

08/23/21 Monday

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Internal Probe Clears of Wrongdoing US Capitol Police Officer Who Shot Ashli Babbitt on January 6
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

In the aftermath of the January 6 storming of the US Capitol by supporters of then-US President Donald Trump, the US Capitol Police investigated 35 officers' actions and disciplined six. Video from the event showed several instances of fraternization and even aiding the rioters entry and navigation of the legislature.

The US Capitol Police (USCP) Office of Professional Responsibility announced Monday that an officer who shot a woman outside the House chamber during the January 6 insurrection would face no internal discipline for the incident.

The [Monday statement](#) says the review found the officer's action "lawful and within Department policy," noting those policies state that "an officer may use deadly force only when the officer reasonably believes that action is in the defense of human life, including the officer's own life, or in the defense of any person in immediate danger of serious physical injury."

"The actions of the officer in this case potentially saved Members [of Congress] and staff from serious injury and possible death from a large crowd of rioters who forced their way into the US Capitol and to the House Chamber where Members and staff were steps away. USCP Officers had barricaded the Speaker's Lobby with furniture before a rioter shattered the glass door. If the doors were breached, the rioters would have immediate access to the House Chambers."

The US Department of Justice had [previously cleared](#) the officer of criminal wrongdoing in April, claiming prosecutors would be unable to prove the officer had acted "willfully" to violate the law or had deprived Babbitt of a constitutionally protected right.

Ashli Babbitt, a 35-year-old retired Air Force veteran from California, was part of the mob that broke into the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, shortly after a "Stop the Steal" rally hosted by then-US President Donald Trump outside the White House. While Trump was later acquitted in an impeachment trial of having encouraged his followers to storm the Capitol, the message at the rally was nonetheless one calling for a stop to Congress' certification of the results of the November 2021 election, which was then underway. Trump claimed he hadn't lost the election, as Democratic candidate Joe Biden had only won due to fraud.

Four others in addition to Babbitt, [were also killed](#) during the attack on the Capitol, including a USCP officer. Although the entry of hundreds of rioters into the Capitol temporarily dispersed Congress and sent lawmakers scrambling to safety, the riot ultimately failed at its goal, and the building was soon cleared and the election results certified. More than 20,000 US troops then garrisoned Washington, DC, through Biden's inauguration several weeks later, with the last national guardsmen only leaving in late May.

While she died a strong Trump supporter, [Babbitt had been](#) a Democrat before the real estate mogul took office in 2017, when she became a believer in the QAnon conspiracy theory

movement, which holds that Trump is locked in battle with a cabal of Satan-worshipping pedophile Democrats who he will one day vanquish.

When she was shot inside the Capitol on January 6, she was among a group of rioters who were attempting to bash their way through the shatter-resistant glass on the barricaded doors outside the House chamber. [Videos captured](#) by several of the rioters show several USCP officers on the other side of the doors, one of whom is mostly hidden from view but whose pistol can be plainly seen.

While some of the rioters notice the gun and can be heard calling out to others about the weapon, Babbitt was seemingly undeterred, and when she was shot in the shoulder she was attempting to climb through a busted-out window. The single gunshot brought pause to the dozens of rioters outside, and they rushed to take care of the wounded Babbitt. When she arrived at the hospital, she was declared dead.

"His bravery on January 6 was nothing short of heroic," Mark E. Schamel, the attorney representing the officer in question, said of his client in an April statement to the [Washington Post](#). "He stopped the rioters from gaining entry into the Speaker's Lobby and saved the lives of countless members of Congress and the rioters. His heroism should be no surprise to those who know him."

Her husband, Aarton Babbitt, [sued the DC Metropolitan](#) Police Department in June in an attempt to get information about the officer who shot Ashli, including the officer's name. Trump has made the demand for answers part of his rallying cries at public appearances since the failed insurrection.

"Who shot Ashli Babbitt? Why are they keeping that secret?" Trump asked during a July interview on Fox News Channel's Maria Bartiromo. "Who was the person that shot an innocent, wonderful, incredible woman, a military woman? Right in the head, and there's no repercussions. If that were on the other side, it would be the biggest story in this country." "They're protecting that person," Trump continued. "I've heard also that it was the head of security for a certain high official - a Democrat - so we'll see, because it's gonna come out."

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Iran Boasts Newest Version of Bavar-373 Air Defense System is Better Than Russia's S-400 by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

In 2019, Iranian Brig. Gen. Shahrokh Shahram, then head of the defense ministry's Organisation of Electronic Industries, said the Bavar-373 exceeded the capabilities of the US' Patriot air defense system and even the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD), although he was nonspecific as to which version of the Patriot its performance exceeded.

Iran's newest version of the Bavar-373 is an even more effective air defense system than the Russian-made S-400 Triumf system, according to an Iranian defense leader.

"New editions of the Bavar-373 are coming and soon, a new edition that may be at the same or higher level than S400 will be unveiled," Iranian Deputy Defense Minister Brig. Gen. Mahdi Farahi said during a Sunday television interview.

According to Iran's [Tasnim News Agency](#), the former Aerospace Industries Organization chief also said that the country had developed a new type of liquid rocket fuel that's as stable as solid fuel. Typically, solid fuels are placed in rockets that must be ready to fire at a moment's notice, but with the disadvantage that the fuel is less efficient than liquid fuel. Stable liquid fuel would give Iranian missiles a faster firing time and speed while making them lighter at the same time. The Bavar-373 was Iran's answer to an export ban by Russia on its S-300 surface-to-air missile system until 2015. The domestically developed system employs multiple radars for detecting up to 300 targets at a time, tracking 60 of them, and engaging six, and can punch through many types of jamming.

Ironically, the Bavar-373's projectile, the Sayyad-4 missile, is an improved version of a reverse-engineered Standard Missile-1 (SM-1) sold to Iran by the United States prior to the 1979 Islamic Revolution that threw out the Western-backed shah and ushered the present government into power. It has a range of up to 210 kilometers and can approach hypersonic speeds.

That will have to be considerably improved upon if the new version is to outperform the S-400, which can hit targets some 400 kilometers out when using the ultra-long-range [40N6E missiles](#). However, if it can indeed do so, then Iran could have a viable weapon for shooting down low-altitude satellites, or ballistic missiles in their midcourse phase.

In June, Dmitry Shugayev, the director of the Russian Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation, said that [Tehran was interested](#) in several Russian-made weapons systems, with Iran's then defense minister, Brig. Gen. Amir Hatami, having [inspected an S-400](#) at the ARMY-2020 military expo outside Moscow the previous August.

Since October 2020, international sanctions against Iran that blocked it from buying weapons abroad expired, but if Tehran were to buy S-400s from Russia, it would open them up to new sanctions from the US under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA). India, China, and Turkey have had to wrestle with similar restrictions when buying S-400s.

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China Reports Zero New Local COVID Cases Weeks After New Lockdowns as US Cases Continue to Skyrocket
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

As hospitalized COVID-19 cases rise to record numbers in the US, the number of children being admitted has reached an all-time high as well, even before schools started returning to class, shattering an early belief that the virus either didn't infect or cause serious cases in children. On Monday, the Chinese National [Health Commission \(NHC\) reported](#) no new local cases of COVID-19, signaling that the country's efforts over the past month to halt spread of the disease have been successful. Meanwhile, in the US, cases continue to rise at a rate comparable to the winter of 2020-2021, the worst period of the pandemic for the US thus far.

The NHC reported 21 new COVID-19 cases on Monday, all of which arrived in China from abroad, signaling an effective end to the outbreak that began six weeks ago, when seven people infected with the Delta variant arrived in Nanjing on a plane from Moscow.

China has vaccinated a higher percentage of its population against COVID-19 than the United States, but unlike the US, [Beijing isn't relying](#) on vaccines to blunt the spread of the ultra-infective Delta variant, which can in some cases "break through" the vaccine and infect inoculated people.

[As Sputnik reported](#), Beijing quickly began limiting travel into and out of infected cities, and in places where multiple cases were detected, officials [ordered residents home](#) and implemented mass testing to track down all possible cases. Meanwhile, warehouse staffers worked overtime to ship daily goods to residents' doors to help them weather the lockdown. In some cities, residents were tested close to a dozen times.

"Although China's current policy is characterised by a high degree of disruption as well as cost, a suite of effective measures has been established, which I don't think will be abandoned easily," Chen Zhengming, professor of epidemiology at the University of Oxford, [told Reuters](#), adding that some of the measures have included "inspections at customs, quarantine, the mobilisation of communities, mass testing, etc, one round, two rounds, and then three rounds - China has grown accustomed to them."

In all, China's Delta variant outbreak has been limited to about 1,200 cases, but their spread across 50 cities and 17 provinces presented one of the country's biggest challenges yet in keeping the population safe from a general outbreak of the virus.

In reporting on the outbreak, Bloomberg referred to China's success as "[a month of draconian curbs](#)," suggesting the restrictions were overbearing in their application. However, a contrast with the ongoing outbreak in the United States is a testament to their necessity.

On the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([CDC](#)) [website](#) on Monday, the most recent data available, from August 20, showed 157,450 new cases nationwide. The last time the US had that many cases [was in late January](#), as cases declined from their all-time highs in the US of nearly 300,000 daily cases weeks earlier.

That peak was reached because as cases exploded in November and December, US states began imposing new social restrictions, shuttering offices and placing strict limits on indoor interactions that interrupted the virus' spread, all of which came at a time when many Americans were still working from home instead of commuting to the office. However, new social restrictions in response to the explosion of US cases since early July have been few and far between, with the Biden administration urging Americans [to get vaccinated](#) and wear masks. On Monday, the US Food and Drug Administration gave its [long-anticipated full approval](#) of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, upgrading it from the emergency use status that has underpinned US administering of the vaccine, as well as the two others in use in the US made by Moderna and Johnson & Johnson. The news was accompanied by a wave of new vaccination mandates by large corporations and government agencies, including the [entire US military](#).

At the extreme "red meat ideology" end, as Miami Beach Mayor [Dan Gelber referred](#) to Florida Governor Ron DeSantis' anti-mask crusade, several Republican governors have opposed COVID-19 safety measures to score political points. The situation has created a set of legal showdowns as cities and towns in Florida, Texas and other states with mandate bans flout executive orders in order to keep their residents safe, and the US Department of Education

recently signaled it would [pursue action against](#) mask mandate bans and other measures as it would violations of students' civil rights.

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Pakistan, Iran Triangulate Pressuring Taliban to End Terrorist Support, Build Inclusive Afghan Gov

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi is set to begin a regional tour on Tuesday, beginning with neighboring Iran, where he will meet with his counterpart, Mohammad Javad Zarif, with the new Taliban government in Afghanistan at the top of their agenda. It's just the last in a flurry of diplomatic coordination on the issue.

At a [Monday press conference](#), Qureshi said that it was important for regional powers to help ensure a stable future for Afghanistan after the Taliban's sudden seizure of power last week, noting peace in the war-torn country "is inevitable for its neighbors and neighboring countries." Earlier this month, the Taliban's lightning offensive in the face of a negotiated US withdrawal was crowned by the peaceful surrender of Kabul as Ashraf Ghani, the now-exiled president, fled to the United Arab Emirates. US and Afghan officials had said they expected the city to hold out for at least another month, so the city's sudden surrender sent nations around the globe scrambling for a united policy on the new Taliban government, which is known for its extremely strict interpretation of Sunni Islam and for harboring terrorist groups like al-Qaeda and the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM).

Meanwhile, the Taliban has promised to build a more inclusive government, refuse to allow terrorist groups to use Afghanistan to attack other nations, and to ban the [cultivation of opium](#). However, amid the broad promises, regional powers have looked to build positive encouragement for the Taliban to follow through in the hopes that some sort of stability might be achieved after 40 years of almost-nonstop war.

Taliban leaders have already promised the US not to support al-Qaeda and China not to support the ETIM, but on Monday, Pakistani Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid said the Afghan Taliban had also reassured Islamabad it would not give refuge to Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), a similar group on the Pakistani side of the border.

"The related authorities there have been told that those who have done terrorism in Pakistan" are controlled, Rashid said, according to Pakistani [daily paper Dawn](#). "The Afghan Taliban have reassured [us] that Afghanistan's land will not be allowed to be used in any case by the TTP."

'No Military Solution'

The US occupation of Afghanistan, slated to end next week, began in October 2001 after al-Qaeda used Taliban-ruled Afghanistan as a base from which to plan and execute the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks against the US. The Taliban, themselves former US clients used to overthrow the socialist Democratic Republic of Afghanistan and frustrate the stability efforts of the DRA's Soviet allies, were quickly overthrown by the US invasion. However, the

Taliban reorganized and mounted a new insurgency against US forces and the new Afghan government they set up. Last week's triumph marks the final success of that 18-year campaign. At his weekly press conference on Monday, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson [Saeed Khatibzadeh said](#) there is no military solution to the Afghan civil war, and called on all parties to seize the opportunity created by the withdrawal of US and its allied forces from Afghanistan to "form an inclusive government with good relations with the neighbors."

His point of view was echoed by Amina Khan, director of the Centre for Afghanistan, Middle East and Africa (CAMEA) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI), at a Monday forum.

According to Iran's [Islamic Republic News Agency](#), Khan said Tehran "shares a consolidated view with its neighbors over Afghanistan, entailing regional ownership, recognition of an inclusive political settlement, and role of the Taliban as a major component of a peaceful settlement, as well as curbing transnational terrorist groups like the Daesh," which, like al-Qaeda and the Taliban, are extremely hostile to Shiite Muslims and have massacred Shiites in Iraq and Syria.

"If a Taliban government wants to be successful, they have learned that it is important for their legitimacy to get recognition from the international community," Professor Amin Saikal, adjunct professor of social sciences at the University of Western Australia, said at the conference.

"Hence, Iranians will be watching the formation of the government closely and whether the minority Shia population of Afghanistan will have representation in the government."

As [Sputnik reported](#), last week several Chinese diplomats held talks with their counterparts in Iran and Pakistan that amounted to essentially the same position, and Chinese troops carried out counterterrorism drills with [their Tajik counterparts](#).

An essential component of their position is that regional economic integration would encourage stable rule in Afghanistan - something the former Afghan government also pursued, attempting to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. With Iran poised to become its newest member, Afghanistan will be all but surrounded by members of the political, economic and military bloc and would stand to benefit enormously from the infrastructure projects its neighbors would want to pursue in the name of regional integration.

Former Taliban Rival Urges Plurality

Within Afghanistan, the same message is being spread by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a warlord who, with US backing, fought against the socialist Afghan government in the 1980s before contesting rule of the country with the Taliban in the 1990s. He later made an attempted foray into electoral politics under the US occupation. Hekmatyar has formed [part of a peace council](#) representing what remains of the US-backed Afghan government alongside the former Afghan reconciliation chief, Abdullah Abdullah, and former Afghan President Hamid Karzai.

"Such a government could stop further bloodshed in Afghanistan and steer the war-ravaged country out of the present crisis," the Hizb-i-Islami [founder told AFP](#) in an interview.

"The Afghans are tired of the long conflict and fighting, and now they want to bring peace and stability to their country and collectively work for its reconstruction and progress," Hekmatyar said, encouraging the Taliban to build a government of national unity that would have the support of the country's many ethnic groups.

The assertion is highly opportunist, given that Hekmatyar is widely known as the ["butcher of Kabul"](#) after he bombarded the city relentlessly in 1992 during the civil war, killing up to 50,000

people, and [shares many positions](#) with the Taliban, including that Sunni jurisprudence should dominate the country and that throwing acid in women's faces is an acceptable response to them being seen in public.

He added that while intra-Afghan talks had so far failed to yield a solution and might not now, "the US and other forces have no right to interfere in the issue. It is the sole prerogative of the Afghan people to decide about their future."

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'Untrue & Absurd': Cuomo Rep Slams 'Ill-Informed Source' Who Claimed Governor Abandoned His Dog
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

The embattled New York governor has been the focus of monthslong controversy after a bevy of former and current staffers accused him of sexual harassment, eventually forcing his resignation. Although the official has a few hours left in his governorship, he is now at the center of renewed backlash after it was reported he deserted his dog.

A representative for New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo (D) has lashed out at reports detailing that the disgraced public official had committed another misstep by abandoning his dog at the executive mansion in Albany.

Richard Azzopardi, who serves as the senior adviser and spokesperson for Cuomo, blasted the allegations as being "untrue" and wholly "absurd" after detailing that the story was being spun out of control.

Cuomo's dog Captain is a three-year-old rescue he adopted in 2018. The so-called "high-strung" pup is said to be a mix of a shepherd, Malamute and Siberian husky.

The official told the [Times Union](#), which initially broke the story, that Cuomo had only inquired among his staffers whether any were interested in a "temporary" caretaking position that would see Captain housed for the duration of Cuomo's looming vacation.

"Captain is part of the governor's family and for your nameless ill-informed source to imply they've been trying to give him away is untrue," Azzopardi said in a statement to the outlet.

"Someone offered to watch him for a few days while the transition was ongoing but for that to be weaponized, and morph from a game of telephone into the pages of your paper is absurd.

The statement was wrapped with a sharp final sentence that read, "Now excuse us, we're preparing for a major storm." The Empire State was one of many US states in the New England region that was set to be slammed by tropical storm Henri.

In a separate conversation, Azzopardi had underscored that the Cuomo family "loves" Captain, and that they had no intention of giving him up.

"This nameless source is crazy," he'd said at the time.

Reports of Captain being ditched by Cuomo and company surfaced on Sunday - just a day before Cuomo's last day as governor of the Empire State drew closer. The allegations were backed by a pair of unidentified sources who spilled the beans to Brendan Lyons, a journalist who serves as the managing editor for the Times Union.

While no names were divulged, Lyons did indicate in his reporting that the two individuals were enlisted in the New York State Police, which also happens to offer a seizable troop number as part of the governor's security detail.

The two sources had informed Lyons that Cuomo had been asking a variety of staff members whether they would be interested in taking care of Captain. Although one staffer decided to take Captain home, the match did not stick as the pup was brought back to the executive mansion in Albany after a "few days."

While Azzopardi refuted the allegations, not everyone warmly accepted the explanation. In fact, many across social media offered to take in the pooch.

Even Donald Trump Jr. got in on the mix, [tweeting](#) out to his 6.9 million followers that Cuomo only rescued Captain for the "political optics and photo ops."

Concerns about Captain's well-being reached such a level that even the head of the New York State Animal Protection Federation (NYSAPF) weighed in on the reports and told the New York Post that the organization would be "ready to help" in rehoming Captain.

"I read with disbelief in this morning's Times Union, that Captain, Governor Cuomo's dog, had been left at the Executive Mansion after Cuomo's belongings had been moved out of the Eagle Street building," NYSAPF executive director Libby Post told the outlet, noting that the group would also be able to connect Captain with a behavior specialist to address his history of "nipping" issues.

"Captain deserves better. He will be welcomed with open arms (and paws) into one of our shelters."

The latest developments came as Cuomo issued his official [farewell address](#) to New Yorkers, telling the public that "intense political pressure and media frenzy" had prompted a "rush to judgement" against him. He also took the opportunity to fight back "because it is unfair and unjust in my mind."

Cuomo's governorship officially expires Monday at 11:59 p.m. local time. He will be succeeded by [Kathy Hochul](#), who presently serves as the state's lieutenant governor.

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Videos: Israeli Aircraft Strike Gaza After Incendiary Balloons Spark Fires in Israel
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Earlier, reports detailed that incendiary balloons deployed by Hamas had prompted the break out of several fires within the Kissufium and Be'eri forests. Blazes amounted to about a dozen, as officials worked to extinguish the flames.

The Israel Defense Forces has reportedly launched its latest strikes against the Gaza Strip after earlier incendiary balloons launched by Hamas had prompted the outbreak of multiple fires along the Gaza-Israel border.

Reports of the late Monday strikes indicate that IDF aircraft struck near Jabaliya, Zeitoun and Khan Younis, with Hamas' al-Qadisiyah site being zeroed in on. It's believed that at least five missiles have been deployed by the IDF.

The Israel Defense Forces confirmed the strikes nearly two hours after reports first surfaced, explaining in a [Twitter post](#) that their actions stemmed from the "firing of incendiary balloons into Israeli territory today."

" [The balloons] proved once again that the Hamas terrorist organization continues to lead and degenerate the Gaza Strip into a terrorist policy," reads a translated post. "The IDF will continue to respond strongly to terrorist attempts and considers the Hamas terrorist organization to be responsible for everything that happens in the Gaza Strip."

It was further noted that the targets included a "Hamas weapons production site" in Khan Younis, a "terrorist tunnel shaft" in Jabalya and an "underground rocket launching station located in the hear of a civilian population in Shaja'iya, near a school."

Officials have since shared aerial footage of the various strikes that were conducted overnight. No reports of fatalities or injuries have surfaced as of yet.

Dramatic video shared on social media have captured the exact moment in which explosions sounded off in the targeted areas.

Reports have also detailed that anti-aircraft weapons have been tapped by Hamas factions in retaliation against Israeli aircraft. Similar measures were previously taken the week prior, however, the Times of Israel [reported](#) that machine gun fires locked in on Israeli aircraft had actually caused damages to buildings in Sderot.

The latest by Israeli officials come as investigators with Israel's Fire and Rescue Services concluded that at least nine fires had been ignited by incendiary balloons that had been sent across the Gaza-Israeli border.

As of late, tensions between Israeli and Hamas forces have spike, but none the likes of the 11-day conflict that garnered worldwide attention in May. Some experts have warned that Gaza and Israel may soon resume such hostilities.

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Fox News Must Apologize to First Lady for 'Trash' Talk Over Afghan Crisis, Press Sec Says by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

No stranger to dishing the heat on the Biden administration, Fox News kicked things up a notch and went after the first lady over the weekend in their efforts to renew criticism against the first family. Stirring up the backlash is weekend host Rachel Campos-Duffy, who has long been a critic of the Biden White House - even before the inauguration.

The Fox News network and weekend host Rachel Campos-Duffy needs to issue an apology to first lady Jill Biden after the news personality accused Biden of having "failed" the US by allowing her husband to run for president, the first lady's press secretary said Monday.

Michael LaRosa, who serves as the White House press secretary for Biden, took the news network to task on Twitter and referred to Campos-Duffy's remarks as being "disgusting" and only worth being thrown in the trash.

"This is disgusting," LaRosa [wrote](#) about the network and contributor's on-air remarks.

"@RCamposDuffy and @FoxNews know better. They can do better and their viewers deserve better."

"I hope they'll apologize to the First Lady and leave this kind of talk in the [trash] where it belongs," he added, using the trash can emoji.

The controversial remarks spoken by Campos Duffy came during the end of the weekend "Fox & Friends" segment, when the trio of contributors were discussing US President Joe Biden's falling poll figures in light of the chaotic pullout from Afghanistan.

At the time, Campos-Duffy was specifically questioning who was "responsible" for putting the "incompetent" and "mentally frail" American president in office. She initially laid some blame on the media, former national security adviser Susan Rice, and former US President Barack Obama, before going in for the first lady.

"I'm sorry, as a political spouse, I can't help but look at Jill Biden," Campos-Duffy [said](#), noting her marriage to former Rep. Sean Duffy (R-WI), who also happens to be an avid backer of the Trump administration.

"No one knew better his state of mind than Jill - Dr. Jill Biden. And if you ask me, the most patriotic thing Jill Biden could have done was tell her husband - to love her husband - and not let him run in this mental state that he's in."

"I think she failed the country, as well," Campos-Duffy added, further bolstering her stance.

While the commander-in-chief's decision to continue with the US withdrawal in Afghanistan has ruffled feathers among many lawmakers on the political spectrum, Campos-Duffy's stood out from the majority on account of her decision to lay blame on the first lady.

In fact, many netizens quickly moved in to blast the Fox News host, and offer their own take on the shock factor of Campos-Duffy's remarks.

Some even took a shot at Campos-Duffy's reality TV stint on MTV.

Campos-Duffy has yet to address the growing backlash over her weekend remarks.

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Cheney Slams Biden White House for 'Denying' Reports of Americans Being 'Beaten' by Taliban Forces

by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Over the last several days, various reports have surfaced detailing instances in which Americans and Afghan nationals have sought refuge at Kabul's Hamid Karzai International Airport, with the ultimate hope of being cleared to evacuate the war-torn nation on one of the many evacuation flights. However, getting to the tarmac has proven difficult.

Weighing in on the ever-developing scenes in Afghanistan, US Rep. Liz Cheney (R-WY) accused the Biden White House of lying about the brutal circumstances facing many Americans

trying to leave the Central Asian nation, saying that some have been “beaten” by members of the Taliban*.

Cheney blasted the Biden administration during an appearance on NBC’s [“Meet the Press”](#) on Sunday. She used the on-air opportunity to raise concern about treatment reportedly being dealt to Americans trying to board evacuation flights, and to highlight what she considers to be a denial that’s been emerging from top officials, including US President Joe Biden.

“The fact that we’re now somehow relying on the Taliban to protect Americans, and the White House is denying what we know is happening on the ground - which is that Americans are being beaten, they’re being prevented from getting to the gates of the airport, and they are probably being held hostage,” Cheney told show host Chuck Todd.

Asked if the commander-in-chief could have found a way to do away with the withdrawal deal that was signed under the Trump administration, Cheney told Todd that “there’s no question” about it.

“President Biden is the president of the United States, and he’s had no problem in reversing course on other things,” the lawmaker stated. “He decided he’s gonna rejoin the [2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action]. He decided he’s gonna rejoin the Paris climate accord.”

“He’s reversed a number of decisions of the Trump administration,” Cheney underscored.

Cheney [further stated](#) that the Trump-era deal was a “surrender agreement” that gave “credibility to the Taliban,” and asserted that in going through with the withdrawal Biden had ignored advice from US military leadership.

Cheney is reportedly not far off in her remarks about the Taliban exacting force against Americans attempting to reach the international airport. US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin told lawmakers during a Friday briefing call that some US nationals had been [beaten](#) during efforts to get through airport checkpoints.

“We’re also aware that some people, including Americans, have been harassed and even beaten by the Taliban,” Austin reportedly said on the call, before steering away from giving exact details. “This is unacceptable and [we] made it clear to the designated Taliban leader.”

The defense secretary explained during the closed-door briefing that many Americans are being cleared through the checkpoint without issue.

Austin’s remarks came just moments after Biden told reporters that he was not aware of any assessments that indicated Americans were encountering difficulties trying to get through checkpoints.

The latest figures suggest that the US has so far evacuated approximately 48,000 individuals from Afghanistan, with 10,900 evacuees removed in the last day alone. Although Biden has touched on the possibility of extending the US stay until all Americans and Afghan nationals are removed, an official decision is not expected to be made within the next 24 hours, according to reports.

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FDA Grants Full Approval to Pfizer-BioNTech Vaccine, Triggering New Wave of Mandates, Requirements

by [Evan Craighead](#)

The push to accelerate COVID-19 vaccinations in the US has been fueled by the recent spread of the SARS-CoV-2 Delta variant. US health officials have warned that the now-predominant COVID strain is twice as contagious as its previous counterparts and may cause more severe illness than former variants - particularly in those unvaccinated.

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced on Monday that the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine has been formally approved for the prevention of the novel coronavirus in those aged 16 and up in the country.

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine - one of three available in the US - was previously granted emergency approval by the FDA. It will remain available for children, aged 12 to 15, via the aforementioned emergency use authorization.

The double-dose jab will be marketed as "Comirnaty," the FDA highlighted.

Shortly after the highly-anticipated FDA announcement, US President Joe Biden called on unvaccinated Americans to consider the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine approval as reassurance of its safety and effectiveness in most individuals.

"If you're one of the millions of Americans who said that they will not get the shot until it has full and final approval of the FDA, it has now happened," Biden declared. "The moment you've been waiting for is here."

According to Biden, the COVID death toll is approximately 70% lower than the previous winter, and the US' overall weekly vaccinations are up 56% from the previous month. US states previously lagging in new vaccinations, including Arkansas, Louisiana, Alabama and Mississippi, have seen improvement.

Overall, the US' COVID-19 vaccine rollout saved some 279,000 lives and prevented 1.25 million hospitalizations, according to Yale School of Public Health research referenced by the US president. The study, [published last month](#), also found that around 120,000 additional deaths and another 450,000 hospitalizations would have occurred if only half the amount of vaccines were administered.

As of today, more than [170 million individuals \(51.5% of the total US population\)](#) have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19, and over 201 million individuals (60.7% of the total US population) have received at least one dose.

The full federal approval of a COVID-19 vaccine will likely be the catalyst for a new wave of vaccine requirements in both the public and private sectors.

Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby confirmed in a same-day announcement that the department will update vaccine requirements for US military personnel.

A timeline was not provided, but US Defense Secretary Lloyd [Austin pledged earlier this month](#) that he would "seek the president's approval to make the vaccines mandatory no later than mid-September, or immediately upon" full licensure by the FDA. "Whichever comes first."

Several private companies, including the Walt Disney Company, Microsoft and Tyson Foods, took cues from the Biden administration's vaccine mandate and announced their own respective vaccine-related requirements.

Nevertheless, additional vaccine mandates will begin emerging after Monday, as many businesses were admittedly waiting on the FDA's full approval. [US Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy told CNN](#) on Sunday that he believes the federal agency's announcement "would likely

encourage [universities and businesses] and make them feel more comfortable in putting some requirements in place."

[The urgency for such vaccine-related measures and mandates](#) has been fueled by the exponential spread of the highly contagious Delta variant of COVID-19. [US health officials have warned](#) that the now-predominant strain of the disease is twice as contagious as its previous counterparts and may cause more severe illness than former variants - particularly in unvaccinated individuals.

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Apple Confirms It Has Already Been Scanning iCloud Mail to Combat Child Exploitation
by [Evan Craighead](#)

Eric Friedman, head of Apple's Fraud Engineering Algorithms and Risk unit, puzzled many earlier this month when he claimed that the tech giant has "the greatest platform for distributing child porn." His curious statement has provoked several questions for Apple regarding user privacy, phone scans and the details of its new anti-child abuse effort.

As Apple seeks to [detect and report potential child abuse imagery](#), the tech giant also appears to be coming clean about the scope, and duration of its surveillance on users.

[The company confirmed to Apple-centered outlet 9To5Mac](#) that its plan to periodically scan users' iCloud photos and iCloud backups for Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) is only partially new, as Apple - has been routinely scanning both incoming and outgoing iCloud mail for such content.

Apple's email surveillance has been active since 2019, and would apply to those using the Mail app on an iOS-enabled device.

The company's admission came in response to 9To5Mac probing the anti-fraud chief's claim that Apple was "the greatest platform for distributing child porn."

The outlet, like many privacy advocates, questioned how Apple would know about the distribution of such content without conducting some form of surveillance.

Apple did not address Friedman's comments directly, but did highlight the scanning of users' iCloud mail, as well as the scanning of "other data," which does not refer to iCloud backups. Some hundreds of CSAM reports are submitted each year.

Based on Apple's response, it is possible the anti-fraud chief was using known data to make inferences about other exploitative content that exists on its platform.

Apple's planned rollout of new surveillance capabilities has also been slammed by an international coalition of civil and policy rights groups, including the American Civil Liberties Union, Privacy International, the Electronic Frontier Foundation, and Access Now.

[The group asserted](#) that the expanded capabilities could be "used to censor protected speech, threaten the privacy and security of people around the world, and have disastrous consequences for many children."

Concerns about the security of iMessage's end-to-end encryption were also raised.

"Once this backdoor feature is built in, governments could compel Apple to extend notification to other accounts, and to detect images that are objectionable for reasons other than being sexually explicit," the coalition argued.

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Report of 'Anomalous Health Incident' in Hanoi Delays Harris' Visit to Vietnam- US Embassy

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - The report of an "anomalous health incident" in Hanoi has delayed the visit of US Vice President Kamala Harris from departing Singapore to Vietnam, the US embassy in Vietnam announced on Tuesday.

"Earlier this evening, the Vice President's traveling delegation was delayed from departing Singapore because the Vice President's office was made aware of a report of a recent possible anomalous health incident in Hanoi, Vietnam. After careful assessment, the decision was made to continue with the Vice President's trip," the statement said.

Harris will leave Singapore later on Tuesday and arrive in Hanoi, Vietnam.

While the embassy did not specify the nature of the incident, US authorities often refer to the so-called Havana Syndrome as an "anomalous health incident."

The health issue was first reported by Americans posted to Havana in Cuba in 2016, earning the syndrome its name. It has since been rumored to affect US officials in China, Russia, Austria and even Washington, DC.

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US Investigates Ex-Trump Campaign Advisor for Secretly Funding Advocacy Group – Reports

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) – US federal prosecutors are investigating well-known Republican lobbyist and former adviser for the Donald Trump campaign Barry Bennett over allegedly setting up and funding a US-based advocacy group without informing authorities about its connection to the Qatari government, the Wall Street Journal said on Tuesday citing sources familiar with the matter.

Bennett founded the firm, Avenue Strategies, soon after Trump's election in 2016, and signed an agreement to represent the Qatari government a few months later, the report said, revealing the firm's documents.

From July 2017 to July 2018, the Qatari diplomats in the US paid Bennett's firm about \$3 million for long-term planning of fostering closer ties between Doha and Washington, it added. The lobbyist also set up a political group named Yemen Crisis Group, which was not registered properly in the US under the Foreign Agents Registration Act.

The Qatari authorities paid Avenue Strategies \$250,000 in October 2017 for supporting the relief of the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, the report noted citing lobbying documents.

In February, Bennett announced the closure of Avenue Strategies due to the pandemic and protests in Washington, DC, it added. In 2016, he was Republican Ben Carson's campaign manager and later became an unpaid outside adviser for the Trump campaign.

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RPT: ANALYSIS - Biden Hopes New Nord Stream 2 Sanctions Appease Republicans Blocking Appointments

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden slapped new sanctions on Russia over the Nord Stream 2 pipeline in order to satisfy Republican senators who were blocking some of his administration's appointments, analysts told Sputnik.

On Friday, the Biden administration imposed sanctions on two Russian companies and two vessels over their involvement in the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project. The move comes after the US and Germany on July 21 published a deal in which Washington agreed to withhold sanctions to allow for the completion of the pipeline. However, the US also reserved the right to impose sanctions if it deemed it necessary, but that was supposed to be related to Russia's activities vis-à-vis Ukraine.

APPEASING REPUBLICANS

The Nord Stream 2 project, which is 99 percent completed, provides for the construction of a 745-mile offshore twin pipeline aimed to supply up to 1.9 trillion cubic feet of gas per year from Russia directly to Germany. Ukraine and several eastern European states have called on the European Union to abandon the project, citing the bloc's perceived energy over-dependence on Moscow.

Meanwhile, Russia has insisted that the Nord Stream 2 is an entirely commercial undertaking, urging critics to stop politicizing the project.

Republican senators led by Ted Cruz recently vowed to block Biden's appointments for a number of positions unless he reversed his decision on Nord Stream 2.

"This move by Biden appears an effort to mollify the Republicans in Congress," Global Policy Institute President Professor Paolo von Schirach, a former consultant to the European Union and the US Agency for International Development (USAID), told Sputnik. "This is only a gesture for domestic political consumption... the new sanctions just imposed by the Biden administration will not stop the almost completed Nord Stream 2 pipeline."

Schirach, who also holds the Chair in Political Science and International Relations at Bay Atlantic University, said Biden's decision earlier to waive the main part of the sanctions was in essence "a Washington green light on the entire project" and a good will gesture towards Germany.

Many Republicans in the Senate seem to be determined to force Biden "to do something," he added, hence why the administration felt the need to assuage them.

LACKING VALIDITY, IMPACT

Financial analyst and former merchant banker Martin Hutchinson said the new measures would do nothing to significantly delay, let alone prevent the completion and activation of Nord Stream 2.

"[That] horse left the barn at least a year ago and is now miles away. [Failing to] stop Nord Stream... was an Obama administration failure," Hutchinson told Sputnik.

Moreover, the US government had no credible grounds for trying to prevent the completion of the Nord Stream project, Hutchison pointed out.

"There is really no moral validity in imposing sanctions on people building a pipeline on a willing buyer-willing seller basis with Germany. Sanctions ...were perhaps appropriate when the pipeline was started, but not now," he said.

Political commentator Professor John Walsh suggested that Biden also appeared in part motivated by a desire to strike out economically against Russia, even though the announced sanctions could not have any significant impact.

"It appears that the object is to damage Russia without angering Germany, that is let the pipeline go ahead to keep the Germans happy and place sanctions on Russia of a sort that will not stop the pipeline," Walsh told Sputnik.

The sanctions would also be popular among both Republicans and Democrats in Congress who had long supported such irresponsible and polarizing moves against other nations around the world, Walsh observed.

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RPT - Americans Mark International Slave Trade Remembrance Day as New Empathy Grows

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik), Barrington M. Salmon - Atlanta resident Shanice Bennerson said even as the world pauses to observe the International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition, merely marking the day is not enough. Bennerson, 27, said she is tired of the empty words and rhetoric that flow freely on days like today, none of which do much to change the sometimes dire circumstances of the descendants of those enslaved during the Atlantic Slave trade.

"Beyond an observance, this has to embrace and reflect social justice and equity," said Bennerson, a product specialist in manufacturing, writer and creator. "Reparations is a way to respond to centuries of the Atlantic slave trade. Jamaica recently announced its intention to formerly petition Queen Elizabeth II for \$10 billion in reparations. I love Jamaicans. That's the very energy that's required. They said they aren't dealing with Boris [Johnson] and went to the queen. She and her entire family are sitting on an empire of bones, an empire built on skeletons."

Bennerson said she admires the passion with which the Jamaica parliament has approached this mission, adding that she would love to see more people adopt this stance.

"I love the energy. This is a part of the conversation. Let's talk about it honestly. At this point, everybody needs to pay us," she said. "The question that I ask and one that needs to be asked is

what does justice look like especially in the Global South? We need to ask this question because that's where the bulk of this shit show is happening."

Bennerson said the national discussion about Reparations – a means of redressing a dehumanizing slave system that enmeshed an estimated 12-15 million Africans – has been animated by the massive nationwide protests following the murder of George Floyd by white police officers in Minneapolis, Minnesota in May 2020. To those like US Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, who in arguing against Reparations asserts that no one alive bears any responsibility for slavery, Bennerson has a retort.

"To make this observance really mean something, we have to acknowledge and recognize we need to redistribute wealth. It's land, wealth, buildings, hospitals, schools, everything that's equitable. It's not just about the cash," said Bennerson, who has a master's degree in educational research. "I sit here thinking about the degrees that I have and the money I'm paid, and it makes no sense. If this was truly a meritocracy, we wouldn't only have one Oprah, one Serena [Williams], one Maya Angelou. We would have 20 people like them driving Maseratis. Bennerson said most low- and middle-income wage and salary earners in the US are trapped in a system that saddles people with punishing debt and essentially punishes all except those at the very top of the food chain.

"People don't think about how the f**k they've gotten into the condition they're in," said Bennerson, a US Virgin Islands native. "If you work hard enough, you will be rich? That's a lie. If this was really a meritocracy, Black women would be the wealthiest people in this society. Run me my f***ing money."

Omar Eaton-Martinez said one of the beauties of his work is developing programs, projects and educational components that are able to put meat on the bones of rhetoric; involve a wide swathe of people who may otherwise not be aware of African American, Native American and Indigenous history; and encourages Blacks, whites and other ethnicities to begin their own voyages of discovery about their past and those parts of history that society has erased.

"I just took part in a program on Saturday at Fort Monroe Park. Our agency and partner organizations have always worked with community groups to cultivate relationship of descendant families," said Eaton-Martinez, Assistant Division Chief of Historical Resources at Maryland-National Capital Parks and Planning Commission, Natural and Historical Resources Division, Prince George's County Parks and Recreation. "We co-created this event with the Tucker family. We had 200-plus people there. Now, the program is built upon with a mini-festival and guest speakers. We did the ringing of the bell, had local leaders, bought in dancers and did a commemorative dance around ancestry."

These activities are exactly what the United Nations suggests should be a part of this observance. As its website notes, "each year the UN invites people all over the world, including educators, students, and artists, to organize events that center on the theme of this day. Theater companies, cultural organizations, musicians, and artists take part on this day by expressing their resistance against slavery through performances that involve music, dance, and drama." The educational purpose is to inform people about historical events associated with the slave trade, the negative consequences of that trade, and to promote tolerance and human rights. Eaton-Martinez spoke about a recent program that featured rapper and activist KRS-1 and jazz trombonist, record producer and educator Delfeoyo Marsalis. The duo discussed the evolution of freedom in their work.

"Most of those who came were African-descended people and whites who are conscious and empathetic. White people are gaining context," he said. "Writ large, across the US, a new empathy is growing. People are taking a deeper dive and doing their own work. We will see more of that, not specifically tied to Africa."

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US 'Very Unlikely' to Meet August 31 Afghan Withdrawal Deadline - House Intel Chair

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - US House Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam Schiff said it is very unlikely the United States will meet the August 31 deadline to completely withdraw from Afghanistan given the number of people on the ground that still must be evacuated.

"I think it's possible but I think it's very unlikely given the number of Americans that still need to be evacuated, the number of SIVs [Afghan Special Immigrant Visa applicants], the number of others who are members of the Afghan press, civil society leaders, women leaders; it's hard for me to imagine all of that can be accomplished between now and the end of the month," Schiff told reporters on Monday.

There are tens of thousands of US citizens, Afghan interpreters and their families who still need to be evacuated from Kabul, Schiff said after he and other lawmakers received a classified briefing from US officials at the Capitol.

Schiff added that it is fair to say the US intelligence community's assessments of the Afghan government's ability to maintain itself after the US withdrawal became pessimistic over the last six months.

There were a number of warnings the Taliban might takeover, including a rapid takeover, but no one predicated such a rapid and complete collapse of the Afghan government and forces in 11 days, Schiff said.

President Joe Biden is expected to decide in the next 24 hours whether he will extend the Afghanistan withdrawal deadline beyond August 31 and may announce his decision during the virtual G7 leaders' meeting on Tuesday, Reuters reported earlier on Monday citing a senior US administration official.

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ANALYSIS - Biden Hopes New Nord Stream 2 Sanctions Appease Republicans Blocking Appointments

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Meanwhile, Russia has insisted that the Nord Stream 2 is an entirely commercial undertaking, urging critics to stop politicizing the project.

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"This move by Biden appears an effort to mollify the Republicans in Congress," Global Policy Institute President Professor Paolo von Schirach, a former consultant to the European Union and the US Agency for International Development (USAID), told Sputnik. "This is only a gesture for domestic political consumption... the new sanctions just imposed by the Biden administration will not stop the almost completed Nord Stream 2 pipeline."

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Biden Expected to Decide in 24 Hours on Whether to Extend Afghan Exit Deadline - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden is expected to decide in the next 24 hours whether he will extend the Afghanistan withdrawal deadline beyond August 31, Reuters reported citing US official.

The report said on Monday that because it will take several days to pullout the nearly 6,000 American troops from Afghanistan, Biden may have to make the decision to extend the US withdrawal deadline within the next 24 hours.

Some of Biden's advisers have recommend he not extend the withdrawal deadline due to security concerns, the report said.

The report added, according to the official, that Biden may unveil his decision during the virtual meeting of G7 leaders on Tuesday.

Earlier in the day, the White House said Biden and UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson had a telephone call to discuss matters related to the G7 meeting, but no specifics were provided.

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Biden's Approval Rating Drops 6 Points Amid Afghanistan Evacuation Crisis - Poll

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden's approval rating dropped six points amid criticism his administration faces for the withdrawal from Afghanistan and the subsequent mass evacuation crisis, a new Hill-Harris poll revealed.

The poll results showed on Monday that Biden's job performance rating dropped from 55 percent to 49 percent according to a survey of 2,846 registered US voters last week.

Biden reached the highest rating for his handling of the novel coronavirus pandemic, with 61 percent approving of his work.

The survey has a margin of error of 1.8 percentage points.

The Biden administration has been widely criticized for withdrawing US troops while not evacuating US citizens and Afghan allies after the Taliban seized Afghanistan on August 15. The Taliban's quick advance created chaos in and around the Kabul airport, where tens of thousands of people have been stranded and many others can not reach the airport through Taliban checkpoints.

The Biden administration set August 31 as the deadline to evacuate all US citizens, Afghan allies and military personnel from Afghanistan.

White House Rapid Response Director Mike Gwin said the United States has evacuated some 48,000 people from Kabul since August 14.

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US Evacuates Another 10,900 From Kabul, Total at 48,000 Since August 14 - White House

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - The United States has evacuated another 10,900 individuals from Kabul, Afghanistan, since Monday morning, White House Rapid Response Director Mike Gwin said in a statement.

"Between 3:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. ET today, a total of approximately 10,900 people were evacuated from Kabul," Gwin said via Twitter on Monday afternoon.

Gwin also noted that the United States has so far helped evacuate 48,000 people from Kabul since August 14.

After Afghanistan fell to the Taliban terror group (banned in Russia) and the civilian government collapsed on August 15, numerous countries started to evacuate their citizens, diplomats and Afghans who had worked for them. Some countries have also agreed to take in a limited number of Afghan asylum seekers.

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Ex-Chief of El Salvador Soccer Federation Pleads Guilty to Racketeering - US Justice Dept

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) – Former President of the El Salvadorean Soccer Federation Reynaldo Vasquez pleaded guilty to racketeering conspiracy in connection to illicit licensing of media and image rights of the national football team's matches, US Department of Justice said on Monday.

"Earlier today, in federal court in Brooklyn, Reynaldo Vasquez... pleaded guilty to racketeering conspiracy in connection with his participation in schemes to accept hundreds of thousands of dollars in bribes and kickbacks. Part of the money Vasquez received was wired through a US bank account," the department in a statement.

Vasquez also agreed to forfeit \$360,000 and multiple bank accounts, it added.

According to court filings, Vasquez and his co-conspirators participated in and corrupt activities. In 2012, he and other former and current federation officials received approximately \$350,000 in bribes in connection with the sale of media and marketing rights to El Salvador World Cup qualifying matches to be played in advance of the 2018 World Cup.

This bribe payment was wired from a sports marketing company's bank account in the United States, while other crimes occurred in 2014 and 2015, the statement noted.

Vasquez was extradited from El Salvador to the United States in January 2021. When sentenced, he faces a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY
WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik)

PUTIN-LUKASHENKO TALKS

- * Russian President Vladimir Putin held a phone conversation with his Belarusian counterpart Alexander Lukashenko, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Sputnik.
- * Putin and Lukashenko exchanged views on the results of an extraordinary meeting of the CSTO Collective Security Council that discussed the situation in Afghanistan, the Kremlin said.

AFGHANISTAN

- * The US military in Afghanistan has used helicopters on at least two occasions to transport US citizens to the Kabul airport for evacuation, Defense Department spokesperson John Kirby said on Monday.
- * The United States is well aware of the desire by the Taliban (banned in Russia) to see the US evacuation mission completed by the end of August and intends to stick to that deadline, Kirby said.
- * One Afghan service member was killed and several wounded in an exchange of fire outside Kabul airport which left no US or coalition personnel hurt, CENTCOM spokesperson William Urban said.
- * The United States and the Taliban (banned in Russia) have discussed the terror group's future control of the Kabul international airport, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said.
- * Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev held a phone conversation with US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan to discuss the situation in Afghanistan, the Russian Security Council said.
- * Foreign special services tried to incite hostilities in Afghanistan after the Taliban (banned in Russia) seized power, Party of Islam leader and a member of the coordination council overseeing peaceful transfer of power Gulbuddin Hekmatyar told Sputnik.

CORONAVIRUS VACCINES

- * The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced on Monday that it has granted full approval to the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine making it the first vaccine that has been fully licensed for use in individuals 16 years and older in the United States.
- * US President Joe Biden called upon private sector leaders to introduce vaccination requirements for the employees following the FDA full approval of the Pfizer vaccine.
- * The US Defense Department is currently working on a guidance that will require all service members to get vaccinated against the novel coronavirus following the issuance of full approval

to the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine by the FDA earlier in the day, Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby said.

CSTO SUMMIT

* Russian President Vladimir Putin said during the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) videoconference that he is deeply concerned about the developments in Afghanistan and potential threats, and also pointed to the need to prevent radical Islamism infiltration, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Monday.

* Belarusian President called for defining the position of the CSTO in light of the fact that some countries may recognize the Taliban (banned in Russia) rule in Afghanistan.

* The next meeting of heads of state of the CSTO will be held on September 16 in Dushanbe, the press office of the Kazakh president said.

RYANAIR INCIDENT INVESTIGATION

* A team of experts from the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) has arrived in Belarus to investigate an incident with an emergency landing of a Ryanair flight at Minsk airport in early May, the Belarusian Transport Ministry said on Monday.

UKRAINE DEVELOPMENTS

* New sanctions introduced by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, including those targeting Russian media, are nothing but a purge on the media and an attack on freedom of speech, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Monday.

* The Kremlin believes that the Crimean Platform summit in Ukraine is an anti-Russian and very unfriendly event, Peskov said.

* Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy invited Russia to take part in the Crimean Platform summit.

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Proud Boys Leader Sentenced to 155 Days in Jail for Burning BLM Banner - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - The US authorities sentenced Proud Boys leader Henry Tarrío to 155 days in jail after being found guilty on firearms charges and the destruction of a Black Lives Matter (BLM) banner from a historically black church in Washington, DC, the US Justice Department said on Monday.

"Henry 'Enrique' Tarrío, 37, of Miami, Fla., was sentenced today to a total of 155 days of incarceration on charges stemming from two cases, including one involving the burning of a Black Lives Matter banner stolen from a historically prominent Black church in downtown Washington," the Justice Department said in a release.

Tarrío admitted on social media and to media outlets that he, alongside other members of the right-wing group Proud Boys, stole a BLM banner from the Asbury Methodist Church and then burned it using lighter fluid and lighters.

The Justice Department said officers recovered two high-capacity firearms magazines from Tarrio's bookbag during a search conducted at the time of his arrest in Washington on January 4. Tarrio claimed that he intended to transfer the magazines, which both had the Proud Boys insignia on them, to a customer who was coming to the city.

Tarrio was sentenced to 90 days for the destruction of property charge and 150 days for the ammunition offense. However, Judge Harold Cushman suspended all but 155 days of the sentence, conditional on Tarrio successfully completing three years of probation and paying \$1,347 in fines and restitution.

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Future Control of Kabul Airport Topic of Discussion Between US, Taliban - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - The United States and the Taliban (banned in Russia) have discussed the terror group's future control of the Kabul international airport, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Monday.

"A functioning state, a functioning economy, a government that has some semblance of a relationship with the rest of the world needs a functioning commercial airport," Price said during a press briefing. "We are in discussions with the Taliban on this very front. They have indicated to us in no uncertain terms that they seek to have a functioning commercial airport."

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At Least 3 Babies Were Born on US Evacuation Flights From Afghanistan to Date – General

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) – At least 3 kids have been reported born onboard evacuation flights from Afghanistan since the beginning of the operation, Chief of US Transportation Command General Steve Lyons said on Monday.

"I really appreciate the news reporting on the baby being born as that flight came into Ramstein [base in Germany]. There's actually been more than that," Lyons said at a Pentagon press briefing. "My last data point was three [babies], I don't have a formal tracker."

Lyons confirmed that the US medical staff is not present on every evacuation flight but there are initial medical screenings taking place before boarding in Kabul airport.

The general added that while all the US flight crews are wearing face masks, most of the Afghans onboard are flying unmasked.

Earlier on Monday, Major General William Taylor said the United States military has evacuated a total of about 37,000 from Afghanistan since the operations began on August 14.

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Ex-Giuliani Associate Igor Fruman to Change Plea to Guilty in Campaign Finance Case

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - Businessman Igor Fruman, a former associate of Rudy Giuliani, will change his plea to guilty this week in a campaign finance scheme case, a court filing revealed on Monday.

"Notice as to Igor Fruman: an in-person change of plea hearing is scheduled for August 25, 2021 at 4:30pm [EDT]," the filing said.

Fruman previously pled not guilty to charges that they funneled \$1 million in donations from foreign nationals to unspecified political campaigns in the United States.

In October 2019, Fruman, businessman Andrey Kukushkin, Ukraine-born businessman Lev Parnas and his colleague David Correia were charged for funneling \$1 million in donations from foreign nationals to unspecified political campaigns in the United States, including making false statements and falsifying records to the Federal Election Commission.

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Threat to US Airlift Operations in Afghanistan 'Significant' - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - There are significant threats to the US airlift operation out of Afghanistan but the military is taking measures to mitigate them, head of US Transportation Command General Stephen R. Lyons said during a press briefing on Monday.

"The threat is significant as you know. I won't get into details. We're closely aligned to CENTCOM and other agencies on threat reporting and potential threat to airlift operations," Lyons said. "I would just say as we watch that, our crews are the best in the world. That machine, the C-17, is the best in the world, and I'm confident that we're taking the right measures to mitigate the threat."

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White House to Release Report on COVID-19 Origins in Next Several Days

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - The White House expects to release an unclassified version of the US intelligence report on the origins of COVID-19 in the next several days, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said on Monday at a briefing.

"It typically takes a couple of days, if not longer, to put together an unclassified version to present publically and obviously the president would be briefed first on any findings. So I don't

have an exact date for you but I expect it will be a couple to several days after tomorrow," she said.

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US Plans to Offer COVID-19 Vaccines to Afghan Refugees - White House

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - The United States plans to offer coronavirus vaccines to Afghan refugees housed in US military bases, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Monday.

"[Afghan refugees] They are being tested and we are working through offering vaccines and what that process will look like," Psaki said during a press briefing when asked if Afghan refugees will be vaccinated for COVID-19.

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Biden Not Considering Speaking to Taliban Leadership at This Time - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden is not considering speaking to the representatives of the Taliban group (terrorist group, banned in Russia), US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said during a White House press briefing.

"With respect to whether President Biden is likely to speak to the leadership of the Taliban, that is not in contemplation at this time," Sullivan said.

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US Forces Face 'Serious' Threat From Islamic State at Kabul Airport - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said on Monday that US forces at the Kabul international airport face a serious threat from the Islamic State terror group (banned in Russia).

"What is present in Afghanistan right now to our forces at the airport is a serious threat from ISIS-K that we're trying to deal with," Sullivan said during a White House press briefing.

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Sullivan Says US Will Continue to Evacuate At-Risk Afghans Even After US Forces Leave

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - The United States will continue to evacuate at-risk Afghans out of Afghanistan after US troops leave the country by the August 31 deadline, US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said on Monday.

"We will continue to get Afghans at-risk out of the country even after US military forces have left," Sullivan said during a press briefing at the White House.

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UN 'Concerned' at Possible Taliban Attack in North-Central Afghanistan – Spokesman

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) – United Nations officials are "very concerned" about a possible new Taliban (outlawed in Russia) armed offensive against the Tajik-majority populated Panjshir Valley in north-central Afghanistan, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' Spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Monday.

"The last thing the people in Afghanistan need is continued armed conflict," Dujarric said when asked about reports of a new Taliban military buildup against the Panjshir Valley. "We are very concerned at the humanitarian impact of continued fighting anywhere in Afghanistan."

Taliban forces are reported to have surrounded independent militia local forces in the Panjshir valley led by Ahmad Massoud, son of renowned anti-Taliban figure Ahmad Shah Massoud assassinated on the eve of the September 11 attacks. Both sides have claimed they are trying to resolve differences between them peacefully.

The Panjshir Valley, or Valley of the Five Lions is located in north-central Afghanistan, 93 miles north of Kabul, near the Hindu Kush mountain range. The valley is divided by the Panjshir River and is populated by more than 100,000 people, including Afghanistan's largest concentration of ethnic Tajiks.

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US in Talks With Taliban On Daily Basis - National Security Adviser

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - The United States is in talks with the Taliban (terrorist group, banned in Russia) on a daily basis, National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan told journalists on Monday.

"We are in talks with the Taliban on daily basis through our political and security channels," he said.

Sullivan added that the US is "consulting with the Taliban on every aspect," including on the situation at Kabul airport "to make sure there is access to the airport" for American and Afghan citizens.

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US Believes It Has Time to Get Every American Out Of Afghanistan By August 31 - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - The Joe Biden administration believes that the United States has time to get every American out of Afghanistan by the August 31 withdrawal deadline, National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan told journalists on Monday.

"We believe that we have time between now and the [August] 31 to get any American out [of Afghanistan]," he said.

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NASA Postpones Planned Tuesday Spacewalk Over Astronaut's Medical Issue – Release

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) – The scheduled spacewalk of a US astronaut currently serving on the International Space Station (ISS) on Tuesday has been postponed owing to a minor medical issue, NASA announced on Monday.

"NASA announced the US spacewalk outside the International Space Station originally planned for Tuesday, August 24, with NASA astronaut Mark Vande Hei and Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) astronaut Akihiko Hoshide has been postponed due to a minor medical issue involving Vande Hei," the agency said in a press release.

Vande Hei's medical issue was not a medical emergency and the spacewalk was not time-sensitive, NASA said.

"Teams are assessing the next available opportunity to conduct the spacewalk following the SpaceX CRS-23 cargo resupply launch planned for August 28 and upcoming Russian spacewalks," the release added.

The spacewalk was planned to install a support bracket in preparation for future installation of the ISS's third new solar array, NASA explained.

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US Defense Department Preparing to House Afghan Refugees for 'Extended Period' - Lawmaker

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - The US Department of Defense is preparing to house Afghan refugees in the United States for an extended period as they await their visas to be processed, Democratic Representative Veronica Escobar said on Monday.

"Currently, the DoD [Department of Defense] is preparing to house refugees for an extended period, which will be determined by how quickly the refugees can obtain their visas," Escobar said via Twitter. "The DoD is closely coordinating with CBP [Customs and Border Protection] to facilitate the visa approval process."

Escobar represents the city of El Paso, which is headquarters to Fort Bliss, one of three military bases housing Afghan refugees. As of Monday morning, 650 Afghan refugees have arrived at the base, Escobar said.

Afghan refugees undergo rigorous medical examinations by Department of staff, Escobar said. There are plans for on-site COVID-19 vaccinations as well, she added.

The US Defense Department is using three military bases to house more than 22,000 Afghan refugees. Fort Lee in Virginia received some 2,000 refugees earlier this month. Fort Bliss is expected to house up to 10,000 refugees and Fort McCoy in Wisconsin will house about 12,000 refugees.

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Biden, UK's Johnson Discuss Afghanistan Evacuation, Upcoming G7 Meeting - White House

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden and UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson spoke on Monday about the ongoing mission to evacuate civilians from Kabul and to preview the upcoming virtual meeting with G7 leaders to discuss a common approach to Afghanistan, the White House said.

"President Joe Biden and Prime Minister Boris Johnson of the United Kingdom spoke today about Afghanistan," the White House said in a press release. "They discussed the ongoing efforts by our diplomatic and military personnel to evacuate their citizens, local staff, and other vulnerable Afghans. They also discussed plans for the G7 virtual leaders' meeting tomorrow, underscoring the importance of close coordination with allies and partners in managing the current situation and forging a common approach to Afghanistan policy."

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Biden Urges More Companies to Step Up Vaccine Requirements for Employees

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden on Monday called upon private sector leaders to introduce vaccination requirements for the employees following the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) full approval of the Pfizer vaccine against the coronavirus.

"Today, I am calling on more companies in the private sector to step up with vaccine requirements that will reach millions more people. If you are a business leader, a nonprofit leader, state or local leader, who has been waiting for full FDA approval to require vaccinations, I call on you now to do that, require it," Biden said in an address from the White House.

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UN Chief to Take Part in G7 Virtual Summit on Afghanistan Tuesday - Spokesman

UNITEDNATIONS, August 23 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres will participate in Tuesday's virtual Group of Seven (G7) meeting on Afghanistan, the United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Monday.

"The Secretary-General has been invited to participate in the G7 special virtual summit on Afghanistan," Dujarric said during a press briefing. "His message will be focused on the need for unity in the international community as we keep the interests of the Afghan people front and center."

Previously, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said in a statement that the G7 leaders on Tuesday would discuss continuing their close coordination on Afghanistan policy and evacuating their citizens, Afghan allies and other vulnerable individuals.

The G7 meeting will also focus on the issue of humanitarian assistance and support for Afghan refugees, Psaki added.

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US Capitol Police Clears Officer Who Shot Trump Supporter Ashli Babbitt in January 6 Riot

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - US Capitol Police (USCP) said on Monday that it cleared the officer who shot dead US Air Force veteran Ashli Babbitt during the January 6 riot when former President Donald Trump supporters protested lawmakers certifying the 2020 presidential results in several US states that Trump considered invalid.

"The United States Capitol Police has completed the internal investigation into the fatal shooting of Ms. Ashli Babbitt, which occurred in the Speaker's Lobby on January 6," Capitol Police said in a press release. "USCP's Office of Professional Responsibility (OPR) determined the officer's conduct was lawful and within Department policy."

The US Capitol Police said the officer used deadly force to defend members of Congress, staff and the democratic process.

The officer's identity will not be released due to safety concerns given the numerous credible threats, the release said.

On April 14, the US Justice Department cleared the officer of any criminal misconduct.

Babbitt, 35, was a 14-year US Air Force veteran who served in the 2003 Iraq war and had been decorated during her years of service. Trump referred to the police officer who shot her as a murderer.

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Cuomo, in Farewell Address, Calls AG Report 'Political Firecracker' That Caused 'Stampede'

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - Former-Governor of New York Andrew Cuomo called State Attorney General Letitia James' report on sexual harassment allegations against him a "political firecracker" that caused a political and media frenzy in a farewell address he delivered on Monday.

"There will be another time to talk about the truth and ethics of the recent situation involving me, but let me say now that when government politicizes allegations and the headlines condemn without facts, you undermine the justice system, and that doesn't serve women, and that doesn't serve men or society," Cuomo said. "A firecracker can start a stampede... The Attorney General's report was designed to be a political firecracker on an explosive topic, and it worked. There was a political and media stampede."

Cuomo said everyone has the right to come forward with allegations and that he applauds those who do, but that facts still matter and allegations must be scrutinized. He added that he is confident that the truth will come out in time.

Cuomo resigned after an investigation by James found him to have harassed nearly a dozen colleagues, although he continues to deny any wrongdoing.

During his address, Cuomo also addressed the people and officials of New York, saying that the state must stop demonizing business and causing them and the jobs they bring to leave the state. He also called upon New Yorkers to continue taking action to combat the COVID-19 pandemic amid the new surge of delta variant cases.

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Trudeau Doubles Down After Deputy's Post Flagged by Twitter as 'Manipulated Media'

TORONTO, August 23 (Sputnik) – Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Monday doubled down on claims that Conservative Party Leader Erin O'Toole intends to introduce for-profit healthcare after Twitter flagged his deputy Chrystia Freeland's social media post as "manipulated media."

On Sunday, a clip of a virtual discussion from last year's Conservative Party leadership campaign was posted to Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Freeland's Twitter page, in which then-leadership candidate O'Toole answered in the affirmative to the moderator's question of whether he would allow provinces to experiment with "real healthcare" reform including for-profit and nonprofit private healthcare services.

In the clip, which Twitter flagged under its policy to label videos where there may be a lack of context, O'Toole said he would work to find "public-private synergies" and "capital will come in to drive efficiencies, to drive innovation." However, Freeland's 35-second clip did not include

O'Toole's vow to ensure that "universal access remains paramount" and reforms are "fair, measured and keep the public with it."

"What's really important here is that in the middle of a pandemic Erin O'Toole came out, unequivocally, in support of private healthcare, in terms of for-profit healthcare," Trudeau told reporters when asked about Twitter's decision to flag Freeland's post and the Conservative campaign's call for an investigation.

Trudeau added that the Liberal Party has posted the unedited version of the clip and urged Canadians to watch it in its entirety.

O'Toole, meanwhile, slammed the Liberal Party for "importing American-style misleading politics" into the country's national election campaign, while highlighting that his party proposes injecting \$47.4 billion in additional healthcare funding.

Last Sunday, Canada's Governor General Mary Simon accepted Trudeau's request to dissolve parliament triggering the 44th election in the country's history, sending Canadians to the polls on September 20.

Trudeau has come under increasing scrutiny from the opposition and media for calling an election while the country faces a range of domestic and international challenges.

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US Yet to Determine Kabul Airport Shooter Affiliation, Gathers Forensic Details - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - The United States has yet to determine the affiliation of the individual responsible for a shooting at the airport in Kabul, Afghanistan, that left one Afghan serviceman dead and several others wounded, US Defense Department spokesperson John Kirby said on Monday.

"We cannot rule out who the hostile actor was in this shooting incident last night. I think as you saw, Central Command's statement referred to it as a 'hostile actor.' We don't know more than that," Kirby said during a press briefing. "I don't know when we'll have more forensics on this."

On Monday, Central Command spokesperson William Urban said an unknown hostile actor engaged in a firefight with Afghan security forces guarding the Kabul airport gate, prompting Afghan and US troops to return fire in self-defense.

Urban said the wounded Afghans are in stable condition at the airfield hospital where they are receiving treatment.

Kirby and Urban both confirmed that there were no casualties among US and coalition forces.

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US Forces Twice Used Helicopters to Fly Americans to Kabul Airport - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) – The US military in Afghanistan has used helicopters on at least two occasions to transport American citizens to the Kabul airport for evacuation, Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby said on Monday.

“Our commanders on the ground [in Afghanistan] are doing what they feel they need to do to help Americans reach the airport. We are using the variety of methods at our disposal,” Kirby said at a press briefing. “There has been at least one additional instance where rotary airlift was used to help Americans get from outside the airport into the [Kabul] airport,” Kirby said at press briefing.

Kirby also noted that airlift help is just one of the means US military exploits to get American citizens to the airport.

On Thursday, the US military used three CH-47 "Chinook" helicopters to bring 169 Americans to the Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul.

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FDA Needs More Data to Determine if Pfizer Vaccine Safe for Children - Acting Commissioner

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) needs more data to determine whether the Pfizer coronavirus vaccine is safe for use in children younger than 12 years of age, acting Commissioner Janet Woodcock said on Monday.

Earlier in the day, the FDA announced it granted a full approval to the Pfizer vaccine, making it the first full-licensed COVID-19 vaccine for use in individuals 16 years and older.

"We do not have data on the proper dose nor do we have full data on the safety in children younger than what is in the EUA [Emergency Use Authorization]," Woodcock said during a conference call with reporters. "We are not recommending that children younger than age 12 be vaccinated with this vaccine, it would not be appropriate."

Woodcock said the vaccine remains available for individuals 12 to 15 years old under the emergency use authorization.

The Pfizer vaccine obtained emergency use authorization on December 11 while the authorization was expanded to include individuals 12 to 15 years of age on May 10.

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Keystone XL Pipeline Spilled 11,000 Barrels of Oil in 2017, 2019 - Report

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - The Keystone XL Pipeline from Canada to the United States shut down by President Joe Biden earlier this year spilled more than 11,000 barrels of oil in its two worst leaks in 2017 and 2019, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) said in a report on Monday.

The two largest spills in Keystone's history in 2017 and 2019 were among the six accidents that met PHMSA [Department of Transportation's Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration]'s criteria for accidents "impacting people or the environment," the report said. GAO said in the report that the two accidents spilled 6,592 barrels of oil at Amherst in November 2017 and 4,515 barrels at Edinburg in October 2019.

"In its thorough review of the pipeline's history and construction, GAO found that preventable construction issues contributed to the current Keystone pipeline's spills more frequently than the industry-wide trends. ... half of Keystone's accidents were caused by material failure of the pipe or weld," the report said.

Four of the pipeline's largest spills were caused by construction of the pipeline, manufacturing of the pipe or involved original design issues, the report added.

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US to Sell Up to 20Mln Barrels of Crude Oil From Strategic Reserves - Energy Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) – The United States is going to sell up to 20 million barrels of crude oil from its Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR), the Department of Energy announced on Monday.

"Today, the Department of Energy's Office of Fossil Energy and Carbon Management (FECM) announced a Notice of Sale of crude oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve," an official statement said. "[The Energy Department] intends to sell up to 20 million barrels of crude oil from the SPR."

The sale will be conducted with up to 8 million barrels from the Bryan Mound site, up to 8 million barrels from Big Hill, up to 8 million barrels from West Hackberry and up to 1 million barrels from Bayou Choctaw, the department explained.

The Energy Department "must receive bids no later than 10:00 a.m. Central Time, Tuesday August 31, 2021 and will award contracts to successful offerors no later than September 13, 2021. Deliveries will take place between October 1, 2021 and December 15, 2021," the statement said.

The SPR is the world's largest supply of emergency crude oil, and the federally owned oil stocks are stored in underground salt caverns at four storage sites in Texas and Louisiana, the department noted.

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US Aware of Taliban's Desire to Have Evacuation Mission Complete By August 31 - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - The United States is well aware of the desire by the Taliban (banned in Russia) to see the US evacuation mission completed by the end of August

and intends to stick to that deadline, Defense Department spokesperson John Kirby said on Monday.

"We are well aware of the state of desire by the Taliban to have this mission completed by the 31st of August. I will tell you that we too are still planning on completing it by the 31st of August," Kirby said during a press briefing.

The Taliban said earlier on Monday that it will not give the United States or the United Kingdom any extra time to complete evacuating from Afghanistan, referring to August 31 as the "red line" that would bring about consequences if it is crossed.

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US to Require Service Members to Get Vaccinated After FDA Approves Pfizer Jab - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - The US Defense Department is currently working on a guidance that will require all service members to get vaccinated against the novel coronavirus following the issuance of full approval to the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) earlier in the day, Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby said on Monday. "Now that the Pfizer vaccine has been approved the department is prepared to issue updated guidance, requiring all service members to be vaccinated, a timeline for vaccination completion will be provided in the coming days," Kirby said during a press briefing.

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US Evacuated Total of 37,000 People From Afghanistan Since August 14 – Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) – The United States military has evacuated a total of about 37,000 from Afghanistan since the operations began on August 14, Major General William Taylor said on Monday.

"Since the beginning of evacuation operations [from Afghanistan] on August 14, we have evacuated approximately 37,000 [people]," Taylor said at a press briefing.

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New York City to Vaccinate All Teachers, School Staff Against COVID-19 Threat - Mayor

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - New York City will enforce the compulsory vaccination against the novel coronavirus of all teachers and support staff throughout the school system during this educational year, Mayor Bill de Blasio announced on Monday.

"Today we're announcing that ALL NYC [New York City] schools faculty and staff must be vaccinated against COVID-19 this school year," de Blasio said via Twitter.

The New York City Department of Education, serves 1.1 million students in more than 1,800 schools.

August 9 was the last day for students in the school system to receive Pfizer vaccinations against the coronavirus before the new school year started, according to New York City's educational authorities.

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US Imposes Sanctions on Chief of Staff of Eritrean Defense Forces - Treasury

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed a number of sanctions on the Chief of Staff of the Eritrean Defense Forces Filipos Woldeyohannes, the US Treasury Department announced on Monday.

Eritrean forces have been accused by Washington of partaking in the fighting in northern Ethiopia and perpetrating human rights abuses against civilians in Tigray.

"The following individual has been added to OFAC's [Office of Foreign Assets Control] SDN [Specially Designated Nationals] List: WOLDEYOHANNES, Filipos..., Shire, Tigray, Ethiopia; Eritrea; DOB 1955; POB Ts'elot, Asmara, Eritrea; nationality Eritrea; Gender Male (individual) [GLOMAG]," the statement said.

The department will continue to take action against those involved in serious human rights abuses, Director of the Office of Foreign Assets Control Andrea M. Gacki said.

"Today's action demonstrates the United States' commitment to imposing costs on those responsible for these despicable acts, which worsen a conflict that has led to tremendous suffering by Ethiopians. We urge Eritrea to immediately and permanently withdraw its forces from Ethiopia, and urge the parties to the conflict to begin ceasefire negotiations and end human rights abuses," she added.

Ethiopia is experiencing a conflict in one of its northern provinces. Fighting in the Tigray region broke out in November after the Ethiopian government accused the local ruling party - Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) - of attacking a regional military base to hijack weapons and arm the anti-government militia. Eritrea joined the conflict on the side of Addis Ababa shortly thereafter.

An estimated two million of Tigray's six million people are reported to have fled their homes, and an estimated 900,000 people are likely experiencing famine conditions. In addition, about 33,000 severely malnourished children are projected to face imminent risk of death if more aid is not forthcoming to the people of Tigray, according to UN figures.

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Canada to Join Push for Sanctions Against Taliban During G7 Meeting - Trudeau

TORONTO, August 23 (Sputnik) - Canada will join the push to impose sanctions on the Taliban terror group (banned in Russia) during a meeting of G7 countries on Tuesday, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said.

Reportedly, the United Kingdom will be pushing other G7 members to impose additional sanctions on the Taliban, which seized control of Afghanistan last Sunday when the group of advanced economies meets to discuss the crisis in the war-torn country.

"Absolutely," Trudeau replied to reporters, when asked if he would support the British initiative to impose sanctions on the Taliban.

The Prime Minister added that G7 leaders will "certainly" discuss what more these countries can and "must" do to combat the Taliban renaissance, noting that the Islamist religious-political movement is a designated terrorist entity in Canada.

Trudeau cited the Taliban's status in Canada as reason not to delay sanctions talks against the terror group, despite Ottawa and other countries' difficulties in repatriating their citizens and vetted Afghan nationals with the Islamist group controlling the roads to Hamid Karzai International Airport, which remains one of the few options out of the country.

US President Joe Biden also answered in the affirmative when asked on Sunday if he would consider sanctions against the Taliban.

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Exchange of Fire Outside Kabul Airport Leaves 1 Afghan Service Member Dead - CENTCOM

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - One Afghan service member was killed and several wounded in an exchange of fire outside Kabul airport which left no US or coalition personnel hurt, spokesperson for CENTCOM, Navy Captain William Urban, said on Monday.

"One member of the Afghan forces was killed by the hostile actor; several Afghans were wounded during the exchange. The wounded are being treated at an airfield hospital and are reported to be in stable condition," Urban said.

He added that no US or coalition forces were hurt in the incident.

"The incident appeared to begin when an unknown hostile actor fired upon Afghan security forces involved in monitoring access to the gate. The Afghans returned fire, and in keeping with their right of self-defense, so too did US and coalition troops... Our condolences go out to

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US Army Completes Successful Live Fire Test of Israel Iron Dome System - Statement

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) -The US Army and the Israel Missile Defense Organization (IMDO) have carried out their first successful joint live fire test of the Israeli-built Iron Dome defense system for the US military, the Israeli Ministry of Defense said on Monday.

"The US Army, the Israel Missile Defense Organization and RAFAEL have successfully completed a live fire test of the first US Army Iron Dome Defense System (IDDS-A) Battery, which the United States acquired from Israel," the Ministry of Defense said via Twitter.

The performance and live fire test was conducted at the White Sands New Mexico test range, the Ministry of Defense said in a second message via Twitter.

It "was the first time US soldiers intercepted live targets employing the Iron Dome System," the message also said.

Iron Dome developers RAFAEL, Israel Aircraft Industries (Elta and Prest supported the test, the Israeli Ministry of Defense added.

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US Federal Regulator Grants Full Approval to Pfizer-BioNTech's COVID Vaccine

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) – The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has granted its full approval to the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine making it the first vaccine that has been fully licensed for use in individuals 16 years and older in the United States, FDA announced on Monday.

"Today, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved the first COVID-19 vaccine. The vaccine has been known as the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine, and will now be marketed as Comirnaty (koe-mir'-na-tee), for the prevention of COVID-19 disease in individuals 16 years of age and older," FDA said in a release.

At the same time, the vaccine will remain available under FDA's emergency use authorization (EUA), including for individuals aged 12-15 years old and for the use of a third booster dose in certain groups of immunocompromised individuals, the release said.

Acting FDA Commissioner Janet Woodcock was quoted in the statement as saying that the vaccine's full license will add to the confidence level among those who are still hesitant to get inoculated against the coronavirus.

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine was the first vaccine that obtained EUA on December 11 while the authorization was expanded to include individuals 12-15 years of age on May 10.

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US, Singapore Sign Memorandum to Join Forces on Cybersecurity Cooperation - Treasury

WASHINGTON, August 23 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration and the government of Singapore have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to cooperate on enforcing cybersecurity, the Treasury Department announced on Monday.

"On August 23, the US Department of the Treasury and the Monetary Authority of Singapore announced the finalization of a bilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Cybersecurity Cooperation," the Treasury Department said in a press release.

The announcement was made during Vice President Kamala Harris' visit to Singapore, where both the US and Singapore recognized the importance of deepening cooperation in new domains to deal with the challenges of the 21st century, the release said.

"Treasury and MAS share common goals of maintaining strength and stability, as well as operational and cyber resilience in each country's economy and financial system. The cybersecurity cooperation agreement will serve to improve the cyber resilience of both countries' financial systems," Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said.

The MoU enhances cooperation between the Treasury Department and the Monetary Authority of Singapore in information sharing relating to the financial sector including cybersecurity regulations and guidance, cybersecurity incidents and cybersecurity threat intelligence and staff training and study visits to promote cooperation, the release said.

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