

10/27/20 Wires

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Young US Adults Under Age 29 Increasingly Shun COVID-19 Measures - Report

WASHINGTON, October 27 (Sputnik) - The prevalence of recommended novel coronavirus mitigation measures such as face masks, social distancing and hand washing was lowest among adults aged 18-29 years and highest among those aged 60 and over, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said in a report on Tuesday.

The report was based on surveys by the Data Foundation during the during April-June quarter from adults in the United States, the report said.

"During April-June 2020, the prevalence of these behaviors was lowest among adults aged 18-29 years and highest among those aged 60 years. Whereas mask wearing increased over time, other reported mitigation behaviors decreased or remained unchanged," the report said. The report recommended that public health agencies prioritize clear, targeted messaging and behavior modification interventions, especially for young adults, to encourage compliance with three primary mitigation measures recommended by CDC, face masks, social distancing and hand washing.

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Facebook Axes 3 Networks for Violating Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior - Statement

WASHINGTON, October 27 (Sputnik) - Posts from three coordinated campaigns were removed from Facebook and its subsidiary, Instagram, for violating policies targeting inauthentic behavior - two targeting the US election and one targeting domestic audiences in Myanmar, Facebook said in a press release on Tuesday.

"In each case, the people behind this activity coordinated with one another and used fake accounts as a central part of their operations to mislead people about who they are and what they are doing, and that was the basis for our action," the release said.

Facebook said it characterized the practice as "perception hacking," which it defined as an attempt to weaponize uncertainty to sow distrust and division.

"We're closely monitoring for potential scenarios where malicious actors around the world may use fictitious claims, including about compromised election infrastructure or inaccurate election outcomes, to suppress voter turnout or erode trust in the poll results, particularly in [US] battleground states," the release said.

In the first targeted network, two Facebook and 22 Instagram accounts were terminated for violating a policy against foreign interference. The network was operated by individuals - some

wittingly and some unwittingly - from Mexico and Venezuela and primarily targeted the United States.

The people behind the network posted in Spanish and English about news and current events in the United States, including memes and other content about humor, race relations and racial injustice, feminism and gender relations, environmental issues and religion, the release said. Facebook also removed 12 Facebook accounts, six Pages and 11 Instagram accounts run by a government-affiliated network in Iran that focused primarily on the United States and Israel. The third action removed network that posted primarily in Burmese about current events in Rakhine state in Myanmar, including posts in support of the Islamist Arakan Army and criticism of Myanmar's armed forces.

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UNSC Urges Libya's Sides to Show Determination in Reaching Political Solution - Statement

UNITED NATIONS, October 27 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council in a statement on Tuesday called on the Libyan parties to show determination in reaching a political solution through the UN-led Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF).

On Friday, Libya's rival parties - the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) and the Libyan National Army (LNA) - signed a permanent ceasefire agreement in Geneva, and on October 26 convened the first virtual meeting of the LPDF.

"The members of the Security Council welcomed the permanent ceasefire agreement signed by the 5+5 Joint Military Commission on October 23 in Geneva following talks facilitated by the United Nations," the statement said. "The members of the Security Council called on the Libyan parties to show the same determination in reaching a political solution through the LPDF."

The Security Council members also called on the Libyan parties to implement the ceasefire in full and urged other countries to respect and support the truce.

Libya has been split between two rival administrations since its longtime leader Muammar Gaddafi was overthrown and murdered back in 2011. The western part of the country is controlled by the GNA headed by Fayeaz al-Sarraj, while the eastern one by LNA's Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar.

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Trump Considers Executive Order to Highlight Economic Benefits From Fracking - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 27 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump might soon issue an executive order that would mandate an economic analysis of fracking in the United States in order to show its benefits, the Wall Street Journal reported on Tuesday citing senior US administration officials.

The analysis would detail the positive impact fracking has on the United States' economy and trade, the report said, adding that the executive order would also seek to expand the use of fracking.

Moreover, the report said the analysis would highlight potential consequences if fracking is banned in the country.

The report said the White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment, but according to the US administration officials, no final decision has been made on whether to issue the order.

Trump has been a strong supporter of the oil industry in the United States. This election year he has criticized his Democratic rival Joe Biden of wanting to ban fracking.

In the last presidential debate, Biden said he would not ban fracking if elected, but later mentioned he would eventually like to make a transition from the oil industry to clean energy production.

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US Google Searches of 'Can I Change My Vote' Soar Tuesday Morning - Data

WASHINGTON, October 27 (Sputnik) - Google searches in the United States about whether citizens can change their vote after casting it peaked early Tuesday morning, a week before the November vote, data from the search engine revealed.

The trend is strongest in Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden's home state of Delaware, the data shows.

The trend is also popular in the battleground states of Pennsylvania, Florida, Ohio, North Carolina, Iowa, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Arizona.

Earlier on Tuesday, President Donald Trump noticed the trending topic and in a statement via Twitter said US voters must be wanting to change their votes in favor of him. He encouraged US voters to change their vote if it is allowed in their state.

US voters, under certain conditions, are allowed to change their vote in the states of Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, New York, Connecticut, New Hampshire.

As of Tuesday afternoon, nearly 69 million Americans have cast early votes for the 2020 presidential election, according to data from the US Elections Project.

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US Space Force May Provide Security for Private Sector Assets in Future - Commander

WASHINGTON, October 27 (Sputnik) - The US Space Force may be called on to provide security as governments and private companies develop a trillion dollar economy in Earth's orbit

and the moon, the unit's commanding General John Raymond said in a Defense Department webcast on Tuesday.

"I don't think it's tomorrow. But I would [not] rule it out," Raymond said. "Maybe not today or tomorrow or 10 years from now but I do believe that if you look towards a space economy that's going to be over a trillion dollars between here and the moon, I really believe there's going to be a role for enhanced security in that domain and the role of the space force is to provide that stability across the domain."

The US is attempting to commercialize low Earth orbit with plans to privatize the International Space Station. NASA officials have also indicated that US-led plans to colonize the Moon could lead to private companies mining the lunar landscape for rare minerals.

Creation of the US Space Force was prompted by Chinese and Russian development of weapons that could be used against satellites, according to US officials.

In addition to China and Russia, the US and India have also demonstrated anti-satellite capabilities in recent decades.

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US, Canada to Discuss Aluminum Trade in December – Presidential Proclamation

TORONTO, October 27 (Sputnik) - US and Canadian representatives will discuss aluminum trade between the two countries during consultations in December, President Donald Trump said in a presidential proclamation on Tuesday.

The proclamation officially terminated the 10 percent tariff on raw aluminum from Canada imposed on August 16.

"The United States and Canada expect to hold further consultations in December 2020 to discuss the state of aluminum trade between the two countries in light of trade patterns in the last 4 months of 2020 and expected market conditions in 2021," the proclamation said.

The tariff on aluminum imports was introduced after US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer determined that Canadian aluminum producers broke a commitment not to flood the United States with aluminum imports made following first round of tariffs in 2018.

Under the new rules, Canadian aluminum exports to the United States will be capped at approximately 77,000 tons until the end of 2020 – a decline of 50 percent – from the first seven months of the year, the proclamation said.

However, if actual shipments exceeded the expected volume for any month during the four-month period, then the tariff will be reimposed retroactively on earlier shipments made that month, according to the proclamation.

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DHS Proposed Journalist Visa Restrictions to Affect US Media Abroad - Advocacy Group

WASHINGTON, October 27 (Sputnik) - The restrictions on foreign journalists proposed by the US government would limit the ability of the foreign press to cover events and report news in the United States, but also seriously affect the operations of US media abroad, Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) President Matthew Hall said in a statement on Tuesday. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) said in a statement last month that it has proposed limiting the duration of visas issued to foreign journalists in the United States to 240 days with an opportunity to obtain a maximum extension of 240 days.

"The proposed changes by the DHS would restrict the ability of independent foreign news organizations from reporting news within the US and could lead to reprisals affecting US journalists in other countries. Both outcomes are unacceptable," Hall said in a comment sent to the US government portal [regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov) as part of a public debate on the issue.

SPJ denounced the proposed changes "in the strongest terms," saying the move is an effort to limit the number of foreign journalists in the United States and a way to intimidate reporters who are already working in the country.

"Given the backlog in US States Citizen and Immigration Services (USCIS) already for other routine extensions - some of which have taken up to six months - this new rule puts an undue burden on the already overworked USCIS employees and puts foreign journalists in a regular state of uncertainty when it comes to visa status renewals," SPJ said.

Other organizations such as the European Broadcasting Union and the North American Broadcasters Association as well as media outlets like AFP, Reuters and the Associated Press said in a joint letter that the US government proposal threatens to seriously jeopardize the exercise of press freedom.

"The proposed initiative represents a serious risk for freedom of speech, guaranteed by the First Amendment of the US Constitution and risks damaging the United States' reputation globally," the letter 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 to the country.

The DHS explained that the significant growth of the journalist - and other - visa programs has necessitated the proposed update to ensure the integrity of the US immigration system.

The Russian Embassy to the United States also criticized the proposed visa restrictions.

"The novelties proposed by the Department of Homeland Security in order to revise 'I' visa issuance procedures significantly complicate the professional duties of foreign journalists in the United States. In particular, the limitation of the period of stay for foreign media employees to 240 days (with the possibility of extension up to 480 days) will not allow them to consistently cover local events," the Russian Embassy said.

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Trump Says 'Disappointing' to See Armenia-Azerbaijan Truce Break Down

WASHINGTON, October 27 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump said on Tuesday that he found it upsetting to see the ceasefire between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh region has failed.

"It's disappointing to see that. That's what happens when you have countries, countries that have been going at it for a long time," Trump said. "They'll get back together."

Earlier on Tuesday, the Defense Ministry of the self-proclaimed Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh reported that the total number of its servicemen killed in hostilities with Azerbaijani forces had increased by 35 to more than 1,000.

Heavy fighting in the Nagorno-Karabakh region started on September 27. Armenia and Azerbaijan have accused each other of initiating the hostilities. The international community has strongly condemned the escalation and called on the parties to settle the differences peacefully. The US-brokered humanitarian ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh, the third since the outbreak of hostilities last month, entered into force on Monday at 8:00 a.m. local time.

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US Lawmakers Seek to Designate China's Abuses Against Uyghurs as Genocide - Senator

WASHINGTON, October 27 (Sputnik) - A bipartisan group of US Senators have introduced a resolution to designate human rights abuses perpetrated by China against Uyghurs as genocide, Senator Marco Rubio's office said in a press release on Tuesday.

"US Senator Marco Rubio (R-FL) joined Senators John Cornyn (R-TX), Jim Risch (R-ID) and Bob Menendez (D-NJ), Chairman and Ranking Member, respectively, of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, in introducing a bipartisan resolution to designate human rights abuses perpetrated by the People's Republic of China against Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities in Xinjiang as genocide," the release said.

The measure stipulates that China should be held accountable under the 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the release said.

Moreover, the resolution also calls for a coordinated international response to halt the alleged abuses, the release added.

On September 22, the US House of Representatives passed legislation to ban imports of products made with what it called "forced labor" in Xinjiang amid accusations that Uyghurs are being held in detention camps.

In June, President Donald Trump signed into law the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act that allows the US government to impose sanctions over alleged human rights violations of the Muslim Uyghur minority in China.

The Chinese government has denied the charges, saying that the camps were built to provide vocational and Chinese language training for Uyghurs and other minorities.

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Trump Says 'Disappointing' to See Armenia-Azerbaijan Truce Break Down

WASHINGTON, October 27 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump on Tuesday said it was upsetting to see that the ceasefire between Armenia and Azerbaijan has failed.

"Yeah it's disappointing to see that. That's what happens when you have countries, countries that have been going at it for a long time," Trump said, he said when asked whether he was disappointed that the ceasefire collapsed. "They'll get back together."

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UN Security Council Members Express 'Deep Concern' Over Latest Violence in Afghanistan

UNITED NATIONS, October 27 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council said in a statement on Tuesday that it has expressed "deep concern" over the latest round of violence in Afghanistan amid the deadly terrorist attack on the Kabul Education Center.

"The members of the Security Council condemned in the strongest terms the atrocious and cowardly terrorist attack that took place at the Kabul Education Center, Afghanistan, on 24 October 2020," the statement said. "The members of the Security Council expressed their deep concern about the continuing high level of violence and the security situation in Afghanistan, especially the number of civilian casualties, and stressed the importance of sustained efforts to reduce violence."

The UN Security Council members emphasized the importance of sustained efforts to reduce violence in the country and expressed condolences to the families of the victims and to the Afghan government, wishing a speedy recovery to those who were injured.

"They underlined the Secretary General's call for a global ceasefire in the light of the current COVID-19 pandemic as supported in resolution 2532 (2020)," the statement said.

The UN Security Council members also underscored the need to bring those responsible for terrorist act to justice, the statement added.

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State Dept. Confirms US Citizen Abducted in Niger

WASHINGTON, October 27 (Sputnik) – The US Department of State is aware that an American citizen was abducted in Niger, a spokesperson told Sputnik on Tuesday.

The RFI broadcaster reported earlier in the day that US missionary Philip Walton had been kidnapped by six armed men in Massalata in southern Niger.

"We are aware of a US citizen abducted in Niger," the spokesperson said. "When a US citizen is missing, we work closely with local authorities as they carry out their search efforts, and we share information with families however we can."

The spokesperson did not provide further details due to privacy considerations.

Niger is located in the region of Sahel and has been enmeshed in serious security crisis over Islamic insurgency and related jihadist activities.

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US Enlists Allies in Militarization of Space to Counter China, Russia - Space Force Chief

WASHINGTON, October 27 (Sputnik) - The US Space Command, which includes all branches in the armed forces, has opened training programs, war gaming and data sharing with space agencies in allied nations for the first time, commanding General John Raymond said in a virtual press conference on Tuesday.

"Our job is to make sure we don't get overtaken by Russia and China," Raymond said. "We didn't have partners in space historically on the military side because we really didn't need them."

Raymond cited weapons being developed by both nations to jam space-based communications, as well as weapons designed for "kinetic destruction" of satellites and other assets.

"We have opened up significantly more training opportunities for allied partners, we play war games together with our allied partners, we're developing modes of behavior with our allied partners, we share data broadly with our allied partners, our operations centers are connected together," Raymond said.

As examples, Raymond cited two US Space Force payloads placed on Norwegian satellites, which saved tremendous funds while allowing deployment more quickly than if the force waited for US-built satellites to become available.

Another Space Force payload, Raymond said, was launched on a Japanese satellite.

In addition, the United States is developing joint command and control systems with allies because operations centers are already linked, Raymond added.

The Space Force was recently established as the fifth branch of the US armed services to provide forces and assets for Space Command, with both units led by Raymond. The Space Command consists of officers from all services, much like other combatant commands such as Transportation Command or Strategic Command.

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WHO Delivers Medical Aid to Injured Civilians in Nagorno-Karabakh Clashes - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, October 27 (Sputnik) - The World Health Organization (WHO) has sent medical supplies to Armenia and Azerbaijan to treat people injured in the ongoing Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Tuesday.

"In response to the continued escalation of conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, the WHO today said it is delivering shipments of medical supplies consisting of trauma surgical kits to Armenia and Azerbaijan," Dujarric said.

The emergency supplies arrived in Yerevan on October 23 and those destined for Baku are currently in transit, Dujarric said.

The spokesperson explained the WHO shipments include medicine and provisions necessary to ensure post-traumatic care for hundreds of injured civilians in the region.

In addition, Dujarric further reiterated the United Nations call for an immediate end to hostilities in the conflict zone.

Heavy fighting in the Nagorno-Karabakh region started on September 27. Armenia and Azerbaijan have accused each other of initiating the hostilities. The international community has strongly condemned the escalation and called on the parties to settle the differences peacefully. On Thursday, the US-brokered humanitarian ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh, the third since the outbreak of hostilities last month, entered into force at 8:00 a.m. local time.

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US Urges UN to Forego Int'l Conference on Syrian Refugees Return Next Month - Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, October 27 (Sputnik) - The United States is calling on the United Nations and on countries to refuse to attend the international conference on the Syrian refugees' return in Damascus next month, Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Richard Mills said on Monday.

"Quite frankly, the US government does not believe that the Russian military is a credible host for convening a meaningful discussion on a return of refugees," Mills told the UN Security Council. "For these reasons the United States will not attend the conference. We strongly urge the United Nations and all others to forego attendance as well at this conference."

On Thursday, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said the Syrian authorities planned to hold the conference November 11-12 in Damascus with Russia as a co-organizer.

Mills said the United States strongly believes the conference is counterproductive and totally inappropriate for any military organization to manage refugee returns in Syria, Russia or elsewhere.

"The conference does not address in any way the root causes of the conflict that created millions of refugees in Syria. The conference aims to discuss refugee returns, which is completely premature," Mills said.

The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) spokeswoman Rula Amin told Sputnik that UNHCR believes the success of the international conference on the Syrian refugees' return will depend on its appropriate timing.

Amin said UNHCR remains engaged with the Syrian government and host governments across the region in an effort to find a long-lasting solution "including to gradually address issues that refugees tell us are of concern in the context of their decision-making on potential future return to Syria."

Zakharova, the Syrian government has sent invitations to a wide range of countries and international organizations, adding that Russia sees the event as a platform for substantive discussions for a wide range of issues related to refugees' return.

UNHCR has received an invitation to attend the conference, but has not responded yet.

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Liberals Hold Onto Toronto Seats in By-Elections - Elections Canada

TORONTO, October 27 (Sputnik) - Canada's Liberal Party held onto the two Toronto seats in the by-elections triggered by resignations amid the WE Charity scandal in August and September, Elections Canada said on Tuesday.

Marci Ien, a federal TV morning show host and former reporter, won the riding of Toronto Centre with 42 percent of the vote, beating newly elected leader of the Green Party, Annamie Paul, to replace former Minister of Finance Bill Morneau.

In York Centre, Ya'ara Saks received 45.7 percent support and beat Conservative Party candidate Julius Tiangson, who received 41.8 percent of the vote, Elections Canada said.

Analysts say that the tight margin of victory in Liberal strongholds that were won by double digits in last year's election, show the alleged transgressions by the government of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau are having an impact on voters.

Morneau, who faced mounting backlash following his admissions that he accepted expense paid trips and that both of his daughters have relationships with the WE Charity, resigned as minister and parliamentarian on August 17.

Former York Centre member of parliament Michael Levitt stepped down on September 1, after accepting an offer to become the new CEO of the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies.

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Cystic Fibrosis Treatment to Protect Lungs Offers Potential COVID-19 Therapy - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, October 27 (Sputnik) - Scientists at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USU) are attempting to modify an experimental treatment to mitigate lung

damage in Cystic Fibrosis to do the same for COVID-19 patients, the Defense Department said in a press release on Tuesday.

While researching treatments of Cystic Fibrosis, scientists identified certain miniature RNA molecules that have anti-inflammatory properties that reduce lung destruction characteristic of the disease, the release said.

"Our goal is to suppress inflammatory proteins, like Interleukins (IL-6, IL-8, IL-1-), which play a major role in the damage caused by SARS-CoV-2 [novel coronavirus]," USU Associate Professor Roopa Biswas said in the release.

Biswas explained that USU scientists, in collaboration with colleagues at Johns Hopkins University, are focusing on how short segments of non-coding RNAs can interfere with protein formation, which in turn could reduce inflammation and ultimately suppress the novel coronavirus. Some of these RNAs are designed to directly target the virus itself.

After recovering from severe cases of COVID-19, many victims suffer from long-term lung damage, the release noted.

In a separate project, USU researchers are working with scientists at the regenerative medicine biotech company NellOne Therapeutics to study a protein previously shown to restore injured bone, cartilage, skeletal and heart muscle tissues that were damaged by over-inflammation from viral infections, the release said.

Biswas' team at USU is now testing the NellOne treatment on coronavirus infected mice, the release added.

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Next Syrian Constitutional Cmte. Meeting May Take Place in November - UN Special Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, October 27 (Sputnik) - The next meeting of the Syrian Constitutional Committee could take place in November if the sides reach a consensus on the agenda, United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen said during a UN Security Council meeting on Tuesday.

"We have no agreement yet. And of course, nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. But if we are able to find an agreement within the next two days, it should be possible to meet in Geneva sometime during the month of November this year," Pedersen said.

Pedersen explained that in discussions held in recent days in Damascus, the Syrian government and opposition were able to reach a valuable narrowing of the differences with an option explored that could enable to find an agreement on the agenda for the next two meetings.

"I have been in communication with both Co-Chair [of the Syrian government] Kuzbari and Co-Chair [of the Syrian opposition] Al-Bahra today as finer points are clarified," Pedersen said. The UN-backed Syrian Constitutional Committee is a product of long-standing efforts by international mediators to reconcile the Syrian government and opposition. The 150-member body with equal representation of the government, opposition and civil society was launched on October 30, 2019 to work toward drafting a new constitution.

The most recent session of the Syrian Constitutional Committee took place late in August in Geneva.

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US Envoy Khalilzad to Meet Afghan Negotiating Teams in Doha - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 27 (Sputnik) - US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad will hold meetings with Afghan negotiating teams in Doha, Qatar, to press for cessation of hostilities in Afghanistan, the US State Department announced in a release on Monday.

"In Doha, Ambassador Khalilzad will meet with the negotiating teams to follow up on ongoing discussions to reduce violence and press both sides to immediately stem the recent increase in violence that Afghans across the country are being forced to bear," the release said. "Too many Afghans are dying. The sides urgently need an agreement on a reduction of violence leading to a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire."

The State Department pointed out that Khalilzad, together with international partners, will press the two negotiating teams to boost their efforts and agree on a political roadmap to end the war in Afghanistan.

"The sides must move past procedure and into substantive negotiations," the release said.

"American and international assistance remains available to all sides."

In a separate statement via Twitter, Khalilzad said he returned to the region disappointed because of the failed commitments to cease violence and warned the window to achieve a political settlement "will not stay open forever."

"Afghans are dying at a high rate and regional spoilers are using Afghans as cannon fodder for their illegitimate objectives. The Bloodshed must end," Khalilzad said. "Afghans need to pivot to development instead of destruction, stability instead of chaos, forgiveness instead of vengeance, compromise instead of inflexibility."

According to the State Department, Khalilzad left for Oslo on October 26 where he discussed international coordination of the Afghan peace process.

The United States and the Taliban signed a peace deal on February 29 that paved the way for the beginning of intra-Afghan talks upon the conclusion of prisoners exchange.

The peace negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban began on September 12 in Doha. However, an uptick in violence has been observed in Afghanistan since the talks began. Meanwhile, both sides have publicly expressed their desire to conclude a secure and long-lasting ceasefire to end Afghanistan's long-running conflict.

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Pompeo Calls Armenian, Azerbaijani Leaders to Press for Ceasefire – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 27 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo spoke with the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia to urge them to abide by ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh, State Department spokesperson Morgan Ortagus said in a statement on Tuesday. "Secretary of State Michael Pompeo spoke with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev separately," Ortagus said. "Secretary Pompeo pressed the leaders to abide by their commitments to cease hostilities and pursue a diplomatic solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs, and noted that there is no military solution to this conflict."

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US Envoy Khalilzad to Meet Afghan Negotiating Teams in Doha - State Department

WASHINGTON, October 27 (Sputnik) - US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad will hold meetings with Afghan negotiating teams in Doha to press for a cessation of hostilities, US State Department announced in a release on Monday. "In Doha, Ambassador Khalilzad will meet with the negotiating teams to follow up on ongoing discussions to reduce violence and press both sides to immediately stem the recent increase in violence that Afghans across the country are being forced to bear," the release said. "Too many Afghans are dying. The sides urgently need an agreement on a reduction of violence leading to a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire."

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US Eases COVID-19 Travel Advisory for Bolivia, Raises Alert for Mauritius - State Dept

WASHINGTON, October 27 (Sputnik) - The United States has eased its COVID-19 travel advisories for Bolivia and Panama, while raising its alert for Mauritius amid a new surge of infections, the US State Department said in a Travel Advisory Update on Tuesday.

"This week, the following Travel Advisories have been assessed and lowered to a Level 3, Reconsider Travel: Panama, Bolivia," the State Department said. "The following Travel Advisory has been assessed and raised to a Level 3 – Reconsider Travel: Mauritius."

The State Department also lowered its alert for Bermuda to Level 2, which calls for exercising increased caution.

It also maintained last week's warning for Somalia at Level 4 or "Do Not Travel," while also keeping its alerts for Albania and Comoros at Level 3.

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Pompeo, Modi Discuss Defense Cooperation, Need for Free Indo-Pacific - State Department

WASHINGTON, October 27 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during their meeting in New Delhi discussed defense cooperation and their shared goal of a free Indo-Pacific region, State Department Principal Deputy Spokesperson Cale Brown said in a readout on Monday.

"Secretary Pompeo and Prime Minister Modi discussed several issues of regional and global concern on which the United States and India collaborate, including COVID-19 response, security and defense cooperation, and shared interests in a free and open Indo-Pacific," Brown said.

During the meeting which was held together with Secretary of Defense Mark Esper, Pompeo and Modi also vowed to further enhance the US-India Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership, Brown added.

Pompeo and Esper are in New Delhi to participate in the annual US-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue.

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2020 US Election

WASHINGTON, October 27 (Sputnik) - The US Supreme Court refused to allow the crucial swing state of Wisconsin to extend the deadline for mail-in ballots just eight days ahead of the November 3 election, striking a blow to Democratic challenger Joe Biden whose supporters prefer the mail option by a huge percentage over those who support President Donald Trump.
US SUPREME COURT WEIGHS IN ON MAIL-IN BALLOTS

The US Supreme Court declined to allow a six-day deadline extension for receipt of mail-in ballots in the crucial swing state of Wisconsin, court documents revealed. The Supreme Court in a 5-3 ruling on Monday sided with Republicans in blocking the Democratic Party's request. In the state of Wisconsin, 1.75 million mailed ballots have been requested, about 61% of which have already been returned. In 2016, Trump won the state by less than 23,000 votes (less than 1 percent of the total vote). Overall, more than 63 million Americans have already voted, the US Elections Project revealed on Monday, about 67% of which were cast via mail versus 33% in-person.

Meanwhile, Democrats in the state of Pennsylvania, in a separate case, are urging the US Supreme Court to reject the Republican Party's second attempt to reverse a three-day deadline extension granted by the state for mail-in voting, a court filing revealed.

"It is unthinkable that such weighty issues would be fully briefed and conclusively decided in just a few days - while at the same time subjecting the voters of Pennsylvania to severely unfair treatment and imposing new and significant burdens on the election officials who are charged with conducting this election," Pennsylvania Democrats said in a court filing on Monday.

BIDEN MAINTAINS LEAD BUT MANY SWING STATES 'TOO CLOSE TO CALL'

Biden has maintained his lead in most battleground states yet slim margins and complicating factors such as mail-in ballots make the race practically impossible to predict. Biden, as of Monday afternoon, leads nationally by 7.9% on average in the 11 most recent surveys posted on poll aggregator Reaclearpolitics.com (RCP), dropping one point from where it stood a week ago.

The former vice president is ahead in ten of the top 12 battleground states, but all of his leads are within a typical margin of error, except in Michigan, where he has an 8.1% edge. Biden's lead is under three percent in 5 states: Florida (+1.5%), North Carolina (+1.2%), Georgia (+0.4%), Arizona (2.4%), and Iowa (0.8%). He is leading by 4-6 percent in the remaining four states: Pennsylvania (+4.9%), Wisconsin (+5.4%), Minnesota (+6.0%), and Nevada (5.2%), according to the RCP average.

Trump leads in Texas by 3.2%, down about a point from last week, and is ahead in Ohio by around a half-point.

TWITTER INVOLVEMENT IN ELECTION

The social media giant Twitter said in a statement on Monday that it has added a banner on its platform to debunk any misinformation related to the US presidential election.

"Election 2020 is unlike any other in US history," the statement said. "With so many more people voting by mail and potentially delayed results, starting today, we'll show you prompts in your Home timeline and Search to help you stay informed on these critical topics."

This year, Twitter has blocked or limited any alleged misinformation related to the upcoming presidential election, including issues surrounding mail-in voter fraud or statements that incite violence. President Donald Trump has had several of his tweets flagged and has criticized Twitter and other social media platforms for censoring articles and other information that are critical of his rival Joe Biden.

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RPT: REVIEW - Biden Leads in Final Stretch, Yet Key Swing States Remain in 'Too Close to Guess' Category

WASHINGTON, October 27 (Sputnik) - Democratic presidential challenger Joe Biden has maintained his lead in most battleground states, with just over a week until election day, yet slim margins and complicating factors such as mail-in ballots make the race practically impossible to predict.

Biden, as of Monday afternoon, leads nationally by 7.9% on average in the 11 most recent surveys posted on poll aggregator Reaclearpolitics.com (RCP), dropping one point from where it stood a week ago.

However, the national popular vote is irrelevant given the format of the electoral college, which requires candidates to win statewide contests. In 2016, Hillary Clinton won the national popular vote by 2.1% but lost the election because she failed to win enough electoral votes, 538 of which are apportioned across 50 states. A candidate must win 270 electoral votes to be declared the winner.

STATE OF THE RACE

The Biden camp is extremely nervous about history repeating itself. Jen O'Malley Dillon, Biden's campaign manager, in a recent memo to supporters said the race is "far closer" than some of the punditry would suggest.

"In the key battleground states where this election will be decided, we remain neck and neck with [President] Donald Trump," Dillon said as quoted by Politico last week.

Biden is ahead in ten of the top 12 battleground states, but all of his leads are within a typical margin of error, except in Michigan, where he has an 8.1% edge. Biden's lead is under three percent in 5 states: Florida (+1.5%), North Carolina (+1.2%), Georgia (+0.4%), Arizona (2.4%), and Iowa (0.8%).

The former vice president is leading by 4-6 percent in the remaining four states: Pennsylvania (+4.9%), Wisconsin (+5.4%), Minnesota (+6.0%), and Nevada (5.2%), according to the RCP average.

Trump leads in Texas by 2.6 percent and has maintained about a half-point lead in Ohio.

These RCP poll averages in the past few days have fluctuated more than stock prices and are bound to change before November 3 - the question remains to what extent. The margins have been volatile but within a 1-percent flat range except in Arizona and North Carolina where Biden's lead dropped by 1.5% in each and in Texas where Trump lost 1.2 points in the past week.

The significance of the margin of error (MOE) cannot be understated when assessing these leads because the typical MOE of 3% actually implies a swing of up to six points in either direction. For example, Biden is up 50-45% on average (rounding up slightly) in Pennsylvania, but when we apply the typical MOE of 3% this suggests the lead could be as much as 11 points (53-42%) or it could mean Trump is actually ahead by 1 point (48-47%). For the Biden camp, any lead less than 7% is probably too close for comfort.

Although we are only about eight days away from the election, it is worth considering that Clinton was ahead in the polls at this point in 2016 in seven of these states - and by a greater margin than where Biden is today in four of them. By the eve of the 2016 election, Clinton's lead

had entirely vanished in three states and fell by 3.9 points to 1.9% in Pennsylvania and by 2 points in 2 other states.

When comparing the RCP average on the night before the 2016 election with the actual results, it appears Clinton's poll numbers were inflated by 7.2% in Wisconsin, 3.1% in Michigan and 2.6% in Pennsylvania - 3 states she was favored to win but lost. The numbers were also inflated by 4.5% in Ohio and 6.5% in Iowa, two states she lost by more than expected and inflated by 5.7% in Minnesota - a blue state she won by only 1.5 points.

Technically speaking, however, in only one of these states, Wisconsin, could the polling be considered "wrong," because the rest were within a 3 percent MOE (which implies the possibility of a 6-point swing).

The Democrats are worried polling in swing states might be inflated due to the "hidden" Trump voter phenomenon, the efficacy of Republican voter suppression efforts, and the number of mail-in ballots that could be disqualified for a number of reasons, the report added.

Even if pollsters have better accounted for key demographics - such as non-degreed white males - it is hard to factor in the number of ballots that could be rejected on technical grounds - or for simply arriving too late. Experts have said the massive influx of mailed ballots could increase the rejection rate to up to 2 percent.

As of Sunday evening, nearly 60 million early votes have already been cast, including almost 40 million by mail, according to the US Elections Project which consolidates polling data from each state. In 2016, only about 33 million ballots were submitted via the postal service.

In Pennsylvania, 1.4 million votes have been cast by mail of 2.9 million ballots requested. In 2016, only about 330,000 Pennsylvanians cast ballots by mail of just over 6 million total votes. In 2016, Trump won Pennsylvania by just over 44,000 votes (0.7% margin).

It is impossible to tell what this means for Biden's lead. So much more than just a grain of salt comes with the below estimated scenarios.

PATHS TO 270

If the election were held today, and we assume the polls are 100% accurate, Biden would win by a 357-181 electoral college landslide by capturing all of the aforesaid swing states except Texas and Ohio. This seems unlikely, given the factors mentioned, but Biden still has more "paths to victory," than Trump, who would have to win eight of 12 swing states, among which he only leads in two.

If we assume the polls are inflated in Biden's favor, we could conduct a sensitivity analysis based on a range of reasonable MOEs to determine possible scenarios. The good news for Biden is that even if one applies the exact percentage the polls were off in 2016, Biden would win 325 electoral votes. Largely because the margin of error in Florida in 2016 equated to a 1-point swing (MOE = 0.5%) and Biden is up by 1.5 percent.

If we apply a full 1-percent MOE (2-point swing) across all 12 states - a legitimate possibility given the factors mentioned - Biden ends up with 290. If we apply a 2% MOE (4-point swing), Biden would lose Arizona yet still capture a threshold-crossing 279 electoral votes. If forced to guess, it seems highly likely that Biden would reach at least this figure.

Hence, for Trump to have a chance, it seems to boil down to Pennsylvania and/or Wisconsin. If Trump then takes Wisconsin, where he is down 4.6%, the electoral college would end up tied 269-269.

Determining who wins the presidency would be up to the House of Representatives, according to the 12th amendment, and the Senate would pick the vice president, which has not happened in almost 200 years. Although the Democrats have a 32-seat majority in the 435-member House, the constitution says each state would only get one vote and the Republicans, it turns out, happen to control more states. Hence, Trump would win. This scenario might be far-fetched, but one we cannot entirely rule out.

In conclusion, the odds seem in favor of Biden winning at least 279 to as many as 290 electoral votes. However, it bears reiterating that most of these swing states fall into the "too close to call" category. And a week is a long time. Given the Great Collapse of 2016, election day could not come soon enough for the Biden campaign.

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US Senate Confirms Barrett's Nomination to Be Supreme Court Justice

WASHINGTON, October 27 (Sputnik) - The US Senate has confirmed Judge Amy Coney Barrett's nomination to be a Supreme Court justice.

The Senate on Monday confirmed Barrett's nomination by a 52-48 vote, strictly along partisan lines, filling the vacancy left by the late Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Barrett is expected to be sworn-in later on Monday.

The move further cements the high-court's conservative majority which had a 5-4 edge even prior to the September death of Ginsburg, a liberal icon. President Donald Trump wanted to fast-track Barrett's confirmation because he feels the November 3 presidential election could end up being decided by the Supreme Court. The Democrats pushed back, arguing that the winner of the election should fill the vacancy.

The Supreme Court is expected to take up the latest lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of the Affordable Care Act. The court has previously rejected other constitutional challenges to the law, widely known as Obamacare.

The Supreme Court had a vacant spot after Ginsburg, 87, died in September of complications from metastatic pancreatic cancer at her home in Washington.

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US Supreme Court Refuses to Allow Wisconsin to Extend Mail Ballot Deadline - Filing

WASHINGTON, October 27 (Sputnik) - The US Supreme Court has declined to allow a six-day deadline extension for receipt of mail-in ballots in the state of Wisconsin, court documents revealed.

"In this case, as in several this Court has recently addressed, a District Court intervened in the thick of election season to enjoin enforcement of a State's laws," Chief Justice John Roberts

wrote on Monday in the opinion of the court. "Because I believe this intervention was improper, I agree with the decision of the Seventh Circuit to stay the injunction pending appeal."

The Supreme Court in a 5-3 ruling sided with Republicans in blocking the Democrats' bid to reinstate a mail-in ballot extension in Wisconsin.

In mid-October, 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 3 election.

The lawsuit sought 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).

More than 63 million Americans have already voted - 42.6 million ballots have been cast by mail versus 20.9 in-person votes, according to the US Elections Project which consolidates state data. More than 87.8 million mail-in ballots have been requested overall.

In the state of Wisconsin, 1.75 million mailed ballots have been requested, about 61% of which have already been returned. In 2016, Trump won the state by less than 23,000 votes (less than 1 percent of the total vote).

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The move further cements the high-court's conservative majority which had a 5-4 edge even prior to the September death of Ginsburg, a liberal icon. President Donald Trump wanted to fast-track Barrett's confirmation because he feels the November 3 presidential election could end up being decided by the Supreme Court. The Democrats pushed back, arguing that the winner of the election should fill the vacancy.

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US Government Confirms Afghan Forces Killed Senior Al Qaeda Official Al-Masri

WASHINGTON, October 27 (Sputnik) - The US National Security Council (NSC) confirmed in a statement that the Afghan security forces recently killed senior al Qaeda (banned in Russia) official Abu Muhsin al-Masri during an operation in Afghanistan.

"We commend the Afghan forces for their successful operation against al Qaeda senior leader Abu Muhsin al-Masri. His removal is welcome news in the fight against al Qaeda and denying it a safe haven in Afghanistan," the NSC said via Twitter on Monday.

Earlier on Monday, media reported a US official confirmed that al-Masri died and that US forces provided support to the Afghan-led operation in the Ghazni province.

Al-Masri is believed to have been the al Qaeda terror group's second-in-command.

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Pennsylvania Dems Ask US Supreme Court Not to Intervene in Mail-In Ballot Case - Filing

WASHINGTON, October 27 (Sputnik) - Democrats in the state of Pennsylvania are urging the US Supreme Court to reject the Republican Party's second attempt to reverse a three-day deadline extension granted by the state for mail-in voting, a court filing revealed.

"It is unthinkable that such weighty issues would be fully briefed and conclusively decided in just a few days—while at the same time subjecting the voters of Pennsylvania to severely unfair treatment and imposing new and significant burdens on the election officials who are charged with conducting this election," Pennsylvania Democrats said in a court filing on Monday.

On Saturday, Pennsylvania Republicans asked the Supreme Court to fast-track a review of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court's decision to extend the deadline for mail-in ballots.

On October 19, the US Supreme Court rejected the Pennsylvania Republican Party's bid to limit mail-in voting in the state.

On September 16, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court decided to extend the mail-in ballot deadline in the state to November 6 - three days after Election Day.

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US Administration Preparing for Possible Riots Sparked by Election Day Results - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 27 (Sputnik) - The US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is getting ready to respond to any civil unrest that may be triggered over a contentious outcome in the 2020 presidential election, CNN reported citing agency officials.

The report said on Monday that DHS' Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) have been preparing for the possible deployment to US cities to help local law enforcement quell large-scale protests following the November 3 vote.

US immigration enforcement agencies were used this summer to counter violent racially-charged protests in Portland, Seattle, and Washington, DC.

City officials have argued that the Trump administration's decision to use federal agents to counter violent protests has fueled more civil unrest in their cities.

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Canada Foreign Minister Says Turkey's Denunciation of France 'Totally Unacceptable'

TORONTO, October 27 (Sputnik) - Canadian Foreign Minister Francois-Philippe Champagne said Turkey's condemnation of France and its president, Emmanuel Macron, are intolerable and Ottawa stands with its G7 ally.

Macron has called for building and institutionalizing what he has described as "enlightened Islam" in France in the wake of a brutal murder of a history teacher who showed caricatures of the Islamic prophet Muhammad to his students. Macron announced new legislation to prioritize republican values and establish oversight of funding for French mosques. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has responded to the initiative by slamming Macron and other top French officials.

"We stand in solidarity with our French friends. Turkey's recent comments about France are totally unacceptable. We must return to respectful diplomatic exchanges. We will always stand together to defend freedom of expression with respect," Champagne said via Twitter on Monday.

Champagne's statement echoes the statements of European leaders such as German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas and Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte.

On October 16, an 18-year-old French teenager of Chechen descent beheaded a schoolteacher who showed cartoons depicting Islamic Prophet Muhammad during a lesson on freedom of expression. The French government declared the incident to be a terrorist attack.

Erdogan has said on multiple occasions that Macron should seek treatment for mental issues, prompting France to recall its ambassador from Turkey for consultations.

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US Sets Up Hypersonic Weapons Center at Texas A&M University - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, October 27 (Sputnik) - The US government has chosen Texas A&M University to set up a consortium of universities conducting research into the development of hypersonic weapons systems, the Department of Defense announced in a press release.

"The Department of Defense announced it will be awarding Texas A&M University's Engineering Experiment Station \$20 million per year over a 5-year period to establish and manage a University Consortium for Applied Hypersonics (UCAH)," the release said on Monday.

Acting Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering Michael Kratsios said the new center would seek to speed up the usually much slower transition process from original research and development to the eventual deployment of significant numbers of operational weapons systems with the US armed forces.

"This first-of-its kind consortium will be critical to advancing hypersonics research and innovation, a key priority of the Department of Defense. Importantly, through collaborative industry and academic partnerships, it will also accelerate technology transfer and strengthen workforce development to meet the nation's future warfighting needs," he said.

The center will be directed by experts from Texas A&M, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the University of Minnesota, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the University of Arizona, the University of Tennessee Space Institute, Morgan State University, the California Institute of Technology, Purdue, the University of California-Los Angeles, and the Georgia Institute of Technology, the release said.

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Pentagon Delays F-35 Simulation Tests to 2021 - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 27 (Sputnik) - The Pentagon has postponed simulation testing of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter from next month to an unspecified time next year, Defense News reported.

Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment Ellen Lord ordered the F-35's Joint Simulation Environment (JSE) testing required for its official full-rate production to an unspecified date in 2021, the report said on Monday, citing spokeswoman Jessica Maxwell. Officially, the F-35, the most expensive military aircraft in history must go through and be approved in its JSE before it can start full-rate production.

However, in practice it is already in full-rate production as 134 of the planes were delivered to the US armed services and international customers in 2019, the report added.

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Trump Informs Congress US Rescinds Sudan's Designation as Sponsor of Terrorism - Letter

WASHINGTON, October 27 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump has sent Congress a letter formally informing the lawmakers that his administration has rescinded Sudan's designation as a state sponsor of terrorism.

"I hereby certify, with respect to the rescission of the determination of August 12, 1993, regarding Sudan that: the Government of Sudan has not provided any support for acts of international terrorism during the preceding," Trump said in the letter on Monday.

Trump also said that Sudan has provided assurances it will not support acts of international terrorism in the future.

Last week, Trump announced that the United States was going to remove Sudan off its State Sponsors of Terrorism list after Khartoum paid \$335 million to US terrorism victims and their families.

In late September, Khartoum and Washington reportedly reached a deal that Sudan would sign a peace treaty with Israel in exchange for being excluded from the US State Sponsors of Terrorism list.

On Friday, Trump said that Israel and Sudan agreed to normalize relations in the latest step toward building peace in the Middle East.

Sudan will be the third Arab country, after the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, to join Trump's Abraham accords - a system of fresh peace deals with Israel - and the fifth to have diplomatic relations with the Jewish state, together with Egypt and Jordan.

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US Working on Air-Launched Hypersonic Scramjet for Navy - Senior Pentagon Official

WASHINGTON, October 27 (Sputnik) - The Department of Defense is already working on a an air-launched hypersonic scramjet cruise missile to be fired from US Navy F/A-18 aircraft, Joint Hypersonics Transition Office Director Gillian Bussey told a telephone press conference.

"We are working on an option for the Navy that is compatible for an F-18 operating off an aircraft carrier," Bussey said on Monday. "We have a contract with Boeing to mature a dual mode scramjet design. AFRL [Air Force Research Laboratory] is a program manager on this effort. Boeing is cooperating with Aerojet Rocketdyne," Bussey said on Monday.

Acting Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering Mark Lewis said the Defense Department had set itself a target date of 2028 to deliver operational hypersonic weapons to the US armed forces.

"We want to go as quickly as we can. [The] 2028 delivery of new capabilities is a line in the sand. ... We do believe we are in a bit of a race right now," Lewis said.

Bussey said the Defense Department's hypersonics development program was giving priority to producing the necessary materials and manufacturing capabilities as well as developing the air-breathing propulsion units necessary for the new hypersonic systems.

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Canada Parliament Votes in Favor of Probing Trudeau Government's COVID-19 Response

TORONTO, October 27 (Sputnik) - Canada's House of Commons voted in favor of a Conservative Party motion to launch a probe into Prime Minister Justin Trudeau government's handling of the novel coronavirus pandemic.

The Conservative Party motion brought forward by Shadow Minister of Health Michelle Rempel Garner passed in a 176-152 vote on Monday evening. The vote saw the opposition Bloc Quebecois, New Democrat and Green Parties side with the Conservative Party motion.

The vote directs the Standing Committee on Health to request and obtain documents from the federal government concerning its response to the outbreak.

The opposition has blasted the Trudeau government for a number of shortcomings, including the disbandment of the country's early pandemic warning system, the shortage of personal protective equipment in federal stockpiles and the lack of public access to rapid testing. There are also questions about a near \$180-million government contract to produce ventilators involving a company owned by a former Liberal member of parliament.

The government has responded saying that a probe would compromise its ability to protect Canadians amid the pandemic. During a press conference on Monday, Minister of Public Services and Procurement Anita Anand said that the disclosures proposed by the opposition would "threaten" the procurement of vaccines, protective equipment and rapid test kits.

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US Approves \$2.4Bln Sale of 100 Harpoon Coastal Defense Systems to Taiwan - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, October 27 (Sputnik) - The United States has approved a nearly \$2.4 billion military sale for 100 Harpoon Coastal Defense Systems to Taiwan, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency said in a press release.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the United States (TECRO) of up to one hundred (100) Harpoon Coastal Defense Systems (HCDS) and related equipment for an estimated cost of \$2.37 billion," the release said on Monday.

On Wednesday, the United States approved \$1.8 billion in potential arm sales to Taiwan, including 11 High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, 135 AGM-84H Standoff Land Attack Missile Expanded Response (SLAM-ER) Missiles and six MS-110 Recce Pods.

China said earlier on Monday that it would impose sanctions on Lockheed Martin, Boeing and Raytheon in response to the United States' arms deals with Taiwan.

Tensions across the Taiwan Strait escalated in recent months after the Trump administration stepped up its engagement with the authorities in Taiwan.

Beijing has called Taiwan "an inseparable part of its territory" and has asked other countries to adhere to the "One China" policy.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORY OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, October 27 (Sputnik)

US-RUSSIA RELATIONS

- * The US State Department's cybersecurity report contains anti-Russian statements bordering on rudeness and the thesis about lowering the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons is of particular concern, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Monday.
- * Moscow is urging Washington to cease its efforts to bargain for benefits in the last days of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START), Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said.
- * Russia is prepared to discuss with the United States any mutually acceptable solutions regarding the Open Skies Treaty (OST), Antonov said.
- * Russia will respond if the United States deploys intermediate and shorter-range ground-based missiles in Europe or Asia-Pacific region, Antonov said.

FRANCE-TURKEY POLITICAL DISPUTE

- * Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan called on Turkish citizens on Monday to boycott French goods amid bilateral tensions over French President Emmanuel Macron's statements against radical Islam in light of the brutal murder of a French history teacher.
- * Erdogan qualified Macron's "anti-Islamic" rhetoric as a threat to Turkey's national security.
- * France has no intention to restrict imports of Turkish goods following Erdogan's calls for a boycott of its products, the minister for foreign trade and economic attractiveness Franck Riester said.

NAGORNO-KARABAKH

- * Armenian Defense Ministry spokesman Artsrun Hovhannisyan confirmed on Monday that the Azerbaijani military had occupied the city of Qubadli in Karabakh.
- * UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is deeply concerned by the reports of violations of the latest ceasefire between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said.
- * Azerbaijan Defense Ministry said the Armenian armed forces had shelled the town of Terter, which is located close to the Karabakh region, with Smerch heavy multiple rocket launcher.

* Armenian Security Council Secretary Armen Grigoryan discussed the escalation of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh by phone with his Russian counterpart Nikolai Partrushev, the Armenian Security Council said.

CORONAVIRUS VACCINE

* Russian coronavirus vaccine Sputnik V causes no side effects in 85 percent of the vaccinated, the head of the Gamaleya research center that developed the vaccine said.