed that they will continue negotiations later this month, the United States and United Nations said in a joint statement on Wednesday.

"During this initial meeting, the representatives held productive talks and reaffirmed their commitment to continue negotiations later this month," the government of the US and the Office of the UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon said in the statement.

Earlier in the day, the first round of US-mediated indirect talks over the disputed sea border took place under the auspices of the United Nations at the UN's headquarters in the southern Lebanese town of Naqoura.

The US mediating team was led by Assistant Secretary David Schenker and Ambassador John Desrocher, while the UN was represented by Special Coordinator for Lebanon Jan Kubis, the statement said.

Israel's Energy Ministry Director General Udi Adiri and Lebanon's Army Brigadier General Bassam Yassine headed their respective delegations.

A Lebanese military source told Sputnik earlier on Wednesday that the next round of negotiations would take place on October 28.

According to the source, the Lebanese delegation was due to head from the UN office to the headquarters of the Lebanese army command and then meet with President Michel Aoun to provide him with a report on the first round of negotiations.

The talks seek to resolve an overlap between the two rivaling nations' territorial waters and exclusive economic zones by an area of roughly 330 square miles, which is situated over large oil and gas deposits beneath the Mediterranean seabed.

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RPT - Restricting Visas of Foreign Students, Journalists Contradicts Core US Values - Lawmaker

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - The Trump administration's proposal to restrict the duration of visas for foreign students and journalists contradicts American core values and paints the country as anti-immigrant, state of Florida State Representative Anna Eskamani told Sputnik.

On September 24, the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced an initiative to limit visas for foreign students in the United States to 2 to 4 years. The initiative also calls for restricting the duration of visas issued to foreign journalists to 240 days with an opportunity to obtain an extension of up to 240 days.

"Attacking our international students and foreign journalists is against our American values, and sets a tone that we are anti-immigrant," Eskamani, a congresswoman who called on DHS to rescind the proposed rule, said.

The congresswoman said her father came to the United States from Iran seeking higher education.

"It's essential that the United States welcome international students who not only contribute through tuition to our higher education institutions but also add so much talent to our workforce," she added.

The DHS initiative sends "a dangerous message" to foreign students that they are not welcome to study in the US, Eskamani added.

"The proposed rule continues to flame anti-immigrant fervor within the United States. It continues to paint our country as one that is against immigrants which is not how the majority of Americans feel," Eskamani said.

At present, foreign journalists can stay in the United States as long as they continue to perform their duties in compliance with the terms of admission.

The DHS said the significant growth of the F, J and I visa programs has necessitated the proposed update "to ensure the integrity of the US immigration system." It added that no changes are proposed to "the underlying requirements to qualify for these nonimmigrant classifications."

The proposed rule is opened for public discussion until October 26, and then will go to the Office of Management and Budget for review. Over 20,000 people submitted their comment, mostly opposing the DHS initiative.

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2020 US Election

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - US voters are casting early ballots at a record pace including in several key swing states, while the military and law enforcement prepare for unrest that could erupt before and after the November 3 election.

BRACING FOR TURMOIL

New York Police Department Commissioner Dermot Shea told all uniformed NYPD members to prepare to deal with protests before and after the presidential election, according to a department memo that was obtained and published by CNN. In the memo, Shea instructed his forces to gear up for the possibility that the results of the election may not be decided for several weeks after November 3. The anticipated protests may grow in scale, intensity and frequency and may extend into January 2021, the report quoted the memo.

The US military has not received any requests for the National Guard to be used to ensure security during the election, Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy said. "We are always available to support the Metro police department or other federal agencies," he added during a press briefing.

RECORD TURNOUT

Over 10.5 million US voters have already cast their ballots in the presidential election, according to CNN, Edison Research and Catalist's analysis of voting information from 41 states. The data does not provide an indication as to the outcome of the race, as polling around the country shows that Democrats prefer to vote early or by mail, and Republicans are more likely vote in-person on Election Day, November 3.

America's Georgia saw a historic high turnout on Monday, the first day in the state for early voting in the presidential election. According to the Secretary of State's office, 126,876 people cast ballots, breaking a previous record of around 90,000. Long lines of voters stretched waiting times at some localities to eight hours, The Wall Street Journal cited officials. On Tuesday, early voting also began in Texas with thousands of voters queuing up in front of polling stations.

NO ELECTION GIFTS

The United States will not receive from Russia any deal on strategic offensive arms, "timed to coincide with their elections," Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov told Sputnik. He poured cold water on sensationally upbeat comments of his American counterpart Marshall Billingslea, who claimed that the highest political echelons of both countries have worked out in principle conditions to extend the New START treaty, the last remaining arms control regime set to expire next February.

According to Billingslea, "clear indications" of the breakthrough may emerge in the coming days - giving President Donald Trump a major diplomatic accomplishment ahead of November 3.

SYSTEM CRASH

The Virginia Department of Elections announced that the state registration system went down on the last day for voters to sign in before the November 3 presidential and general elections as a result of a cable cut. Virginia Lieutenant Governor Justin Fairfax and three US Representatives, Don Beyer, Gerry Connolly and Jennifer Wexton, called for a court order to extend a voter registration deadline to offset the disruption.

"The shutdown of Virginia's online voter registration threatens to prevent many Virginians from casting their ballots in the 2020 election," Democratic lawmakers warned in a statement. They said a 72-hour registration extension after the Department of Elections online portal is restored "would be appropriate."

CAMPAIGNING SPREE

Having recovered from coronavirus, President Donald Trump intends to do "multiple rallies a day," White House deputy press secretary Brian Morgenstern told Fox Business. He added that the incumbent is "having a blast", "feeling great" and is certainly not a risk of transmitting a disease.

Former President Barack Obama plans to hit the campaign trail soon in support of Democratic nominee Joe Biden, CNN quotes Obama's aide. He would not detail how soon and where Obama might travel.

FLUCTUATING MARGINS

Former Vice President Joe Biden leads President Donald Trump by three percentage points among registered voters in the battleground state of North Carolina, a Monmouth University poll said. Biden leads with a 49-46 percent margin among all registered voters, with the former vice president's lead increasing to four points in a high turnout scenario and shrinking to one if voter participation is low, according to the release.

White American Catholics continue to back Trump's bid for a second term in office, albeit with support that has slipped since a mid-summer survey, the PEW Research Center said in a poll. Trump is ahead of Biden by eight percentage points: 52 percent in this group say they would vote for Trump (or lean that way) if the election were held today, while 44 percent favor Biden. A previous PEW poll in late July and early August showed Trump 19 points ahead of Biden - 59 percent to 40 percent.

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World Bank Approves \$12Bln to Help Developing Countries Get COVID-19 Vaccines, Treatments

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - The World Bank approved \$12 billion to help developing countries purchase novel coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccines and treatments, the organization said in a statement.

"The World Bank's Board of Executive Directors today approved an envelope of \$12 billion for developing countries to finance the purchase and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, tests, and treatments for their citizens," the release said on Tuesday.

The World Bank seeks to support the vaccination of up to a billion people, the release said.

The \$12 billion is part of the World Bank Group's package to provide up to \$160 billion through June 2021 to help more than 100 countries.

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US Supreme Court Asked to Extend Wisconsin Ballot Deadline - Filing

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - Several organizations including the advocacy group Protect Democracy asked the US Supreme Court to extend the state of Wisconsin's mail-in ballot receipt deadline for the November election, court documents revealed.

"We JUST filed an emergency application to the #SupremeCourt, asking #SCOTUS to reinstate essential relief in #Wisconsin that would extend the ballot receipt deadline and allow citizens from anywhere in the state to fill impending poll worker shortages," the Protect Democracy group said in a tweet accompanying the court filing on Tuesday.

The lawsuit seeks to ensure there are in-person voting opportunities with social distancing and other measures to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

The lawsuit also seeks to ensure that Wisconsin's absentee ballot system is operating effectively during the pandemic.

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World Bank Approves \$12Bln to Help Developing Countries Get COVID-19 Vaccines, Treatments

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - The World Bank approved \$12 billion to help developing countries purchase novel coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccines and treatments, the organization said in a statement.

"The World Bank's Board of Executive Directors today approved an envelope of \$12 billion for developing countries to finance the purchase and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, tests, and treatments for their citizens," the release said on Tuesday.

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DHS Agents Used Unmarked Vans in Guatemala to Deter US-Bound Migrants - Senate Report

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - The Trump administration misused federal funds earlier this year by renting unmarked vans in Guatemala to transport US-bound migrants back to the Guatemala-Honduras border, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Menendez said in a watchdog report.

"Months before the Trump Administration used similar tactics against protesters in Portland, Oregon, we now know DHS [Homeland Security Department] secretary used State Department funding to rent unmarked vans in Guatemala to haul migrants back to the Guatemala-Honduras border," Menendez said in the report on Tuesday.

Menendez said this incident that occurred in January was a misuse of State Department funds and violated an agreement between the two departments.

The Senator said the Department of Homeland Security and Customs and Border Protection cannot act as un-deputized international migration police throughout Latin America, adding that Congress must step in to address the administration's immigration policy.

Earlier this month, US-bound caravans of Honduran migrants set off toward the newly-opened Guatemalan border that was shut by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. To bypass the requirement to provide negative COVID-19 tests to enter the neighboring country, the impoverished migrants take other routes and break through the borders illegally.

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US Judge Denies Bond to 3 Men Involved in Plot to Kidnap Michigan Governor - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - A US federal judge has denied bond to three men involved in a militia plot to kidnap Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer, the Detroit Free Press newspaper reported.

The report said on Tuesday that Judge Sally Berens denied bond to Kaleb Franks, Daniel Harries and Brandon Caserta.

On Thursday, US authorities announced that 13 men with links to militia groups have been arrested and charged for allegedly plotting to kidnap Whitmer after she imposed a state-wide lockdown to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

Six individuals face federal charges, including Franks, Harris, Caserta, Adam Fox, Barry Croft and Ty Garbin. Fox and Garbin are expected to have their bond hearings on Friday, the report said.

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US Attorney Asks Court to Release Russian National Osipova From Prison

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - A US federal court should release Russian national Bogdana Osipova, convicted in the United States for abducting her own child, in order to appear for resentencing, attorney Steven McAllister said in a letter.

"The defendant should be released from Bureau of Prison's custody and ordered to appear for resentencing before this Court," McAllister said on Tuesday.

Osipova's motion should be granted on the basis "she has served as much or more time than authorized for the count of conviction," he added.

In June 2019, a US federal court sentenced Osipova to seven years in prison for international parental kidnapping and demanding child support from her former husband, US national Brian Mobley. She was also ordered to pay compensation in the amount of \$18,000 to her husband and to do everything possible to return her children to the United States.

Both a US and Russian citizen, Osipova-Mobley left Wichita, Kansas, in 2014, allegedly escaping her abusive US husband, Air Force recruiter Brian Mobley, with one child from her first marriage and another from the second one. She gave birth to a third child after arriving in Russia. US authorities arrested Osipova in 2017 shortly after she returned to the United States in order to change child support arrangements.

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US Believes Agreement Exists on Extending New START With Russia In Principle - Billingslea

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - US negotiators believe there is an agreement with Russia in principle on the conditions to extend the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) and "clear indications" of progress may emerge in the coming days, US Special Envoy for Arms Control Marshall Billingslea said during a webinar hosted by The Heritage Foundation.

"We believe that there is an agreement in principle at the highest levels of our two governments," Billingslea said on Tuesday. "I am hopeful that that sort of gentleman's agreement... will ultimately need to percolate down through their system so my counterpart hopefully will be authorized to negotiate."

Billingslea added that the US is ready to strike the deal as soon as tomorrow.

"So now is the time for the Russians to step up and take the deal. We think the way has been cleared for that and I'm hopeful that in the coming days we'll see some clear indications of that," he said.

Russian diplomats have denied any breakthroughs in negotiations over the New START - the last remaining arms control regime between the two countries that is set to expire in February.

Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov told Sputnik last Saturday that his latest meeting with Billingslea on October 5 in Helsinki demonstrated that huge differences remain, including with regard to central elements of such an agreement.

Billingslea said that the United States is offering Russia an extension of the New START Treaty in exchange for a mutual freeze of its nuclear arsenals.

"We have put an extension on the table provided the Russians agree to an overall freeze on the total strategic stockpile, the total weapons stockpile," he explained.

The proposal, according to Billingslea, addresses the issue of Russia's tactical nuclear weapons, uncovered by the current New START version, and enhances verification mechanisms. Billingslea also said that both sides agree the next treaty should be a multilateral one, which in US interpretation means including China.

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US Navy Looks Back to Arleigh Burke Class as Model for Next Destroyers - Top Admiral

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - The US Navy is looking back to its veteran DDG-51 class of Arleigh Burke missile destroyers as the model for its next generation of main surface warships instead of the more recent Zumwalt-class, Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Admiral Michael Gilday told a Defense One State of the Navy podcast.

"The DDG-51 ... We put AEGIS on it, reliable systems. That's the idea," Gilday said on Thursday. "It right-sizes in everybody's mind [a design] smaller than a Zumwalt but packing some power. I need deeper magazines on a manned ship deeper than we have right now. I'm limited. I can't put much more on those hulls."

The Navy currently refers to discussions about the coming generation of surface warships as "DDG-Next," Gilday said. Although the proposed vessels would be smaller than the almost-16,000 ton Zumwalt's, they would be planned to carry more massive missile armaments, Gilday added.

The hypersonic missiles that the US Navy is now developing cannot be deployed on the vertical launch systems carried by the Arleigh Burke destroyers or current cruisers, but they can be launched using Virginia Payload Modules that were approved last year for use on future nuclear submarines, the report said.

The first Zumwalt \$4.2 billion stealth destroyers joined the US Navy in 2016 after years of delays and cost overruns. However, the ships have suffered numerous engine breakdowns and a modern weapons system only started to be deployed on them earlier this year. Only three were built and deployed instead of the 32 that had been planned.

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US Drug Maker Eli Lilly Pauses COVID-19 Treatment Trial for Safety Reasons - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - The US pharmaceutical company Eli Lilly's late-stage trial of its leading monoclonal antibody treatment for the novel coronavirus has been paused by health regulators over potential safety concerns, CNBC reported.

"Safety is of the utmost importance to Lilly. We are aware that, out of an abundance of caution, the ACTIV-3 independent data safety monitoring board has recommended a pause in enrollment," the report quoted Eli Lilly spokeswoman Molly McCully as saying. "Lilly is supportive of the decision by the independent (Data Safety Monitoring Board) to cautiously ensure the safety of the patients participating in this study."

The ACTIV-3 trial is designed to test a monoclonal antibody developed by Eli Lilly in combination with remdesivir, an antiviral medication with emergency use authorization for the virus, the report said.

The trial is one of several that are part of the National Institute of Health's "Activ" program, which is designed to accelerate the development of novel coronavirus vaccines and treatments. The trial is backed by Operation Warp Speed, the Trump administration's effort to manufacture and distribute novel coronavirus vaccines.

Eli Lilly is testing a combination of two lab-engineered immune system proteins called monoclonal antibodies to treat severely ill patients with the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19). The treatment is similar to the one made by Regeneron that was given to President Donald Trump earlier this month after he tested positive for the novel coronavirus.

The decision by Eli Lilly comes after Johnson & Johnson announced that it learned of an "unexplained illness" in one of the volunteers that caused it to pause its Phase 3 coronavirus vaccine trial on Sunday.

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US Supreme Court Grants Trump Admin. Request to End 2020 Census Count Early - Filing

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - The US Supreme Court said that it has granted the Trump administration's emergency request to end the 2020 Census count early.

"Today, the Court stays a preliminary injunction requiring the Census Bureau to follow the data collection plan the agency once described as necessary to avoid 'risking significant impacts on data quality,'" the court said on Tuesday.

The Supreme Court said the Census Bureau can end the gathering of data before the previously proposed deadline of October 31.

The Trump administration argues that because of disruptions caused by the novel coronavirus outbreak, an immediate halt is needed to meet the December 31 statutory deadline for reporting the Census results to the US president.

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US Deeply Disappointed After Russia, China Elected to UN Human Rights Council- State Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik) - The US government has expressed deep disappointment over the election of Russia, China and Cuba to the governing board of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) after President Donald Trump withdrew the United States from the body, Department of State spokesperson Morgan Ortagus in a statement.

"The United States is deeply disappointed by the election of China, Russia and Cuba to seats on the UN Human Rights Council," Ortagus said via Twitter on Tuesday. "The election of some of the world's worst human rights offenders to these positions makes a farce of the Council's mission."

Earlier on Tuesday, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement that Trump withdrew the United States from the UNHRC in 2018 due to bias against Israel and urged UN member states to take immediate action to reform the Human Rights Council.

"Unfortunately, those calls went unheeded, and today the UN General Assembly once again elected countries with abhorrent human rights records, including China, Russia, and Cuba. Venezuela was elected in 2019. These elections only further validate the US decision to withdraw," Pompeo said.

The US government has acted to punish alleged human rights abusers in Xinjiang, Myanmar, Iran, and elsewhere, Pompeo added.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, October 14 (Sputnik)

NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT

* Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev met with Armenian Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan in Moscow, the parties confirmed their commitment to resolving the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh exclusively by political and diplomatic methods, the security council said on Tuesday.

* The co-chairs of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group called on Armenian and Azeri leaders to take steps toward compliance with the ceasefire in Karabakh and to agree upon a verification mechanism.

* Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell held a phone conversation on Moscow's relations with the bloc, and the global crises, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

US-RUSSIA RELATIONS

* Russia will continue to back the partnership between Russians and Americans on local and municipal levels, Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said during a Sister Cities International Global Conversation on Tuesday.

* Moscow is hopeful that the anti-Russia rhetoric in the United States will not lead to additional damage to US-Russia relations, Antonov said.

* The United States is willing to extend the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) with Russia in exchange for freezing both countries' nuclear arsenals for a period of time, US Special Envoy for Arms Control Marshall Billingslea said.

SYRIA DEVELOPMENTS

* Militants are preparing a provocation with the use of toxic substances in the southern part of the Idlib de-escalation zone, deputy head of the Russian Defense Ministry's Center for Syrian Reconciliation said at a daily briefing on Tuesday.

* A new round of Astana-format talks on Syria with the participation of the Syrian opposition this year is a possibility to not be ruled out, albeit no formal requests were submitted to Kazakhstan to host the talks, the Kazakh Foreign Ministry told Sputnik.

STATE OF EMERGENCY IN KYRGYZSTAN

* The Kyrgyz parliament on Tuesday approved the state of emergency in Bishkek that was introduced by President Sooronbay Jeenbekov.

* The United States supports the efforts of Kyrgyz President Sooronbay Jeenbekov and civil society to return the country to the constitutional order amid protests over the results of the recent legislative election, the US Embassy in Bishkek said.

NEW IMF GLOBAL FORECAST

* The world's GDP in 2020 will decline less than previously expected and now is forecast to contract by 4.4 percent instead of 4.9 percent, while the GDP growth forecast for 2021 has been revised down by 0.2 p.p. to 5.2 percent, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said on Tuesday.

* The IMF revised up forecast for average oil prices this year by \$5.5 to \$41.6 per barrel, while 2021 forecast has been also improved,

* Russia's economy will experience a less severe contraction than previously expected, falling by 4.1 percent instead of the previous forecast of 6.6 percent, the IMF said.