

08/09/21 Monday

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DC Federal Judge Unsure She's 'Not Tied' by Ruling to Keep Eviction Ban in Place Amid New Litigation

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Roughly 11 million Americans who fell behind on their rent during the pandemic are at risk of eviction if a federal moratorium is thrown out. Issued after millions of jobs disappeared or were cut due to lockdowns, the Biden administration chose to let it expire amid an economic recovery earlier this year, although millions remain unemployed.

In late June, the US Supreme Court ruled the pandemic-related ban on evictions had to go at the end of July, but gave no official explanation as to why apart from that the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had exceeded its statutory authority under the Public Health Service Act. On Monday, Judge Dabney Friedrich of the US District Court for the District of Columbia heard the group of Alabama and Georgia realtors behind the original challenge to the moratorium present their case for striking down the latest one, [issued on August 3](#).

The realtors asked Friedrich, a Trump appointee who was first to strike down the ban in May, to immediately vacate the most recent order.

"Tell me, why am I not tied in light of the DC Circuit's opinion?" she replied, referring to an [early June ruling](#) on an appeal of her decision which said that the ban should remain in place during litigation. The plaintiffs argued it was a different situation.

The US Department of Justice also argued that the US was in a different situation in early August than it was in June, when COVID-19 cases bottomed out and the economy seemed to be on a course for returning to some semblance of normality.

"We're here today because of the Delta variant, because cases have increased seven-fold since the end of June," Deputy Assistant Attorney General Brian Netter told the judge. "We're in a new chapter of this pandemic."

The [seven-day average](#) of daily new COVID-19 cases in the US on Sunday was over 97,000, the highest it's been since February, when the US was exiting its worst phase of the pandemic thus far. According to the CDC, essentially all the new cases are of the Delta variant, an ultra-transmissible variant that originally emerged in India and has proven to have a limited resistance to existing vaccines.

Moreover, the nation's vaccination campaign has steadily slowed down since its peak in April, when more than 4 million Americans were getting a shot every day. Vaccinations [have picked up](#) slightly since the beginning of August, with 714,000 people getting their shot on August 6 and 50.2% of the population vaccinated overall, but in areas of the South and Great Plains, vaccination rates are often half that of states in the northeast and west coast, where in states like Vermont as many as 87% of people have received at least one vaccine dose.

When the CDC first introduced the ban in September 2020, it was to plug a hole created by the expiration of a federal law dating to the spring that had barred landlords and courts from evicting tenants on the grounds that sheltering at home was the best defense American society had against the spread of the virus at that time. When Alabama and Georgia Realtors sued, Friedrich found the CDC had overstepped its authority, and when the Biden administration implemented a new “targeted” moratorium last week, it in turn argued that the order was different enough from the old one to not be subjected to its limitations.

Friedrich said Monday that “it’s really hard ... to conclude that there’s not a degree of gamesmanship going on.”

“The court should not tolerate the government getting away with it,” Shumate replied, [quoting Biden saying](#) that “the bulk of the constitutional scholars say it’s not likely to pass constitutional muster.” The administration’s aim was thus to buy itself time with litigation in order to distribute more of the \$46 billion in emergency rental assistance already set aside for paying off renters’ debts, he argued.

Friedrich wasn’t so sure, and promised to deliver a ruling in the near future.

When the ban was reinstated on August 3, it came after several [days of confusion](#) and passing of blame through the federal government: the Biden administration said that, according to an opinion by Associate Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh that accompanied the June 29 ruling, a renewal of the eviction ban had to come via legislation. However, the House went into summer recess and lawmakers left town on July 29 without having attempted such action, and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) said it was the CDC’s - and thus Biden’s - responsibility. Meanwhile, Rep. [Cori Bush \(D-MO\) called](#) on concerned citizens on the evening of the 29th to occupy the Capitol steps in protest, demanding the eviction ban be reinstated. After four days of round-the-clock demonstration that attracted hundreds of people and became a national spectacle, Biden relented and issued the new order.

A separate ban [forestalling foreclosures](#) of homes behind on mortgage payments during the pandemic also expired on July 31, but aside from a series of mitigating measures implemented by the Consumer Finance Protection Bureau to soften the blow, no effort has been made to reintroduce it.

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‘We Shall See’: AOC Won’t Dismiss 2022 Run for Chuck Schumer’s US Senate Seat by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

In nationwide polls, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez far outranks Sen. Chuck Schumer in terms of popularity and approval, despite the latter’s 40 years in Congress. While AOC ran as a political outsider with novel ideas in 2018, she could have a harder time making the case now, as one of the Democratic Party’s best-known and best-liked figures.

When asked if she might seek to oust the leader of her party in the US Senate, Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) said it was still too early for her to say. However, she noted that she and Schumer (D-NY) “have been working very closely” as of late.

"I know it drives everybody nuts, but the way that I really feel about this and the way that I really approach my politics and my political career is that I do not look at things and I do not set my course positionally," [Ocasio-Cortez told CNN's](#) Dana Bash in an interview filmed in late June, but set to air on Monday.

"And I know there's a lot of people who do not believe that. But I really - I can't operate the way that I operate and do the things that I do in politics while trying to be aspiring to other things or calculating to other things," the two-term House lawmaker from the Bronx added.

The 70-year-old Schumer, who has represented New York in the US Senate since 1999 and led his party in the upper chamber since Harry Reid retired in 2017, is up for his fourth re-election in 2022.

"For what it's worth, Senator Schumer and I have been working very closely on a lot of legislation and that, to me, is important," Ocasio-Cortez said. "And so, we shall see."

She also told CNN that one reason she wasn't rejecting the idea of pursuing a Senate seat or even the White House is her awareness that she is a role model for so many girls.

"I don't want little girls watching or anything like that to lower their sights or anything in that direction. But for me, I feel that if that was in the scope of my ambition, it would chip away at my courage today," Ocasio-Cortez said.

"I think what happens a lot in politics is that people are so motivated to run for certain higher office that they compromise in fighting for people today. And the idea is that if you can be as clean of a slate or as blank of a slate, that it makes it easier for you to run for higher office later on."

AOC is no stranger to upset victories against party veterans, either.

The 31-year-old democratic socialist lawmaker took office in 2018 at the age of 29, becoming the youngest-ever Congresswoman. Her victory was the result of an insurgent campaign against Rep. Joe Crowley, a centrist Democrat who had held the seat for 20 years, who [she handily defeated](#) in the Democratic Primary and again in the general election after he appeared on the ballot under another party.

At a glance, it might seem like Schumer's 70.61% of the vote in his last re-election in 2016 is insurmountable for AOC, but in Crowley's most recent re-election victory before his 2018 loss, he swept the floor with an even higher 74.8% of the vote in his district.

In a [YouGov poll-based ranking](#) of Americans' favorite Democratic politicians in 2021 both sitting and retired, AOC comes in sixth, with 42% of Americans saying they have a positive opinion of her. By contrast, just 34% have a positive opinion of Schumer, who ranks in at 26th - tied with Walter Mondale, who was Jimmy Carter's vice president and loser of the 1984 presidential election to incumbent President Ronald Reagan.

After being sworn in in early 2019, AOC soon coined the nickname "the Squad" for herself and a number of other young, freshman Democratic lawmakers, all of whom were outspoken women of color [willing to challenge](#) their party's leaders, and many of whom had won upset victories against long-sitting Democratic colleagues.

That tradition was most recently on display on the last weekend of July, when Rep. Cori Bush (D-MO), a member of the Squad, led a protest on the Capitol Building steps after the House went into summer recess without passing an extension of [the eviction ban](#) put in place by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which expired on July 31. By August 3, the demonstration had compelled the Biden administration to issue a revised version of the ban,

despite a Supreme Court ruling in June finding that the public health agency didn't have the power to do so.

However, the group has also attracted the ire of conservatives, with conspiracy theories about AOC and the other Squad members aplenty, and former US President Donald [Trump invoking them](#) during his failed re-election campaign as the spectre of socialist tyranny sure to follow a Joe Biden victory. However, Trump's promised Red Terror has yet to materialize, as the Squad members have all shown [dedication to remaining](#) within the scope of Democratic Party politics.

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Photos: Rwandan, SADC Troops Break Through Islamist Rebel Lines in Mozambique, Free Strategic Port

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

For years, Mozambican President Felipe Nyusi maintained he would not allow foreign troops on Mozambican soil after the country fought an independence war and then a civil war to win and keep its independence. However, things changed in April when rebels stormed the port of Palma, killing 55 people and sending thousands fleeing for safety.

The international force sent to help the Mozambican government crush an Islamist rebellion in its northern Cabo Delgado province scored a major early victory in their campaign over the weekend when they seized the port of Mocimboa da Praia, major stronghold for the Islamist militant group Ansar as-Sunna, and a city of international concern due to its proximity to some of Africa's largest gas fields.

The Rwandan Defense Force announced on Sunday its soldiers sent to fight in Mozambique had helped recapture the key port city from Ansar as-Sunna, known locally as Al-Shabab but having no relationship to the Somali group of the same name. Their triumph was made possible by the capture of the nearby town of Awasse days earlier by forces from South Africa and Botswana sent to Cabo Delgado as part of a large Southern African Development Community (SADC) deployment.

RDF spokesperson Col. Ronald [Rwivanga told AFP](#) that Mocimboa da Praia "was the last stronghold of the insurgents, marking the end of the first phase of counter-insurgency operations which is dislodging insurgents from the stronghold."

"It was a critical port for their survival. Losing it is going to be a significant blow to their ability to maintain the insurgency," Rwivanga [also told Reuters](#).

"We will continue with security operations to completely pacify those areas and allow Mozambican and Rwandan forces to conduct stabilisation operations as (the displaced) return home and business continues," he added.

Roughly 1,000 Rwandan forces arrived in Mozambique in early July, just days before the separate 3,500-soldier SADC force began its deployment. [Both groups have](#) been invited in by Nyusi, who admitted earlier this year to being unable to tame the growing rebellion in the north after the rebels stormed Palma in April and threatened several massive gas projects, [convincing Total](#) to declare force majeure on its investment and subsequently abandon the area.

The gas projects, some of the largest in Africa, are located just miles from the border with Tanzania, but more than 1,100 miles from the capital of Maputo, in the extreme south. As Sputnik has reported, the dramatic expansion of those projects, as well as nearby ruby mining, has pressed hard on the local Muslim community in the country's poorest region, steadily fanning the insurgency since 2017.

Accordingly, [experts have warned](#) that a purely military solution is likely to evade Nyusi's government, which will have to address the social causes of the rebellion if there is to be peace. However, that might not totally be possible, due to the limitations placed on Mozambique's finances as part of the terms of loans taken out from the International Monetary Fund. The pro-free-market restrictions give borrowers little extra cash with which to make the kinds of social investments necessary to overcome Cabo Delgado's grinding poverty.

Other groups sending troops include [the European Union](#), which has sent instructors to train Mozambican forces, and Portugal, the former colonial power from which Mozambique won independence in 1975 following a nine-year liberation war. The FRELIMO liberation front that led the movement remains in power today.

The insurgency, which has formally declared itself a part of Daesh although without real proof of any endorsement or connection to the group in Syria and Iraq, has killed roughly 3,000 people and displaced more than 800,000, as residents flee the conflict for safety.

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DPRK's Kim Yo-jong Condemns US-South Korean Drills, Pledges to Develop Better First Strike Weapons

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Peace talks in 2018 yielded an end-of-war declaration between the Koreas, but despite several summits between then-US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, no further progress toward ending hostilities was made, and the posturing and threats soon returned.

As the US and South Korea prepare for annual large-scale military exercises North Korea has long claimed are rehearsals of an invasion, Kim Yo-jong condemned the drills, calling them ultimately self-destructive.

"The US and South Korean militaries eventually began combined military exercises that further facilitates instability," Kim said in [a Tuesday statement](#) carried by Korean Central News Agency (KCNA). "We express strong regret over South Korean authorities' act of betrayal."

"We will strengthen our national defense and strong preemptive capabilities to swiftly respond to any military act," added Kim, who is vice-director of the Information and Publicity Department of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) Central Committee and sister to Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) leader Kim Jong Un.

The US and South Korea are set to begin preparing on Tuesday for their annual summertime exercises next week. According to Seoul-based [Yonhap News Agency](#), the four-day exercise

aims to test the military's response to "unexpected situation[s] before a war breaks out," which will be followed by a ten-day computer-simulated Combined Command Post Training. For the past two years, the drills have been considerably scaled back due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but during the acme of rapprochement in 2018, Pyongyang nearly convinced Seoul to [drop the exercises](#) before Washington stepped in and reasserted its agenda, which is counter to reunification and peace on the peninsula.

The US maintains a 28,000-strong deployment of troops in South Korea, positioned there since the 1950-53 Korean War when the US led an international invasion force on a mission to halt reunification of the country under communist rule. Korea had split in 1945 at the end of World War II, which ended before the Soviet Union had totally liberated Korea from Japanese colonial rule, and a civil war broke out in 1949 in which the United Nations intervened in one of the early battlefields of the Cold War.

That war ended with just a ceasefire, not a permanent peace treaty, and with the dividing line fought back to nearly the same place it was before the war began, but with more than 2 million Koreans killed, most of them by US strategic bombing that leveled cities like Pyongyang, Nam'po, and Kanggye.

Relations steadily cooled after the heady peacemaking days of 2018, and the following year, the DPRK began testing a new generation of [rocket artillery weapons](#) they claimed could evade the anti-ballistic missile defenses stationed in the South by the United States.

US President Joe Biden, who took office in January, has plotted a different path in US relations with the DPRK than his predecessor, Donald Trump, who held several summits with Kim Jong Un before it became apparent Kim wouldn't unilaterally give up the socialist country's nuclear weapons program, which he says is a final guarantee of the country's security and independence. Biden has insisted Kim agree to denuclearization before any talks will begin - expectations Kim Yo Jong [dismissed as "wrong-headed"](#) earlier this year.

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Texas Judge Signs Order to Block Detention of Fugitive Democrats Who Fled Over Voting Reform Bill
by [Evan Craighead](#)

Texas Governor Greg Abbott (R) and House Speaker Dade Phelan (R) have ordered the arrest of dozens of Democratic state lawmakers who took to Washington, DC, last month in an effort to block the Texas House of Representatives from reaching quorum to vote on a variety of items, including a GOP's voting reform bill that has passed in the Texas Senate.

On Sunday, Texas State District Judge Brad Urrutia (D) granted a temporary restraining order to fugitive House Democrats, effectively blocking both Abbott and Phelan from "detaining, confining or otherwise restricting" the lawmakers' movement within the state for 14 days. The order, which prevents the issuance of warrants for their confinement during the period, may be extended by the judge.

Additionally, the judge has called on Abbott and Phelan to submit justification for why a temporary injunction should not be issued against them [for their respective moves](#). The House Democrats in question are scheduled to appear in court on August 20 for a hearing on their application for temporary injunction.

"The purpose of the hearing will be to determine whether the temporary restraining order should be made a temporary injunction pending a full trial on the merits," [the court filing details](#). Urrutia's decision comes in response to a [petition in which 19 House Democrats argued](#) they would face "imminent and irreparable injury" from Abbott and Phelan's "interpretation and application of the Texas Constitution and the Rules of the House of Representatives of the State of Texas."

The emergency lawsuit from the Democratic lawmakers claimed their detention upon returning to the state would violate the "fundamental principle of our constitutional system of government" that asserts the State cannot use its power to arrest and incarcerate as a political weapon.

"[T]he Speaker thinks he can wave his hand and have his political opponents rounded up and arrested. We're watching a major political party backslide in real time from fair representation, the rule of law, and democracy itself," Texas Rep. Jasmine Crockett (D), one of the 19 plaintiffs, [told the Texas Tribune](#).

However, Republican lawmakers in the state have argued that Democrats can and should be arrested, according to Texas House Rules.

[Per Rule 5, Section 8](#), when a call to the House takes place, the doors of the legislative chamber will be locked, and no lawmaker will be able to leave until their names are recorded.

"All absentees for whom no sufficient excuse is made may, by order of a majority of those present, be sent for and arrested, wherever they may be found, by the sergeant-at-arms ... and their attendance shall be secured and retained," the Texas House Rules detail.

Over the weekend, at least [26 Texas House Democrats pledged to remain in the nation's capital](#), despite the Saturday kickoff of the Texas State Legislature's second special legislative session.

Out of the [57 Democratic state lawmakers who fled the state last month](#), Texas Reps. Eddie Lucio III (D) and Bobby Guerra (D) were the only two to appear for the new session on Saturday.

While the Texas House failed to obtain a quorum for the third time this year, enough members of the Texas Senate were present for the chamber to conduct business. Unlike the Texas House, the Texas Senate has already been able to vote on, and pass, the [GOP's controversial voting reform bill](#).

The voting reform legislation is the latest GOP-backed effort to ban 'drive-thru voting' and enhance restrictions on mail-in voting and other initiatives enacted across the state during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in the US.

The legislation also calls for new ID requirements for mail-in voting, added protections for partisan poll workers and the ban of 24-hour voting locations, which were set up to assist those who are working during the usual hours of polling.

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US Judge Rules Norwegian Cruise Line May Require 'Vaccine Passports,' Despite DeSantis' Ban

by [Evan Craighead](#)

Back in May, Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings expressed that its namesake subsidiary may be forced to explore ports outside of Florida due to Governor Ron DeSantis' (R) decision to prohibit any business or government entity in the state from requiring proof of COVID-19 vaccination, or 'vaccine passports.'

US District Judge Kathleen Williams, of the Southern District of Florida, issued a preliminary ruling on Sunday declaring that Norwegian Cruise Line is within its right to require patrons to show proof of vaccination against COVID-19.

[The 59-page filing argued](#) that the state of Florida failed to "provide a valid evidentiary, factual, or legal predicate" to justify the vaccine passport ban.

The preliminary injunction targeted Dr. Scott Rivkees, Florida's surgeon general and head of the Florida Department of Health, and was submitted by the cruise line last month in opposition to DeSantis' legislation.

Responding to the federal judge's decision, DeSantis' office asserted it does not agree with the legal justification provided.

"A prohibition on vaccine passports does not even implicate, let alone violate, anyone's speech rights, and it furthers the substantial, local interest of preventing discrimination among customers based on private health information," the [Florida governor's office told The Hill](#).

Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings CEO Frank Del Rio [praised the preliminary injunction](#) in favor of COVID-19 passports, arguing the requirement is what the company believes "is the safest and most prudent way to resume cruise operations amid this global pandemic."

"The public health environment continues to evolve around the globe and our robust science-backed health and safety protocols, with vaccines at its cornerstone, allow us to provide what we believe is the safest vacation experience for people who long to get back to their everyday lives and explore the world once again," he added.

[The CEO previously threatened](#) to take the cruise line's business elsewhere if the law was upheld in Florida.

"It is a classic state-versus-federal-government issue," Del Rio previously said. "Lawyers believe that federal law applies and not state law, but I'm not a lawyer. And we hope that this doesn't become a legal football or a political football."

After suspending operations around 15 months ago, Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings, which operates subsidiaries Norwegian Cruise Line, Oceania Cruises and Regent Seven Seas Cruises, plans to resume travel out of Florida ports on August 15.

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DeSantis Threatens to Withhold Salaries of Education Officials Who Enact Mask Mandates

by [Evan Craighead](#)

On Friday, Florida recorded its biggest single-day increase in newly reported COVID-19 infections, logging at least 23,903 new coronavirus cases, according to the US Centers of Disease Control and Prevention. The second-largest single-day increase in COVID-19 cases took place on Thursday, when the state saw at least 22,783 new cases of COVID-19. While Florida has recently recorded more new coronavirus infections than any other state, Governor Ron DeSantis (R) is pushing to [roll back scientifically proven mitigation measures](#), including mask mandates, and is now facing backlash from both his constituents and even members of his own party.

DeSantis, who has signed an executive order prohibiting mask mandates - even for schools with unvaccinated students, signaled that the state government is prepared to go the extra mile to enforce the measure.

"With respect to enforcing any financial consequences for noncompliance of state law regarding these rules and ultimately the rights of parents to make decisions about their children's education and health care decisions, it would be the goal of the State Board of Education to narrowly tailor any financial consequences to the offense committed," [he said in a statement to CBS Miami](#).

DeSantis went on to suggest that the Florida Board of Education could "withhold the salary of the district superintendent or school board members" who "led to the violation of law."

"Education funding is intended to benefit students first and foremost, not systems," the statement concluded. "The Governor's priorities are protecting parents' rights and ensuring that every student has access to a high-quality education that meets their unique needs."

While many working parents would be happy for their children to move away from virtual learning and the possible child care fees associated with it, some view the rollback of mask mandates as potentially dangerous to the health of their children, and those who they encounter if they contract the contagious disease.

At least one group of Florida parents have taken their concerns to court, filing a lawsuit on Friday to block the governor's executive order prohibiting school districts from making their own decisions when it comes to mask-wearing.

"The Executive Order impairs the safe operation of schools," reads the lawsuit filed in Leon County, Florida. "Students will become sick and potentially die as a result of the failure to follow the mandatory masking requirements" posted by the CDC.

Fellow Republicans like Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-LA) have also moved to disagree with DeSantis' ban on mask mandates because it goes against conservative principles of small government.

"I do disagree with Gov. DeSantis," Cassidy, who is also a physician, told CNN. "The local officials should have control here."

"Whenever politicians mess with public health, it usually doesn't work out well for public health," he added. "And ultimately, it doesn't work out for the politician."

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Time's Up Boss Roberta Kaplan Resigns After Being Named in Cuomo Sexual Harassment Report
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

The Time's Up advocacy group was earlier blasted by multiple critics after it was revealed that a top executive with the organization was consulted on the sexual misconduct claims raised against New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo. The talks came months before the consultation was made public in findings released by the New York Attorney General's Office.

A top boss with the Time's Up charity organization has resigned from her post after it was detailed in an explosive sexual harassment report that she was consulted in a damage control scheme being carried out by insiders within the Cuomo administration.

The advocacy group announced early Monday that Roberta Kaplan, a prominent progressive lawyer who served on the Time's Up board and as co-founder of the group's Legal Defense Fund, resigned from her posts amid heavy fallout over her work advising New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo when harassment allegations first surfaced in late 2020.

A [Monday statement](#) issued by Time's Up on the development states that Kaplan's resignation was "right and the appropriate thing to do," but that it also highlighted the need for the organization to be more transparent and implement a "more inclusive process to engage the broader survivor community."

In a [resignation letter](#) obtained by the New York Times, Kaplan explains that her work as a lawyer effectively prevents her from being fully transparent, as it runs in direct opposition to her duties as a legal representative.

"Unfortunately, recent events have made it clear that even our apparent allies in the fight to advance women can turn out to be abusers. We have felt the raw, personal and profound pain of that betrayal," she wrote, before detailing her move to resign from her post.

Fallout against Kaplan began to emerge moments after the damning sexual harassment report detailed nearly a dozen cases in which Cuomo allegedly harassed former and current aides on repeat occasions. The findings specifically pinned Kaplan as having reviewed a letter that rejected the legitimacy of allegations being voiced by former aide [Lindsey Boylan](#) and attacked her claims as being politically motivated.

Although the letter was only drafted and never published, it was part of a broader effort by Cuomo insiders to find any means in which to disparage allegations that were beginning to trickle in from government aides. The independent review also found instances in which Cuomo's team of trusted advisers dispersed confidential information to character assassinate Boylan.

However, Kaplan was not the only prominent figure identified in the sexual harassment report as being part of an inner circle. Others named in the independent review include fellow Time's Up leader Tina Tchen and Alphonso David, who served as a counselor for the Cuomo administration prior to becoming president of the Human Rights Campaign.

Similar to Kaplan, David had been consulted in the drafting of the unpublished letter but never signed off on its contents, a note which was confirmed in the independent report released by the New York Attorney General's Office.

The Human Rights Campaign detailed on [Monday](#) that it would be launching an independent review of its own to determine whether David's work with the Cuomo team had in fact run in line with the organization's "decades' long mission of fighting for equality and justice for all." David has underscored that he "[fully](#)" supports the investigation.

News of Kaplan's resignation came shortly after a group of survivors and victims of sexual harassment and assault issued an [open letter](#) against the Time's Up organization for "failing the survivor community." The collective specifically accused Kaplan and Tchen, who has made no indication of resigning, of "weaponizing their knowledge of survivors' experience to help Governor Cuomo and his office retaliate against at least one of nearly a dozen women." Kaplan's decision to step down was preceded by the Sunday development that Melissa DeRosa, a top Cuomo aide who helped in discrediting accusers, [resigned](#) from her job. Named multiple times throughout the report, DeRosa was described in the report as one of the key staffers who helped create a "hostile work environment for women."

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US Rapper DaBaby Deletes Instagram Apology Over Inflammatory HIV/AIDS Remarks
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

The American rapper recently ignited heavy controversy after making incendiary remarks about individuals living with HIV/AIDS during his Rolling Loud performance in Miami, Florida, in July. In addition to the wave of criticism, the commentary prompted him to be removed from several upcoming music festivals.

US rapper DaBaby stunned netizens after it was revealed that the musician deleted an apology post that was shared in the wake of growing backlash over inflammatory remarks he made during a Florida music festival.

The [apology post](#), which lasted just a week on the account, was the second mea culpa posted by DaBaby on one of his social media accounts. The initial apology filed on Twitter still remains active.

DaBaby's second, more formal apology toward the LGBTQ+ community acknowledged that his comments about HIV/AIDS were "hurtful and triggering," and that his remarks that one could die in a matter of a few weeks from the illness were wholly "misinformed."

However, it also included criticism of individuals who preferred to bash him instead of giving him the opportunity to learn from his mistakes. "Social media moves so fast that people want to demolish you before you even have the opportunity to grow, educate, and learn from your mistakes," he wrote.

"As a man who has had to make his own way from very difficult circumstances, having people I know publicly working against me - knowing that what I needed was education on these topics and guidance - has been challenging," he continued in the since-deleted post.

"I appreciate the many people who came to me with kindness, who reached out to me privately to offer wisdom, education, and resources. That's what I needed and it was received."

Along with critiques from prominent artists Elton John, Madonna and Questlove, approximately 11 organizations with a focus on HIV/AIDS prevention, education and treatment also penned a letter to address the controversial statements.

At the time, many netizens viewed the second apology as a step by his management team to try and cool the blowback as the musician was being dropped from various summer festivals,

including both Lollapalooza and the Governors Ball. The potential scenario was further bolstered by differing language used in the first and second apology.

Some have also [speculated](#) that the rapper opted to remove the second apology after the artist continued to be dropped by venues following the mea culpa that was sent out to the public. Representatives for the musician have not yet addressed the latest development.

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Videos: Monstrous Dixie Fire Ravages California as Flames 'Weeks' Away From Being Contained
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

California's Dixie Fire claimed the title of being the second-largest wildfire to consume much of the Golden State after having charred hundreds of thousands of acres and destroyed countless structural buildings. Although officials had managed to momentarily contain more of the blaze, weather conditions ultimately allowed the fire to expand.

Having ravaged much of California for nearly an entire month, the monstrous Dixie Fire is not expected to be contained for several more weeks, even amid ongoing firefighting efforts by thousands of responders.

[Latest figures](#) released by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire) indicate that the Dixie blaze has consumed approximately 489,287 acres across four counties, and is only 21% contained.

Firefighting response teams had managed to reach 35% containment earlier. However, windy weather conditions sent embers into tinder-dry terrain and caused the monstrous fire to flare up and undergo rapid growth. As such, containment figures fell back down to 21%.

Consuming vast amounts of land in the Butte, Plumas, Lassen and Tehama counties, the Dixie blaze has so far destroyed about 433 structures, going on to damage an additional 28 buildings. In Greenville, a Gold Rush-era town riddled with historic buildings, residents were left with ruins as the state's second-largest fire burned about 75% of the small town. While touring the burn site over the weekend, California Gov. Gavin Newsom commented that it took about 90 minutes for the blaze to destroy the town.

Cal Fire figures indicate that approximately 5,813 individuals are working to combat the blaze, and are using the services of 30 helicopters, 525 fire engines, 135 water tenders and 129 bulldozers in their ongoing containment efforts.

Edwin Zuniga, a Cal Fire spokesperson, [told](#) the Los Angeles Times that containment of the Dixie fire all depends on the weather conditions, especially in regards to wind force, scorching heat temperatures and dryness.

The devastating reach of the Dixie fire, despite having merged with the Fly fire in July, only comes second to the [August Complex fire](#), which consumed more than 1 million acres in 2020. However, unlike Dixie, the deadly 2020 fire was composed of some 40 smaller blazes that

enveloped the Mendocino, Shasta-Trinity and Six Rivers National Forests after being ignited by lightning.

The Dixie blaze is just one of more than 10 fires burning across the state, accounting to [data](#) provided by Cal Fire. Next to Dixie, the second-largest fire currently churning is River fire, which burned through nearly 3,000 acres and is already about 70% contained.

Evacuation orders have been issued across much of the state, with the latest orders being issued for the community of [Burnt Ranch](#) by officials with the Trinity County Sheriff's Office.

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New York Assembly 'Several Weeks' Away From Possibly Filing Impeachment Articles Against Cuomo

by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

In the wake of explosive findings that describe a toxic work environment for staffers, and allegations of New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo's sexual harassment of aides, state lawmakers have begun the process of potentially ousting the governor from his post. Various prominent officials, including US President Joe Biden, have called on Cuomo to resign.

The New York State Assembly announced on Monday that it would hold multiple public and private hearings throughout August as part of the governing body's impeachment investigation into embattled Democratic New York state Gov. Andrew Cuomo.

After updating committee members on the progression of the investigation, it was detailed during the meeting that upcoming public hearings will include testimony from expert witnesses on sexual harassment, as well as impeachment proceedings for the state.

Assemblyman Charles Lavine, who serves as the chair of the judiciary committee, remarked during the Monday hearing that state lawmakers were still probing findings laid out in a damning report that detailed at least 11 cases where Cuomo, throughout his governorship, is alleged to have sexually harassed current and former staffers.

"After the committee has completed its review of the evidence, it will make a recommendation to the full Assembly on whether to proceed with impeachment against Governor Cuomo," Lavine said during the Monday proceedings.

"We anticipate that this process will be concluded very soon," he added, noting that a decision on bringing impeachment articles against Cuomo could be raised sometime in the next "several weeks."

Aside from sexual harassment allegations, the impeachment investigation will also examine whether Cuomo used state resources to write a book during his governorship, and whether he gave family and friends preferential access to COVID-19 tests.

Additionally, the probe will determine whether the Cuomo administration deliberately obscured the full scope of nursing home deaths during the 2020 height of the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It was further noted that Cuomo would have until Friday to provide evidence for his defense.

The Empire State has not impeached a governor and forced them out of office since 1913, when [William Sulzer](#) was booted for stealing campaign funds.

Cuomo has adamantly denied that he committed any wrongdoing, explaining away the accusations moments after the explosive report was published by stating that the discomfort engendered by his embraces stemmed from "cultural" and "generational" differences. He further underscored his defense in an [85-page rebuttal](#) that included multiple images of him in close embraces with other prominent figures.

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US Second Gentleman to Lead Delegation to Tokyo Summer Paralympic Games – White House

WASHINGTON, Aug 9 (Sputnik) – Husband of US Vice President Kamala Harris, Second Gentleman Douglas Emhoff, will head the American delegation to the Paralympic Games in Tokyo, a White House said in a statement.

“Mr. Douglas Emhoff, Second Gentleman of the United States, will lead the delegation,” the statement read.

Charge d’Affaires of the US embassy in Tokyo, Raymond Greene, will also participate in the delegation, the statement added.

The Tokyo 2020 Summer Paralympic Games will take place from August 24 to September 5 immediately following the conclusion of the Summer Olympic Games which concluded on Sunday.

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US Donates \$50Mln to Myanmar, \$5Mln in COVID-19 Assistance to Thailand – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) – The US is set to donate \$50 million in humanitarian aid for Myanmar and \$5 million to fight the coronavirus pandemic in Thailand, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Tuesday.

“Today, during an official visit to Thailand, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield announced that the United States is providing more than \$50 million in critical humanitarian assistance to the people of Burma [Myanmar], including those forced to flee violence and persecution,” Price said in a statement. “In addition, Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield announced \$5 million in aid to help Thailand fight COVID-19.”

The humanitarian aid for Myanmar is necessary to provide emergency food assistance, essential healthcare, water and hygiene services to over 700,000 Myanmar people who have either fled or been displaced from their homes in the aftermath of the February 1 coup, the statement said.

The COVID-19 assistance to Thailand will strengthen the vaccine supply chain for the benefit of the most vulnerable social groups in the country, Price noted in the statement.

On February 1, the Myanmar military overthrew the civilian government and declared a year-long state of emergency. The coup triggered mass protests, which were quashed with deadly violence, resulting in the death of over 700 people. Additionally, about 3,000 protesters were detained, according to rights activists.

Thailand was hit by a third wave of coronavirus in April, driven by more transmissible Alpha and Delta variants. As of today, the country has nearly 780,000 cases and 6,300 deaths while only 6 percent of its population have been fully vaccinated, according to Johns Hopkins University.

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Escalation of Violence in Syria Since July Kills, Injures 45 Children - UNICEF

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - An escalation of violence in Syria since July has killed and injured at least 45 children, a senior official with the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund, Bertrand Bainvel, said in a press release.

"An ongoing escalation of violence in Syria, especially in the north, has killed and injured at least 45 children since the beginning of July," Bainvel said on Monday.

Bainvel said an attack in the Syrian town of Al-Qastoun killed four children from the same family. Several other civilians were killed and injured in the attack as well, Bainvel said.

All parties in the conflict should protect children at all times, Bainvel added.

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Canada Opposition Leaders Urge Trudeau to Put Self-Interest on Back Burner, Delay Election
TORONTO, August 9 (Sputnik) - The leaders of Canada's two largest national opposition parties are calling on Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to hold off an election call and put political interests aside ahead of an expected fourth wave of the coronavirus pandemic.

It is widely believed that Trudeau, in the coming days, will ask newly minted Governor General of Canada, Mary Simon, to dissolve parliament citing non-confidence in the incumbent government from opposition parties and order an election.

"We shouldn't be rushing to an election," Conservative Party Leader Erin O'Toole said during a press briefing in Belleville, Ontario on Monday, adding, "Mr. Trudeau always seems to put his own self-interest ahead of the interest of Canadians."

At a separate event in Bathurst, New Brunswick, New Democrat Party Leader Jagmeet Singh echoed O'Toole's comments, saying that the election "does not have to happen" and slamming Trudeau's alleged reasoning for calling an election.

"Justin Trudeau's reasons do not pan out. Parliament has been working the way Canadians want it to work," Singh said, also noting that Trudeau's Liberals are "more interested in power rather than doing what's in the interest of Canadians."

While the Conservatives and NDP vow they are not interested in an impending election, the leaders of both parties said they are ready for one, should it come to that.

"We are going to be in a great position for an election," Singh said, noting that the party has relieved itself of prior debts and that over 100 candidates have been nominated.

Trudeau's Liberals hold a nationwide lead as large as 12 percent, according to some of the latest polling numbers, which projections say would be enough for Trudeau to regain the majority mandate he lost in the 2019 federal election.

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TORONTO, August 9 (Sputnik) - Canada has extended its ban on direct passenger flights from India until September 21 amid the South Asian country's enduring struggles to contain the spread of COVID-19 within its borders, Transport Canada said.

"Based on the latest public health advice from the Public Health Agency of Canada, Transport Canada is extending the Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) that restricts all direct commercial and private passenger flights to Canada from India until September 21, 2021, at 23:59 EDT," the department said in a statement on Monday.

The ban also applies to private and charter aircraft, Transport Canada said in the NOTAM regarding India. However, cargo, flight crew repatriation and ferry flights, as well as flights that make technical stops in India are exempt from the order.

All passengers departing for Canada from India via a connecting flight will still be required to submit a negative coronavirus test at their last point of departure, the statement said.

Ottawa will work with New Delhi to reinstate direct flights as soon as the epidemiological situation permits, Transport Canada said, noting that the government continues to recommend Canadians avoid international travel while the pandemic rages on.

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COVID-19 Hospitalizations, Cases Surge in US Southern States

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - The number of new hospitalizations and cases due to the novel coronavirus have surged in the US southern states of Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi, Florida and Alabama.

"We saw the largest single-day increase in hospitalizations and have eclipsed our previous high of COVID hospitalizations," Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson said on Monday.

Hutchinson said there are only eight Intensive Care Unit (ICU) beds available in the state. He emphasized that vaccinations will help reduce the number of hospitalizations in the future.

Arkansas's health department reported that 103 people were hospitalized overnight in the state, bringing the total number of hospitalizations to 1,376.

Louisiana for a sixth day in a row reported record-high hospitalizations on Monday with 2,720 people currently in hospitals due to the disease, according to the state's health department.

Ninety-one percent of the patients hospitalized with COVID-19 are not fully vaccinated.

The Mississippi Department of Health on Monday reported 6,912 new cases of COVID-19 and 28 deaths; ninety-seven percent of all the new cases are in the unvaccinated. Mississippi Governor Tate Reeves said the recent data suggests the Delta variant is becoming a pandemic of the unvaccinated.

The state of Florida and Alabama have also had record number of COVID-19 cases recently.

Florida has been hit the hardest in the Delta variant wave of infections. In the first week of August, the state reported 134,506 new coronavirus cases.

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US Security Adviser Sullivan, Estonia's Prime Minister Discuss Belarus - White House

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan and Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas during a telephone call discussed the United States' commitment to hold the government of Belarus accountable for alleged human rights abuses and corruption, National Security Council spokesperson Emily Horne said in a press release.

"National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan spoke today with Prime Minister Kaja Kallas of Estonia...He also stressed the US commitment to hold the Lukashenka regime in Belarus to account for its attacks on democracy and human rights, transnational repression, and corruption," Horne said on Monday.

Sullivan and Kallas also discussed economic cooperation and transparency for infrastructure investments in Europe and other parts of the world, Hornes said.

Sullivan reaffirmed the US administration's support for the security of Estonia, the release said.

Earlier on Monday, the United States imposed new sanctions against Belarus that target 23 Belorussian officials and 21 entities.

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Blinken, Japanese Security Adviser Discuss Denuclearization of North Korea - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Japanese Security Adviser Akiba Takeo discussed issues such as cooperation on the denuclearization of North Korea, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said in a readout of their meeting.

"The Secretary and the National Security Advisor also noted the importance of trilateral U.S.-Japan-Republic of Korea cooperation to address the pressing challenges of the 21st

century, including the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula," Price said on Monday.

Blinken and Takeo also discussed their shared opposition to unilateral changes to the status quo in the South China Sea and the importance of preserving peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait.

The two leaders pledged to maintain peace and stability and respect international law, including freedom of navigation in and over the South China Sea.

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RPT - Canada Renews Ban on Direct Flights From India Until September 21 - Transport Ministry

TORONTO, August 9 (Sputnik) - Canada has extended its ban on direct passenger flights from India until September 21 amid the South Asian country's enduring struggles to contain the spread of COVID-19 within its borders, Transport Canada said.

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Pentagon Secretary, Pakistani Army Chief Discuss Situation in Afghanistan - Spokesperson WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - US and Pakistan's top defense officials during a phone conversation discussed the ongoing situation in Afghanistan as well as regional security, Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby said in a readout.

The phone conversation took place on the eve of the meeting of the extended troika of Russia, China and the United States along with Pakistan on an Afghan settlement.

"Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin spoke by phone with Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff, General Qamar Javed Bajwa to discuss our mutual goals of security and stability in the region," Department of Defense Press Secretary John Kirby said in a readout on Monday. "Secretary Austin and General Bajwa discussed the ongoing situation in Afghanistan, regional security and stability, and the bilateral defense relationship more broadly."

Escalating violence in Afghanistan over the past week has left nearly 130 children dead, according to UNICEF, as the Taliban have ramped up an offensive and began capturing provincial capitals.

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Blinken, Saudi Counterpart Discuss Attack on Mercer Tanker - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - US Secretary Antony Blinken and his Saudi counterpart discussed Iran's alleged attack against the Mercer Street tanker in the Arabian Sea last month, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said in a press release.

Earlier in the day, Blinken told the UN Security Council the US administration is confident Iran bears responsibility for the attack on the Mercer Street vessel that occurred off the coast of Oman last month and called on the international community to hold Tehran accountable. Iran has repeatedly denied involvement.

"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken spoke today with the Foreign Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud," the release said on Monday. "The Secretary and Foreign Minister discussed regional security and the Iranian attack on the M/V Mercer Street in the Arabian Sea."

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US Senators Press Facebook to Allow Researchers to Access Advertisement Data - Letter

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - US Senators Mark Warner, Amy Klobuchar and Chris Coons sent a letter to Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg asking him to explain the company's decision to terminate researchers' ability to access its platform.

"While we agree that Facebook must safeguard user privacy, it is similarly imperative that Facebook allow credible academic researchers and journalists like those involved in the Ad Observatory project to conduct independent research that will help illuminate how the company can better tackle misinformation, disinformation and other harmful activity that is proliferating on its platforms," the letter said on Monday.

The New York University's Ad Observatory Project studies political advertising on Facebook and has produced discoveries that brought to light the lack of transparency involved in how advertisers target audiences on the social media site.

The senators provided a list of questions for Facebook to deliver written answers by August 20. The questions included how many accounts associated with the research were terminated and why the company chose to do so, according to the letter.

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Canada Renews Ban on Direct Flights From India Until September 21 - Transport Ministry

TORONTO, August 9 (Sputnik) - Canada has extended its ban on direct passenger flights from India until September 21 amid the South Asian country's enduring struggles to contain the spread of COVID-19 within its borders, Transport Canada said.

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Lockheed Martin Successfully Intercepts Ballistic Missiles in Flight Test - Statement

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - Lockheed Martin said in a press release that it has demonstrated upgrades to its Patriot PAC-3 air defense system after successfully intercepting tactical ballistic missiles during a flight test.

"In flight tests at White Sands Missile Range on August 9, Lockheed Martin demonstrated new upgrades to its PAC-3 Missile Segment Enhancement (MSE) interceptor and continued reliability of its PAC-3 Cost Reduction Initiative interceptor," the company said on Monday.

The PAC-3 air defense system received missile and launcher software and hardware component upgrades, the release said.

More tests are expected later this year, the release said.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik)

WESTERN SANCTIONS AGAINST BELARUS

* The United States has imposed new sanctions against Belarus that target 23 Belorussian officials and 21 entities, the US Treasury Department announced on Monday.

* The United States has targeted fertilizer giant Belaruskali OAO, the country's National Olympic Committee as well as entities in tobacco, construction and energy sectors in its latest round of sanctions against Minsk, the White House said.

* Canada is imposing new sanctions on sectors vital to the Belarusian economy aimed at minimizing Minsk's access to international markets, Global Affairs Canada said.

US-RUSSIA RELATIONS

* Moscow considers new US sanctions against Russia unacceptable and in contradiction with spirit of the Geneva summit between the two countries' presidents, Russian Ambassador to US Anatoly Antonov said in a statement on Monday.

* The new sanctions the United States has imposed on Russia increasingly "push back" the prospects for a constructive interaction between the two countries, Antonov said.

* The US State Department has imposed nonproliferation sanctions on three Russian organizations, the US State Department has announced.

RUSSIA-BELARUS MILITARY COOPERATION

* Belarus will be ready to have Russian servicemen deployed on its territory if there is a risk of a new world war, President Alexander Lukashenko said on Monday.

* Minsk is interested in Russian S-400 air defense systems, Lukashenko said.

* It is too early for Belarus and Russia to create a union defense ministry, since neither Minsk nor Moscow are ready and it is necessary to adopt a constitution of the Union State first, Lukashenko said.

DEVELOPMENTS IN AFGHANISTAN

* The US defense chief believes the security situation in Afghanistan is moving in the wrong direction but that the government forces are capable of holding back the Taliban onslaught, Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby said on Monday.

* At least 27 children have been killed and 136 more injured in violence in Afghanistan over the past three days, UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) Executive Director Henrietta Fore said.

* Radical movement Taliban (recognized as terrorist organization and banned in Russia) has not yet entered Kabul and has not made any decision regarding the Afghan capital, spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told Sputnik.

* Qatar will host a meeting of the extended troika (Russia, China, the United States and Pakistan) on Afghanistan on Tuesday, the Qatari Foreign Ministry said.

* Taliban (recognized as terrorist organization and banned in Russia) sustained little damage from recent US strikes targeting it, Mujahid told Sputnik.

NORD STREAM 2

* The European Commission is discussing the possibility of holding a meeting with member states of the European Union on Nord Stream 2 after US-Germany agreements on the issue, a source in the commission told RIA Novosti on Monday.

RUSSIA'S ASSISTANCE TO GREECE

* Russian President Vladimir Putin has instructed to increase the number of people in the Russian response team sent to Greece to respond to wildfires after Athens made such a request, the Kremlin said on Monday.

* Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias said that he requested a second Russia's Be-200 amphibious aircraft for extinguishing forest fires in his phone conversation with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

* Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin and his Greek counterpart, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, held a phone conversation on fire suppression, the coronavirus and cooperation in trade and the economy, the Russian cabinet said,

* Greece has requested two Il-76 planes, two Mi-8 helicopters from Russia to respond to raging wildfires in the country, the office of the first deputy foreign minister, Miltiadis Varvitsiotis, said.

SECURITY INCIDENT IN KYRGYZSTAN

* The police in Kyrgyzstan's Bishkek cordoned off a shopping mall after unconfirmed reports emerged that the hostage crisis is ongoing and a bomb has been planted in the building.

* Viktor Zhirkov, the head of the security of a shopping mall in Kyrgyzstan, refuted reports that claimed that there was a hostage crisis in the building.

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University of North Dakota Partners With US Space Force in New Program - Statement

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - The University of North Dakota (UND) has signed an agreement to launch a new research partnership with the US Space Force, both organizations announced during a signing ceremony on Monday.

"The US Space Force announced its University Partnership Program at the University of North Dakota during a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signing event [on] August 9," the force announced in a news release. "Chief of Space Operations Gen. John 'Jay' Raymond joined UND President Andy Armacost on campus to sign the MOU."

Raymond said the Space Force faces some of the toughest challenges in engineering, science and technology and the United States needs its brightest minds working to help tackle these problems.

"That is why we have established the University Partnership Program to harness the innovation at universities across our country. Today, I'm excited to welcome the University of North Dakota as our first official UPP member, with ten more schools to follow in the coming months," Raymond said.

The other universities joining the partnership this year are: Georgia Institute of Technology, Howard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, Purdue University, University of Colorado System, University of Texas System and the University of Southern California, the release said.

"Students and faculty will apply their expertise to projects vital to the Space Force mission to deliver impactful solutions for increasing efficiency, resiliency and sustainability for space capabilities," Armacost said.

The universities were selected based on the quality of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) degree offerings and space-related research; a robust Reserve Officers Training Program program; a diverse student population and programming designed to support military and veterans in pursuing higher education, the release added.

The Space Force designed the program to identify, develop and retain a diverse STEM-capable workforce, according to the release.

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Harris in Call With Israel President Reiterates US Commitment to 2-State Solution

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - US Vice President Kamala Harris spoke over the telephone with Israeli President Isaac Herzog and reaffirmed the United States' commitment to a two-state solution in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the White House said on Monday.

"Vice President Harris spoke with President Isaac Herzog of Israel today to congratulate him on his recent inauguration as Israel's 11th president," the White House said in a press release.

"Vice President Harris also reiterated the U.S. commitment to a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and to advancing freedom, security, dignity and opportunity for people on both sides."

Harris and Herzog committed to deepening bilateral relations and supporting the normalization of relations between Israel and its Arab neighboring countries, the release said.

Harris and Herzog also discussed climate change, particularly the issue of water scarcity. The US vice president thanked Israel for providing Guatemala with water catchment systems in Guatemala and for collaborating with the United States to train farmers in climate-smart agriculture.

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Seventeen Democratic Senators Urge Attorney General to Scrap US Death Penalty – Letter

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) – Seventeen Democratic senators have sent a letter to Attorney General Merrick Garland urging him to abolish the federal death penalty for all crimes, Senator Dick Durbin said on Monday.

"US Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin, Chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, and US Senators Patrick Leahy and Cory Booker... today led 14 of their Senate Democratic colleagues in urging the Department of Justice to take further steps to end the federal death penalty once and for all," Durbin said in a press release.

In their letter to Garland, the senators praised the recent decision to impose a moratorium on federal executions pending a review of death penalty policies and procedures and called on him to also withdraw all pending death notices and authorize no new ones while the review was underway.

"There are serious concerns about arbitrariness in the application of the death penalty, its disparate impact on people of color, and the alarming number of exonerations in capital cases.

These concerns... support halting its use - including prohibiting federal prosecutors from seeking the death penalty - during the review process," the letter said
In July, Garland imposed a moratorium on federal executions pending a formal review supervised by Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco, the release noted.

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US to Invest into Domestic Renewal Before Making International Trade Deals - Blinken

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) – The United States is going to invest in domestic renewal before making new trade deals with other countries, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Monday.

"President [Joe] Biden made clear that before making more [international] trade deals, we must first make a generational investment in our own competitiveness," Blinken said in his remarks at the University of Maryland.

The United States is competing for trade, and domestic renewal is the priority for its foreign policy, he added.

"If we do that, we will compete in the 21st Century global economy from a position of strength," he added.

Previous administrations were intent on creating more international trade partnerships than making investments at home and that did not work for US workers and the nation's economy, Blinken said.

Not only China, but other countries now investing more in their infrastructure than the US, so America should make a serious decision in order to keep its leadership in this area, he added.

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Brazil Made No Commitments to US Regarding Huawei During Sullivan Visit - White House

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - Brazil did not make any commitment to the United States regarding its cooperation with the Chinese technology giant Huawei during the visit of US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Juan Gonzalez told reporters on Monday.

Asked whether the United States received any assurances from Brazil they will not use Huawei technology, Gonzalez said, "It made no commitments to us on Huawei but we did agree on this is finding ways for us to support them in developing potential opportunities for a Brazilian entrant into the market."

"They are focusing on finalizing an auction - time to be confirmed - and they are very focused on the issue that the auction allows for create very high standards for transparency but also allows, you know, kind of a level playing field for market participants," Gonzalez said.

Gonzalez pointed out that Sullivan conveyed the United States' interest to continue to support Brazil to become a NATO partner, adding that there was no discussion about exchanging such support for not collaborating with Huawei.

"There have been also reports that argued that there was an exchange on Huawei for Us support for that. At no point there was quid pro quo, no exchange of a favourable position on Huawei for Us support becoming a NATO global partner. These are separate issues," he said. Gonzalez also said both countries have an opportunity to create innovative domestic technology companies that support open RAN deployments, not only for the domestic market, but also to export around the region and beyond.

"And 5G deployments will track hundreds of billions of dollars of investment worldwide over the next few years. What we encouraged and offered supported is that they have an opportunity here to build native industries that could make Brazil and Argentina, transformational in how Latin America, deploys on 5G and digital infrastructure," he said.

Gonzales underscored that Huawei is facing major challenges to its semiconductor supply chain.

"And [it] will leave international customers, frankly high and dry by failing to deliver on its commitments as it prioritizes China's domestic 5g deployment or best case scenario by delivering subpar energy and efficient equipment that is going to be far more expensive to operate than that of competitors," he added.

Last week, the US Embassy in Brazil said via Twitter that Sullivan discussed building 5G networks in Brazil, based on American Open RAN technologies, amid the United States competition with Huawei.

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Huawei CFO Lawyer Urges Halting 'One-of-a-Kind' Extradition Citing Trump, Legal Errors

TORONTO, August 9 (Sputnik) – A lawyer for Huawei CFO Meng Wanzhou told a Canadian courtroom on Monday that the United States' extradition request should be stayed on account of former US President Donald Trump's conduct and numerous procedural errors leading up to the executive's arrest.

Monday's hearing marked the start of the final chapter of the nearly 19-month extradition process against the Huawei executive, with Meng's legal team making their final submissions before British Columbia Supreme Court Justice Heather Holmes.

Meng's legal team, which counts more than half-dozen lawyers, is arguing that the United States' bid to have her extradited south of the border to face justice for fraud charges should be denied because she is the victim of an abuse of process.

This defense is based on four components, or branches, with the first arguing that former US President Donald Trump's assertion that he would intervene in the case brought forward by the Justice Department against Meng, if it would be beneficial to US national interests, amounts to political interference and, accordingly, an abuse of process.

Defense attorney Richard Peck zeroed in on Trump's comments in his overview of the case before Holmes.

"We submit to you this conduct... is deeply offensive to the rule of law. It's deeply offensive... to the integrity of this process," Peck told the courtroom.

Meng's counsel stressed that "words matter" and that Trump's comments violated the principle of separation of powers of the executive and legal branches, while noting that former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo made similar insinuations when he said in a Fox News interview "any time there is a law enforcement engagement, we need to make sure we take foreign policy considerations into effect."

Peck argued that Trump's conduct is just one of the peculiarities in a case he called "truly one of a kind."

"When before has a head of state interfered in an extradition? When before has an extradition case been the subject of four, evidently arguable, abuse of process allegations... when before has a former, high-ranking member of the RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] declined to attend court to testify on a matter of significant importance," Peck postulated.

Meng's attorney also noted that the case is riddled with procedural errors, which forms the basis for the second branch of abuse of process. The defense contends that Meng's Charter rights were violated by Canadian authorities during her arrest and have gone as far as to allege that Canadian police and border agents were acting at the behest of US law enforcement agencies when the procedural errors were committed.

During the arrest at Vancouver's International Airport, Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA) agents sealed the executive's mobile devices special bags, designed to prevent remote wiping, and transferred it to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) but not before a border agent obtained passcodes to the phones from Meng and placed them in the bags. Canadian Justice Department lawyers representing the Attorney General of Canada on behalf of the United States have argued that there is no evidence Canadian law enforcement officials turned over information about Meng's electronic devices to the FBI.

In the third and fourth branches, the defense alleges that US prosecutors misled the Canadian court on the facts of the case and that the prosecution violates international law.

Meng, the daughter of Huawei founder and CEO Ren Zhengfei, was arrested on December 1, 2018 at Vancouver International Airport during a layover stop at the request of the US government.

The US Justice Department alleges that Meng committed fraud by misleading HSBC into approving more than \$100 million in transactions that contravened US sanctions on Iran from 2010 to 2014 through a Tehran-based shell company, Skycom.

Meng remains under house arrest in Vancouver, although is free to traverse the region in the company of state-imposed guards outside of her 11:00 p.m to 6:00 a.m. curfew.

The final arguments are expected to wrap up on August 20.

Holmes is expected to give her recommendation on the United States' extradition request to AGC and Justice David Lametti later in the fall. Lametti has the final say on the request and has the right to refuse extradition in exceptional circumstances.

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New Bill Targets 'Radio Energy' Attacks on US Diplomats Round World - Congressman

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - A proposed new bill would sanction any foreign government found responsible for carrying out radio frequency energy-directed attacks on US diplomats and other personnel around the world, Republicans on the US House Foreign Affairs Committee said on Monday.

"Within 60 days after receiving persuasive information that a foreign government is responsible for such attacks, [the bill] requires the President to determine and report to Congress," the proposed legislation said. "If the President determines that a foreign government has conducted such attacks, [it] requires the imposition of certain sanctions against that government."

Proposed by Congressman Michael McCaul, a Republican, the legislation is aimed at addressing the attacks on US diplomatic personnel happening around the world that the National Academy of Sciences said are likely caused by "directed, pulsed radio frequency energy," and holding those responsible accountable, the House Foreign Affairs Committee said in a press release.

"What first started in Havana in late 2016 has now expanded to more than 130 possible cases from all around the world - including right here in Washington, DC. That's why I've introduced the Havana Syndrome Attacks Response Act. We must find out who is behind these attacks and hold them responsible." McCaul said.

The act was designed to detect, deter and punish such attacks, provide assistance to harmed US personnel and hold responsible any persons, entities, or governments who carried them out, the legislation said.

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CDC Advises Americans to Avoid Iceland, France Because of High Number of Coronavirus Cases

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on Monday recommended that US travelers avoid visiting France, Israel, Iceland and Thailand due to high number of coronavirus cases

The CDC also warned that Americans should avoid traveling to Saudi Arabia, Greece, Indonesia, Spain and the United Kingdom, among others, again due to the increased number of coronavirus cases in these countries.

In addition, the CDC recommended that Americans are fully vaccinated if they must travel to these destinations.

The Delta variant of the novel coronavirus is believed to be the most prevalent and fastest spreading mutation in the world albeit less deadly. The variant was first reported in India in

October 2020 and has already become the predominant strain in a number of countries, including the United States.

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International Space Station Cargo Mission on Time for Launch Tuesday Afternoon - NASA

WASHINGTON August 9 (Sputnik) - The next unmanned cargo mission to the International Space Station (ISS) is on schedule to be launched on Tuesday afternoon, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) officials said on Monday.

"NASA and Northrop Grumman are targeting 5:56 pm EDT, Tuesday, for the company's 16th commercial resupply services mission to the International Space Station," ISS Program Manager Joe Montalbano told a press conference.

The unmanned Cygnus cargo spacecraft will carry more than 8,200 pounds of research, crew supplies and hardware and will be launched on the company's Antares rocket from Virginia Space's Mid-Atlantic Regional Spaceport, Montalbano said.

Weather and other conditions were looking positive for the launch on schedule, Wallops Range Antares Project Manager Brittany McKenzie said.

"We have an 80 percent chance of launch tomorrow: Looking good," she said.

New scientific experiments being carried up to the ISS included a project to assess whether muscle tissue grown on scaffolds in orbit was a good model for testing drugs and treatments on earth and another one studying the behavior of a blob related to amoebas in microgravity, ISS Chief Scientist Kirt Costello said.

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Biden Supports Pentagon's Plan to Require COVID Vaccination by Mid-September - Statement

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden released a statement on Monday expressing his support for Defense Secretary Austin's decision to seek a waiver to add the COVID-19 vaccine to the mandated vaccine list for military members in mid-September should the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) not approve it by then.

"I strongly support Secretary Austin's message to the Force today on the Department of Defense's plan to add the COVID-19 vaccine to the list of required vaccinations for our service members not later than mid-September," Biden said. "Secretary Austin and I share an unshakable commitment to making sure our troops have every tool they need to do their jobs as safely as possible."

Austin released a memo earlier on Monday saying that the Defense Department intends to make the vaccinations mandatory for service members by mid-September or when the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) officially approves it, whichever comes first.

"[Austin] will request approval from the president for a waiver to make the COVID vaccine mandatory by mid-September," Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby said, noting that the memo is not intended to suggest that service members need to be vaccinated by then.

Biden said that he was proud of the military for helping to lead the fight against the pandemic and "setting the example of keeping their fellow Americans safe."

The US military will have the next several weeks to prepare to implement the vaccine mandate, Austin said, adding that he has "every confidence" that commanders will implement it with professionalism, skill, and compassion.

Kirby said that each branch of the military would individually work on implementing the mandate in their service and that Austin does not expect it to take long for them to deliver their implementation plans to him.

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Biden Welcomes Justice Dept. Filing Committing to Fresh Review of 9/11 Attack Documents

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden has welcomed the Justice Department's filing where it announced a fresh review of 9/11 attack documents, the White House said on Monday.

Last week, Senator Bob Menendez announced that US intelligence officials would be required to review and declassify documents on any involvement by the government of Saudi Arabia or any Saudi individuals in attacks under the bipartisan 9/11 Transparency Act. Fifteen of the 19 hijackers were Saudi nationals.

"I welcome the Department of Justice's filing today, which commits to conducting a fresh review of documents where the government has previously asserted privileges, and to doing so as quickly as possible," Biden said.

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New York Lawmakers to Recommend Whether to Impeach Cuomo Within 'Several Weeks'

NEW YORK CITY, August 9 (Sputnik) - The New York State Assembly Judiciary Committee will make a recommendation whether or not to move forward with an impeachment trial of Governor Andrew Cuomo within several weeks, Judiciary Committee Chair Charles Lavine said on Monday.

"After the Committee has completed its review of the evidence, it will make a recommendation to the full Assembly on whether to proceed with impeachment against Governor Cuomo. We anticipate that this process will be concluded very soon... I am speaking about several weeks," Lavine said.

New York lawmakers met earlier on Monday to look into drafting articles of impeachment against Cuomo, who was accused of sexually harassing 11 women by independent investigators appointed by the New York Attorney General.

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US Senators, Yellen Announce Bipartisan Cryptocurrency Deal Aimed Against Tax Evasion

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - Republican and Democratic senators announced on Monday they have achieved broad agreement on a cryptocurrency regulation, with US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen saying it will make "meaningful progress" in preventing tax evasion via alternate currencies.

"There's broad agreement that digital asset exchanges behaving as brokers should be required to report transactions just like other kinds of brokers already do," Democrat senators Mark Warner and Kyrsten Sinema, who are aligned to the Biden administration, said in a joint statement with Republicans Pat Toomey, Cynthia Lummis and Rob Portman.

The senator said the regulation would address the "concern that tax evasion and non-compliance are becoming significant issues surrounding cryptocurrencies and digital assets".

Yellen, in a separate statement, also expressed confidence that the regulation, which is to be incorporated into an infrastructure bill to be tabled in the Senate, will "make meaningful progress (against) tax evasion".

The Treasury has expressed concern in the past about wealthy Americans shifting taxable assets into the crypto economy to avoid tax.

The crypto economy in the future could account for a significant portion of the \$7 trillion US "tax gap" — which is the difference between taxes paid and taxes owed, the Treasury Department said.

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Security Situation in Afghanistan Clearly Not Going in Right Direction - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) – The US defense chief believes the security situation in Afghanistan is moving in the wrong direction but that the government forces are capable of holding back the Taliban onslaught, Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby said on Monday.

"The [US Defense] Secretary [Lloyd Austin] shares the concern of the international community about the security situation in Afghanistan, which is clearly not going in the right direction," Kirby said at a press briefing. "The Secretary continues to believe that the Afghan forces have the capability, they have the capacity to make a big difference on the battlefield."

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Biden Supports Pentagon's Plan to Require COVID-19 Vaccination By September 15 - Statement

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden on Monday expressed support for Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin's decision to require all military members to get vaccinated against the novel coronavirus by September 15.

"I strongly support Secretary Austin's message to the force today on the Department of Defense's plan to add the COVID-19 vaccine to the list of required vaccinations for our service members not later than mid-September. Secretary Austin and I share an unshakable commitment to making sure our troops have every tool they need to do their jobs as safely as possible," Biden said in a statement.

Earlier on Monday, Austin released a memorandum to the troops saying the Defense Department intends to make the coronavirus vaccination mandatory by September 15 or by the date the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) officially approves the experimental injections, whichever comes first.

Biden said he was proud of the US military for helping to lead the fight against the coronavirus pandemic and "setting the example of keeping their fellow Americans safe."

Austin said the US military will have the next several weeks to prepare to implement the vaccine mandate, Austin said. Austin added he has "every confidence" that commanders will implement the mandate with professionalism, skill and compassion.

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US Could Begin Tapering Stimulus From October to December - Federal Reserve

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - The Federal Reserve could begin tapering between October and December the stimulus funds it has been providing to the US economy, or move even earlier if the monthly jobs growth hits close to a million couple of months in a row, Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta President Raphael Bostic said on Monday.

"I believe the Fed will begin to trim purchases between October and December but is willing to move it forward if necessary," Bostic said. "If there is another month or two of strong job gains... similar to those in July, the target will be met."

The Federal Reserve has been buying at least \$80 billion of Treasury securities and \$40 billion of agency mortgage-backed securities per month to support the US economic recovery since the coronavirus outbreak 16 months ago. The Federal Reserve has also kept US interest rates at a record low of between zero and 0.25 percent.

At the close of the Federal Reserve's monthly policy meeting for July, Chairman Jerome Powell said now was not the time for the US central bank to discuss a revision of either asset

purchases or interest rates. Powell said the focus should instead be placed on the Federal Reserve's mandates of trying to achieve maximum employment - defined by an unemployment rate of 4 percent or less - and an yearly inflation of 2 percent.

Following Powell's comments, the Labor Department reported that 943,000 new job positions were filled in July, bringing the unemployment rate down to 5.4 percent or less than 1.5 percent to the Federal Reserve's target for maximum employment.

Despite being in favor of tapering soon, Bostic cautioned about the unknowns from the Delta variant of the novel coronavirus and how it could impact the economy.

"If the Delta variant proves difficult, the taper may be delayed," he said.

The Atlanta Fed President also made clear that the United States should be well past the pandemic and the inflation contained at 2 percent before the Federal Reserve raises rates.

While he was currently expecting "a rate hike to start in 2022", Bostic reiterated that "prices must be closely monitored."

The US economy grew by an annualized rate of 6.5 percent in the second quarter of 2021, after a 3.5 percent contraction for all of 2020 due to coronavirus pandemic-related shutdowns and other disruptions. Inflation has been higher-than-expected in the near term as prices of almost everything have increased from the lows of the pandemic. The Personal Consumption Expenditure Index, the Federal Reserve's preferred inflation gauge, increased by 3.5 percent in the year to June - its most in 30 years.

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US Military Requires Troops to Get Coronavirus Vaccines By September 15 - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - Members of the US military will have to receive coronavirus vaccines by September 15, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said in a memorandum to soldiers, obtained by Associated Press on Monday.

"I will seek the president's approval to make the vaccines mandatory no later than mid-September, or immediately upon [licensure by the Food and Drug Administration]... whichever comes first," Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said in the memo. "I will not hesitate to act sooner or recommend a different course to the President if I feel the need to do so."

The announcement comes amid decisions by the Biden administration and governors to begin placing restrictions on state and federal employees who are unvaccinated or refuse to attest to their vaccination status. Private companies such as Google have likewise begun to re-implement extra restrictions on unvaccinated employees.

Austin said in the memorandum that service members will have the next several weeks to prepare to implement the vaccine mandate. The coronavirus shots will be added to the list of vaccinations that soldiers are required to get, which can number as high as 17 depending on where they serve.

More than 1 million service members have been fully vaccinated, according to the Defense Department.

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UN Reviewing Haiti's Request for Aid in Probe of Moise Assassination - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, August 9 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is looking at the letter sent by the Haiti government requesting assistance in the investigation into the killing of President Jovenel Moise and the forming of an international commission of inquiry, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Monday.

"We've received the letter which asks for assistance to the investigation of the assassination of the President and the prosecution of those who are responsible," Dujarric said during a press briefing. "We're taking a look at the letter, and that letter will be answered."

The letter from the Haitian Foreign Ministry to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres requested creating a special court to prosecute the alleged killers and masterminds, citing a similar act of 2005 following a terrorist attack in Lebanon that killed 22 people, including Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.

The United Nations has already deployed four police investigative advisers to support Haiti's Inspector General and the Judicial Police in probing Moise's assassination on July 7.

The decision to move forward with an international commission of inquiry or international tribunal into the killing will have to be taken by the UN Human Rights Council and the Security Council respectively, the bodies competent to undertaking such steps, Dujarric said.

The Haitian authorities have already detained more than 40 people, including 18 Colombian citizens and five US citizens, as well as four police officers who were allegedly involved in Moise's assassination. The current head of the Haitian government, Ariel Henry, expressed doubt those detained were responsible for the assassination.

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CIA Chief to Visit Israel, Palestine on Tuesday - Axios

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - Head of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Bill Burns will visit both Israel and Palestine this week, US media reported on Monday.

Burns will be in Israel on Tuesday for talks on Iran, Axios reported citing Israeli officials.

Burn then will head to Ramallah to meet with Palestinian Authority officials, according to the report.

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Afghan Violence Leaves 27 Children Dead, 136 Injured in Past 72 Hours - UNICEF

UNITED NATIONS, August 9 (Sputnik) - At least 27 children have been killed and 136 more injured in violence in Afghanistan over the past three days, UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) Executive Director Henrietta Fore said in a statement on Monday.

"UNICEF is shocked by the rapid escalation of grave violations against children in Afghanistan. In the last 72 hours, 20 children have been killed and 130 children have been injured in Kandahar province; 2 children were killed and 3 were injured in Khost province; and in Paktia province, 5 children were killed and 3 were injured," Fore said.

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US Job Openings at Record High of 10.1Mln in June - JOLTS Report

WASHINGTON, Aug 9 (Sputnik) - US job openings jumped to a record high of more than 10 million in June, Labor Department's Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS) released on Monday showed, in a further sign that there was more demand for workers than people available for jobs in an economy rebounding from COVID-19 disruptions.

The number of available jobs in June was 10.1 million versus May's revised tally of 9.5 million, according to the survey. Economists polled by US media had expected an opening of 9.27 million positions on average for June.

"On the overall headline, the rise above 10 million is the first ever and highlights the struggle companies are having to fill jobs," economist Adam Button said in a post on ForexLive. More than a year into the COVID-19 crisis, restoring job growth remains one of the biggest challenges of US policymakers.

The United States lost more than 21 million jobs between March and April 2020, at the height of business lockdowns forced by the coronavirus. At least 7 million of those lost jobs have yet to be filled with new positions, officials say.

At the same time, the Labor Department's non-farm payrolls report for July, released last week, showed an encouraging 943,000 new positions filled in July, bringing the unemployment rate down to 5.4 percent. Economists had projected just around 870,000 positions to be filled in July, and an unemployment rate of 5.7 percent.

The US economy shrank 3.5 percent in 2020 due to COVID-related disruptions. This year's rebound has been rather dynamic, with a 6.5 percent growth registered in the second quarter though that still lagged the 8.5 percent expected by economists.

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US Urges Belarusian Government to Engage in 'Genuine Dialogue' With Opposition - Blinken

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - The United States urges the Belarusian authorities to engaged in a "genuine dialogue" with opposition and hold free elections, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Monday.

"The United States once again calls on the Belarusian authorities to end the crackdown on members of civil society, the media, athletes, students, legal professionals and other citizens, immediately release all political prisoners, engage in a genuine dialogue with the democratic opposition and civil society, as called for in the OSCE Expert Mission report, and hold free and fair elections under international observation," Blinken said in a statement.

The secretary of state said the United States will continue working with the international community to hold to account those responsible for human rights violations and abuses in Belarus, as well as support human rights and fundamental freedoms in the country.

Earlier on Monday, the United States has imposed new sanctions against Belarus that target 23 Belorussian officials and 21 entities.

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Canada Reopens Border to US Citizens, Permanent Residents for First Time in Over 16 Months

TORONTO, August 9 (Sputnik) – Canada on Monday reopened its land border to US citizens and permanent citizens, who have been vaccinated against COVID-19, for the first time in over 16 months.

International travelers, including Americans, have been barred from entering Canada since March 2020.

"As of today, August 9th, US citizens and [permanent residents] who are fully vaccinated are able to enter Canada for non-essential travel," Transport Minister Omar Alghabra said in a statement via Twitter.

To enter Canada, US citizens and permanent citizens must provide proof that they have been inoculated with one of the vaccines approved by Ottawa and present a COVID-19 molecular test taken in the United States.

Unvaccinated children under the age of 12 will be exempt from Canada's quarantine requirements, the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) said in a travel advisory.

The agency also advised the would-be travelers to pack extra patience with them as the added passenger traffic is expected to create some pressure at points of entry.

It is uncertain when the Canadian government will open its doors to unvaccinated travelers after Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said last month that it will be "quite a while" before unimmunized foreigners will be granted entry into the country.

Meanwhile, there is no indication Canada's gesture will be reciprocated, with Washington rolling over existing restrictions from last month until August 21.

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US Sanctions Belaruskali OAO, National Olympic Committee, Entities in Tobacco, Energy

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - The United States has targeted fertilizer giant Belaruskali OAO, the country's National Olympic Committee as well as entities in tobacco, construction and energy sectors in its latest round of sanctions against Minsk, the White House said in a Fact Sheet on the Executive Order on Monday.

"Specifically, this E.O. expands the scope of the national emergency declared in E.O. 13405 of June 16, 2006, by authorizing the imposition of blocking sanctions on persons operating in certain identified sectors of the Belarus economy, including the defense and related materiel sector, security sector, energy sector, potassium chloride (potash) sector, tobacco products sector, construction sector, transportation sector, or any other sector of the Belarus economy as may be determined by the Secretary of the Treasury, in consultation with the Secretary of State," the White House said.

The White House in its Fact Sheet accused the Olympic Committee of facilitating money laundering, sanctions evasion as well as the circumvention of visa bans.

Moreover, the sanctions target prominent businesspeople who support the Belarusian President and 15 companies with which they are affiliated.

"Additional entities that operate in the tobacco products, construction, energy, and transportation sectors of the Belarus economy. Democratic countries are strongest when we stand together," it added.

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US Imposes New Sanctions Against Belarus Targeting 23 Individuals, 21 Entities - Treasury

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed new sanctions against Belarus that target 23 Belorussian officials and 21 entities, the US Treasury Department announced on Monday.

"The President has signed a new Executive Order blocking property of additional persons contributing to the situation in Belarus," the statement said.

The list includes the National Olympic Committee of Belarus, the country's investigative committee, as well as the Belaruskali company that produces potash fertilizers, among others. All the above mentioned entities are linked to the Belorussian government.

"We stand with the people of Belarus and will continue to use every tool available, including the new sanctions authority the President signed today, to hold the Lukashenka [Belorussian President Alexander Lukashenko] regime to account for its human rights abuses, corruption, and attacks on democracy. Together with our Canadian and British partners, today we are demonstrating continued international condemnation of the Lukashenka regime's undemocratic actions," Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said.

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Canada Imposes New Sanctions on 'Key Sectors' of Belarus Economy - Global Affairs

TORONTO, August 9 (Sputnik) - Canada is imposing new sanctions on Belarus by targeting sectors vital to the country's economy in hopes of minimizing Minsk's access to international markets, Global Affairs Canada said in a statement on Monday.

"Marc Garneau, Minister of Foreign Affairs, today announced new sanctions under the Special Economic Measures Act in response to the ongoing, gross and systematic violations of human rights in Belarus. These new measures impose restrictions on key sectors of the Belarusian economy and minimize Belarusian state actors' access to international finance," the statement said.

The sectors affected by Ottawa's sanctions include transferable securities and money market instruments, debt financing, insurance and reinsurance, petroleum products and potassium chloride products, the statement said.

The sanctions, in response to alleged human rights violations, are being administered in conjunction with the international partners, the statement added. The United Kingdom introduced a new package of trade, financial and aviation sanctions on Belarus just hours earlier.

The fifth round of sanctions against Minsk - Ottawa has already imposed sanctions against 72 Belarusian officials and five entities under the Special Economic Measures Act – coincides with the re-election Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, which Western nations, including Canada, have denounced as fraudulent.

Lukashenko said the United Kingdom is "nothing more than a US sidekick, but the country's government has not publicly commented on Canada's sanctions.

Belarus has been beset by Western aggression and sanctions since the country's opposition first organized protests following Lukashenko's re-election in August of 2020. The opposition continues to insist that its candidate, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, won the election.

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Biden Signs Executive Order Imposing New Belarus Sanctions- White House

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden has signed an executive order targeting Belarus with a new round of sanctions in tandem with Canada and the United Kingdom.

"I, JOSEPH R. BIDEN JR., President of the United States of America, hereby expand the scope of the national emergency declared in Executive Order 13405 of June 16, 2006 (Blocking Property of Certain Persons Undermining Democratic Processes or Institutions in Belarus), finding that the Belarusian regime's harmful activities and long-standing abuses aimed at

suppressing democracy and the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Belarus," the order, released by the White House, said. "Such as the elimination of political opposition and civil society organizations and the regime's disruption and endangering of international civil air travel - constitute an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States."

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Bipartisan Congress Members Press Pentagon for Information on Kenya Terror Attack - Letter

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - Congress members Stephen Lynch and Glenn Grothman, the top Republican and Democrat on the US House National Security Subcommittee, on Monday sent a letter to Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin asking him for details on a January 5 terror attack in Kenya that killed three Americans.

"[Lynch and Grothman] sent a letter to Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin demanding information about the January 5, 2020, terrorist attack against US personnel at Cooperative Security Location Manda Bay, Kenya, which resulted in the deaths of three American citizens," the US House Committee on Oversight and Reform said in a press release.

US Army Specialist Henry Mayfield and Defense Department contractors Bruce Triplett and Dustin Harrison were killed in the attack, the release noted. Lynch, a Democrat, is chairman of the subcommittee and Grothman, a Republican, is his party's ranking member on it, the release noted.

"It is simply unacceptable for the Department to withhold information from Congress about a terrorist attack that killed three American citizens. Congress has a solemn constitutional duty to conduct oversight of US military operations ... especially when a terrorist attack claims the lives of American citizens overseas," the letter said.

Following the attack, US Africa Command (AFRICOM) carried out an Army Regulation 15-6 investigation, which was completed in April, but the Defense Department has refused to produce the investigation report to the subcommittee, according to the release.

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Seven of Starliner Spacecraft's 13 Jammed Propulsion Valves Working Again – Boeing

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) – Seven of the Starliner Spacecraft's 13 propulsion valves that jammed last week during a pre-launch check are now working properly again, the prime contractor Boeing announced on Monday.

Boeing last week saw two launch dates scrapped over last-minute issues involving the propulsion system in its Starliner spacecraft, set to deliver its second experimental unmanned cargo delivery to the International Space Station.

"This weekend, Boeing restored functionality on more of the 13 CST-100 Starliner propulsion system valves that did not open as designed during pre-launch system checks last week," the company said in a press release.

Boeing has completed physical inspections and chemical sampling on the exterior of a number of the affected valves, which indicated no signs of damage or external corrosion. Test teams are now applying mechanical, electrical and thermal techniques to prompt the valves open, the company stated.

"Seven of the 13 valves are now operating as designed, with inspection and remediation of the remaining affected valves to be performed in the days ahead. Boeing is working on a systematic plan to open the affected valves, demonstrate repeatable system performance, and verify the root cause of the issue," it said.

Boeing is also assessing multiple launch opportunities for Starliner to finally carry out its repeatedly delayed Orbital Flight Test-2 (OFT-2) mission in August and will work with NASA and United Launch Alliance to confirm those dates when the spacecraft is ready, the company said.

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Convicted Spy Paul Whelan Spoke to Parents By Phone From Moscow Jail - Family

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - US citizen Paul Whelan, who is serving a 16-year prison sentence in Russia after being convicted of espionage, was able to talk with his parents by telephone, the Whelan family said on Monday.

"Paul was able to speak with our parents over this past weekend," the Whelan family said in a statement, adding that he still can not call his lawyers or the US embassy in Moscow.

During the conversation, Paul described to his parents an example of how he communicates with the prison authorities, the statement said.

"Paul was asked to go to the prison administration building, which prisoners can't normally go to," the statement said.

However, upon returning back, Paul was given an infraction for having responded to the order to go to the administration building the first time, the statement added.

Last Wednesday, British diplomats visited Whelan in prison and said that he appears healthy, according to the statement.

Paul Whelan, who is a citizen of Canada, Ireland and the United Kingdom, has maintained he is innocent of the charges leveled against him and has insisted he came to Russia to attend a friend's wedding. Court papers have revealed that he has frequented Russia since 2007.

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Biden's Democrat Allies in Congress Propose \$3.5 Trillion US Budget Framework

WASHINGTON, Aug 9 (Sputnik) - Democratic lawmakers in the US Congress aligned to President Joe Biden released on Monday a \$3.5 trillion budget framework meant to provide more funds for education, family care, housing and climate change as well as to create jobs. "By making education, health care, child care, and housing more affordable, we can give tens of millions of families a leg up," US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said in a letter to other lawmakers. "By making investments in infrastructure, we can create tens of thousands of good paying jobs. And by finally tackling climate change, we can spare our country and our planet the most devastating effects of global warming."

The plan does not yet have the support of the Republicans and could face resistance from those opposed to policies of the Biden administration when put to a vote in Congress.

Schumer appeared to acknowledge that possibility and said Democrats are "carefully coordinating our work on the budget with our House colleagues." He also said the target date for a resolution was September 15.

Democrats in the past have used a process called "reconciliation" to pass bills without the threat of a Republican filibuster. Republicans have routinely rejected plans for additional spending, accusing the White House and Democrats of wasteful and reckless management of the US economy.

While Democrats have been successful previously with the reconciliation process, the unanimous agreement required among them to pass any bill may be at risk now, with some moderates in the party signaling they may withhold their support.

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US Announces \$165Mln in New Humanitarian Assistance for Yemen - US Special Envoy

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - Washington will donate \$165 million in additional humanitarian assistance to the conflict-stricken Yemen, US Special Envoy for the country Tim Lenderking announced during a briefing on Monday.

"The US is announcing today \$165 million in additional humanitarian assistance for Yemen," he said.

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US Settles With Keysight Technologies for \$6.6Mln Over Arms Export Violations -State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) – The US Department of State has reached a \$6.6 million settlement agreement with Keysight Technologies Inc. over alleged technical data and software export violations, the department said on Monday.

"The Department of State has concluded an administrative settlement with Keysight Technologies, Inc. (Keysight) of Santa Rosa, California, to resolve alleged violations of the Arms

Export Control Act (AECA)... and the International Traffic in Arms Regulations," the department said in a release. "Under the terms of the 36-month Consent Agreement, Keysight will pay a civil penalty of \$6,600,000."

The export violations involved unauthorized exports of technical data and software used for testing radar equipment on fixed or mobile platforms, the release said. No additional details as to the nature of the violations were given.

The amount of penalty can be decreased by \$2,500,000 on the premise that the funds will be used for the sake of the department-approved consent agreement remedial compliance measures, the department added.

Moreover, Keysight is obliged to hire an outside special compliance officer for two years and to conduct an external audit to assess its compliance program during the consent agreement, according to the release.

The company was not debarred or blacklisted by the department since it submitted acknowledging the violations disclosure, implemented remedial compliance measures, and signed a statute of limitations agreement, the release noted.

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New US Sanctions Against Russia Unacceptable, Contradict Geneva Summit Spirit - Antonov

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - Moscow considers the new US sanctions against Russia unacceptable and in contradiction with the spirit of the Geneva summit between the two countries' presidents, Russian Ambassador to United States Anatoly Antonov said in a statement on Monday.

Earlier in the day, the US State Department imposed nonproliferation sanctions on three Russian organizations.

"The US administration continues to escalate the situation artificially. Having arrogated to itself the right to judge and punish all 'the unwanted,' it again follows the path of introducing unilateral restrictions in circumvention of international law and the UN Security Council," Antonov said.

"We consider this approach unacceptable and fundamentally contradicting the 'spirit of Geneva,' as well as efforts to stabilize relations between the two countries."

Antonov emphasized that the latest move by the United States against Russia undermines the prospects for any constructive interaction between the two countries.

"Such actions of Washington by contrast increasingly push back the prospects for any constructive interaction," he said.

Antonov also said that while announcing the decisions to impose sanctions on certain Russian enterprises, "Washington is asking us to take for granted that these firms allegedly violated American non-proliferation rules."

"As usual, no evidence is provided to the Russian side," he added.

The latest US sanctions targeted Asia-Invest LLC, Charter Green Light Moscow (CGLM) and NPP Pulsar LLC as well as any successor, sub-unit or subsidiary of these organizations, according to the US Federal Register.

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New US Anti-Russia Sanctions 'Push Back' Prospects for Constructive Interaction - Antonov

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - The new sanctions the United States has imposed on Russia increasingly "push back" the prospects for a constructive interaction between the two countries, Russian Ambassador to United States Anatoly Antonov said in a statement on Monday.

"Such actions of Washington by contrast increasingly push back the prospects for any constructive interaction," Antonov said.

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Canada Imposes New Sanctions on 'Key Sectors' of Belarus Economy - Global Affairs

TORONTO, August 9 (Sputnik) – Canada is imposing new sanctions on sectors vital to the Belarusian economy aimed at minimizing Minsk's access to international markets, Global Affairs Canada said in a statement on Monday.

"Marc Garneau, Minister of Foreign Affairs, today announced new sanctions under the Special Economic Measures Act in response to the ongoing, gross and systematic violations of human rights in Belarus. These new measures impose restrictions on key sectors of the Belarusian

economy and minimize Belarusian state actors' access to international finance," the statement read.

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US Confident Iran Responsible for Mercer Attack, Calls for Accountability - Blinken

UNITED NATIONS, August 9 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Monday Washington was confident Iran bears responsibility for the attack on Mercer Street vessel that took place off the coast of Oman last month and called on the international community to hold Tehran accountable.

"Upon review of the available information, we are confident that Iran conducted this unjustified attack which is part of a pattern of attacks and other provocative behavior. These actions threaten freedom of navigation through this crucial waterway, international shipping and commerce and the lives of people on the vessels involved," Blinken said.

"It is on all of our nations to hold accountable those responsible," he said.

The Japanese-owned Liberian-flagged merchant vessel managed by Israeli-owned Zodiac Maritime was attacked on July 29, which resulted in the death of two crew members, nationals of the United Kingdom and Romania.

On Wednesday, Israel said that Saeed Ara Jani, the head of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' UAV Command, was behind the air attack on the ship.

UK Ambassador to the United Nations Barbara Woodward also said last week Iran was behind the attack, adding that London will seek to hold Tehran accountable over its alleged involvement.

Iran denied all the accusations.

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US Imposes Nonproliferation Sanctions on 3 Russian Organizations - State Dept

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - The US State Department has imposed nonproliferation sanctions on three Russian organizations, the US State Department has announced. The information was released on the US Federal Register, the official journal of the US federal government.

"thereof; Asia-Invest LLC (Russia) and any successor, sub-unit, or subsidiary thereof; Charter Green Light Moscow (CGLM) (Russia) and any successor, sub-unit ... sub-unit, or subsidiary thereof; NPP Pulsar LLC (Russia) and any successor, sub-unit, or subsidiary," the statement said.

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US Joint Intelligence Community Council Meets to Discuss 'Havana Syndrome' - ODNI

WASHINGTON, August 9 (Sputnik) - High-level US intelligence officials met to discuss the set of health incidents affecting US diplomats and military personnel abroad known as the "Havana syndrome," the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) said on Monday.

"Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines late Friday convened the Joint Intelligence Community Council (JICC) to promote and strengthen coordinated Intelligence Community support to the existing interagency efforts to address anomalous health incidents (AHI) affecting US government personnel and their families," the statement said.

The participants in the meeting agreed to support the National Security Council-led interagency efforts to address the incidents and said determining its cause is a top priority, the statement said. They also highlighted an importance of providing high-level care to those affected and preventing such incidents in the future, it added.

"The participants also made clear that they will support those affected by AHI to ensure they are believed, heard, and respected, and will work together, including through the sharing of relevant information and by following agreed, standardized medical protocols," the statement said.

US diplomats were first diagnosed with the Havana syndrome in Cuba in 2016 and then in China in 2018. The diplomats said they experienced piercing sounds that have caused longer-term health effects. US diplomats in Russia, Tajikistan, Austria and in several African countries have also reported to have experienced Havana syndrome symptoms, such as nausea and dizziness.

The US government initially blamed Russia for what it said were "acoustic attacks," but the allegations have been dismissed by Moscow as being totally absurd. In July, CIA Director William Burns said Russia may be responsible for the incidents, but the US government lacks sufficient proof to have a final determination.

