

08/30/21 Monday

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With US Federal Eviction Ban Overturned, Nearly 1 Million Renters Likely to Lose Home By End of Year
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

In addition to tenants, homeowners with federally-backed mortgages were also protected from eviction during the first part of the COVID-19 pandemic. With the foreclosure ban having expired in July, 1.75 million homeowners behind on payments are at risk of losing their homes alongside millions of renters.

According to estimates by Goldman Sachs, some 750,000 Americans are likely to be evicted from their homes before the end of the year, due to the US Supreme Court striking down the federal eviction moratorium last week.

The financial services giant estimates that between 2.5 and 3.5 million households are considerably behind on paying rent, owing between \$12 billion and \$17 billion in total, [CNN reported](#) on Monday.

However, that's not all of the people likely to face eviction: the [Aspen Institute reported](#) at the end of July, as the first eviction moratorium put in place by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) drew to a close, that 6.7 million renters, or a total of 15 million people, were "on the precipice of eviction."

Aspen estimated they collectively owed \$20 billion to their landlords, but the National Apartment Association, a group representing landlords, [claimed at the time](#) that the real number was \$73 billion.

Other estimates are far higher: the US [Census Bureau reported](#) that a survey conducted in mid-August found that 1.3 million Americans believed themselves likely to be evicted in the next two months.

"The strength of the housing and rental market suggests landlords will try to evict tenants who are delinquent on rent unless they obtain federal assistance," the analysts said. "And evictions could be particularly pronounced in cities hardest hit by the [pandemic crisis], since apartment markets are actually tighter in those cities."

Goldman Sachs' estimate is so much lower than the total number of renters behind on rent because several [states have their own](#) separate eviction bans put in place on top of the CDC's ban, many of which extend into late 2021 and even into next year. Landlords have also attempted to challenge those bans or parts of those bans and had some successes, [as in New York](#), but have also been turned back, [as in Los Angeles](#).

Just six US states and Washington, DC, still have eviction bans in place going into September, although another 10 states have some form of tenant protections connected to their distribution of rental assistance.

As the CDC's original eviction ban expired at the end of July, the White House initially declined to renew it, citing a Supreme Court ruling the prior month rejecting the legal underpinning of the

CDC mandate. However, while Associate Justice Brett [Kavanaugh advised](#) the administration that only a legislative extension was likely to pass legal muster, Congress went into a seven-week recess without attempting to implement one.

Round-the-clock protests outside the US Capitol in Washington, DC, turned the glaring omission into a national spectacle, and on August 3, the CDC [implemented a new ban](#) with slightly different standards, claiming it wasn't an extension of the old ban. However, on August 27, the Supreme Court ruled it was legally the same ban as before and [struck it down](#).

Even during the moratorium, evictions didn't totally stop, and the revised ban implemented during most of August gave even less protection than before. However, as the latest outbreak of the Delta variant spread nationwide, the number of counties protected by the ban, as measured by the pace of community spread of COVID-19, grew dramatically to include almost the entire country anyway.

On Friday, [the CDC counted](#) more than 176,000 reported COVID-19 cases nationwide - the most since late January and more than twice the number of daily cases seen a month ago. Compounding the tragedy of the situation is the fact that Congress has appropriated more than \$46 billion for emergency rental assistance, for which both tenants and landlords may apply. However, the pace of distribution has been so slow that even though the funds were authorized in March, by the end of August [just 11% of the money](#) - \$5 billion - has been paid out, despite the law mandating that at least 90% of the funds be paid out by government agencies.

According to the Census survey cited above, 2.2 million people reported applying for rental assistance through either state or local governments and had either not heard back or been denied aid.

In other words, many of the people likely to be evicted could have had their rent debt erased if not for bureaucratic bungles.

House Speaker Nancy [Pelosi \(D-CA\) denounced](#) the court decision in a letter to her colleagues on Friday, saying they were "assessing possible legislative remedies." However, she only mentioned ways to expedite paying out rental assistance and gave no indication the Democrats, who control both houses of Congress and the White House, would make any attempt to pass their own eviction moratorium.

Throughout the crisis, Pelosi has looked to the White House for solutions, despite Biden [calling on Congress](#) to fix it, as the Supreme Court made abundantly clear in both its June 27 and August 27 rulings.

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Taliban Hails 'Great Neighbor' China, Renews Promise Not to Let Terrorists Base in Afghanistan by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Chinese entrepreneurs and managers of state-owned enterprises recently told Chinese media that while investment opportunities in Afghanistan are ample, the danger of violence and of US sanctions has made them leery of pursuing them so far.

The Taliban* has renewed its pledge to fight terrorism in Afghanistan as it continues to court promises of Chinese infrastructure investment in a new interview with Chinese media.

“We are ready to exchange views with China on how to forge ahead in terms of boosting our mutual relations, establishing peace in the region, and its assistance in the reconstruction of Afghanistan,” Taliban spokesperson Suhail Shaheen told the [South China Morning Post](#) on Monday.

“China, our great neighbouring country, can have a constructive and positive role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan and also in the economic development and prosperity of the people of Afghanistan,” he added.

At a Tianjin meeting in July, Chinese Foreign Minister [Wang Yi told](#) Taliban leader and co-founder Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar that the group must “deal resolutely” with the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), a Xinjiang-based terrorist group the Taliban has given refuge to in the past. He added [earlier this month](#) that the Taliban “needs to completely cut off from all terrorist forces with a clear attitude and take measures to combat international terrorist organisations classified by the UN Security Council.”

Suhail reiterated the group’s pledge on Monday, saying that the Taliban had “given a clear message to all that no one can use the soil of Afghanistan against neighbouring and other countries.” The group has given similar pledges to the US and Pakistan, promising to end its support for al-Qaeda* and Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan.

Iran and [Tajikistan have focused](#) more on the formation of an [inclusive and stable](#) government in Afghanistan that will represent all ethnic and religious minorities, although Beijing and [Islamabad have said](#) the same as well.

After four decades of war, the Central Asian nation largely lies in ruins, with its infrastructure wrecked and its economy based in large part on the exporting of opiates. Twenty years of that time was spent under US occupation and a counterinsurgency war that left up to half a million Afghans dead, [according to estimates](#) by the Costs of War Project at Brown University. That occupation ended early Tuesday morning as the last US military aircraft left Kabul’s main airport in the middle of the night, the product of a negotiated peace with the Taliban.

The Taliban unexpectedly wound up cooperating with US forces in securing the airport during the final phase of the withdrawal after they captured Kabul, the country’s capital and largest city, without a fight on August 15. After throngs of people attempting to leave the country crowded around the entrance to Hamid Karzai International Airport, Daesh-Khorasan*, an Islamic State group hostile to both the US and the Taliban, staged a series of deadly terrorist attacks last week that killed nearly 200 people, including 13 US service members.

However, after the US carried out retaliatory airstrikes against Daesh-K that killed a number of civilians as well, [Taliban officials castigated](#) their US counterparts for not informing them and allowing them to deal with the threat.

As the last US forces left, the Taliban took over control of the airport, which is presently inoperable. According to [Middle East Eye](#), they have cut a deal with the Turkish and Qatari governments by which the two nations will operate the airport as a consortium and recognize the Taliban as the legitimate rulers of the country. It was unclear what the Taliban had offered in return, but officials declined to comment on the talks.

On Tuesday, Mohammad Naim, a spokesperson for the Taliban's political office, told Sputnik resuming airport operation "is one of our priorities" which they hope will happen "as soon as possible."

The former US-backed Afghan government hoped that joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a Eurasian military, political and economic bloc whose members surround Afghanistan on almost every side, would help stabilize the country, especially by increasing trade and employment. The Taliban has shown similar interest in infrastructure investment, as well as in winning international recognition - which they eschewed during their first government from 1996-2001 - but it's unclear as of yet how they will respond to the SCO, which is set to meet in Dushanbe next month.

Yue Xiaoyong, China's recently appointed special envoy to Afghanistan, told the Chinese news portal [Guancha.cn on Saturday](#) that "We have already been working with countries in the region - in the north [of Afghanistan], many Central Asian countries are part of the Belt and Road Initiative, which has been very successful. We also have a lot of projects that boost connectivity."

"From a long-term and constructive perspective, China is ready to be part of the peaceful reconstruction of Afghanistan. We are not only ready to open, develop and build our own country, we are also willing to develop a win-win situation with them," he added.

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US Pens Deal for New Military Base in Micronesia in Latest Move to Keep China Out of Pacific by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

As the US pursues "great power competition" with China, Washington is on the hunt for new bases in the Pacific it can use to potentially get an upper hand in the fight. The latest site to be agreed upon is in the Federated States of Micronesia, a group of archipelagoes on the far side of the Philippine Sea from China.

Last month in Honolulu, Hawaii, Microensian President David Panuelo held high-level defense talks with US Navy Adm. John C. Aquilino, commander of US Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) about "the United States' broader defense and force posture in the Pacific," among other topics.

"The FSM and the United States collaborated on plans for more frequent and permanent US Armed Forces presence, and have agreed to cooperate on how that presence will be built up both temporarily and permanently within the FSM, with the purpose of serving the mutual security interests of both nations," [a news release](#) by the Micronesian government noted. The release gave no further details about where the base would be located or what type of facility it would be.

Speaking to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation after the summit, [Panuelo said](#) that while the small country of 58,000 people maintains diplomatic relations with China, he didn't foresee the new US base as harming that relationship.

“The Freely Associated States are squarely part of the homeland, and so, we’re being protected by the United States,” he said, referring to a special client-state arrangement by which the FSM, as well as neighboring Palau and Republic of the Marshall Islands, get access to US federal aid in exchange for allowing the US military to operate in their territories and demand land for bases. The 20-year treaty is up for renewal in 2024.

“Any time there is a sudden change to the land, you affect our identity as Native islanders,” Sam Illesugam, a Micronesian native from the western Yap state, told [Public Radio International](#) last week. “This will alter the social landscape of our islands. Our islands are very, very small. Any type of changes to our lifestyle will greatly affect us.”

A ‘Power-Projection Superhighway’

The strategic position of Micronesia and neighboring Pacific islands has not gone unnoticed by US defense thinkers in recent years. In [September 2019, a report](#) by the Rand Corporation referred to the Freely Associated States as “a power-projection superhighway running through the heart of the North Pacific into Asia.”

"History underscores that the FAS play a vital role in US defense strategy," the report said, according to [Radio New Zealand](#). "If ignored or subverted, they could become, as in the past, a critical vulnerability."

"Going forward, the United States, its allies, and its partners should demonstrate their commitment to the region by maintaining appropriate levels of funding to the FAS, and strengthening engagement with the FAS more broadly," Rand further advised.

More specific ideas appeared in an April 2021 [op-ed in Defense One](#) written by Abraham M. Denmark, who served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for East Asia under former US President Barack Obama from 2015 to 2017, and Eric Sayers, a visiting fellow at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and former special assistant to INDOPACOM.

They argue that in order to deter the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA), the US must building facilities on “key Pacific islands” including Tinian, one of the Northern Mariana Islands north of Guam; Palau, which is about 750 miles southwest of Guam; and Yap, the westernmost large island in Micronesia, which sits about halfway between Guam and Palau.

Guam is presently the hub of US military activity in the region, with Pentagon facilities covering 29% of the island’s surface. Those include US Naval Base Guam, which is capable of docking aircraft carriers, and Andersen Air Force Base, a massive facility that houses [strategic bombers](#) and serves as a stopoff facility for aircraft crossing the Pacific.

The US military’s presence on Guam is [widely reviled](#), as massive air, water and noise pollution affect much of the island and the steadily encroaching US military facilities cut down more and more forestland, endangering the livelihoods of the native Chamorro people and [sparking protests](#).

Fears of Chinese Expansion Fall Flat

In recent years, the PLA Navy has increased its activities in the Philippine Sea, including drilling with its new aircraft carriers, as well as with long-range aircraft. The sea encloses Taiwan’s eastern flank and is necessary to sail through if one wishes to avoid an inherently contentious transit through the Taiwan Strait. It has also tested [new long-range missiles](#), like the Dong Feng-26, that are capable of [reaching Guam](#) from the Chinese mainland 2,000 miles away.

US Defense Secretary [Lloyd Austin told](#) the US Senate Armed Services Committee in June as he argued for a larger military budget that China "wants to control the Indo-Pacific" region as part of its quest to become the "preeminent country" on the planet.

Further, the inclusion or potential inclusion of several Pacific Island nations into China's Belt and Road Initiative has aroused fears in the US and Australia that China is trying to expand its sphere of influence in the region and could even base military forces there.

In 2018, the Solomon Islands switched its recognition of the Chinese government from Taipei to Beijing, and Australian and Western media began to fret that Chinese military facilities would soon follow. [As Sputnik reported](#) at the time, those fears were heavily based on false reports that China had been scouting a spot in the nearby island nation of Vanuatu for a new naval base location - negotiations which instead turned out to be a \$190 million commercial wharf on Vanuatu's Santo Island.

The following year Kiribati switched its recognition, as well, and the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), a Canberra-based think tank funded in part by the Australian Department of Defense, began [raising its own fears](#) of Chinese development, claiming Beijing would imminently begin seafloor dredging projects to widen the nation's narrow islands and fortify them with military bases, as it has done to some South China Sea islands.

ASPI accused China of "moving to achieve control over the vital trans-Pacific sea lines of communication under the guise of assisting with economic development and climate-change adaptation," referring to a deal in January of that year for Beijing to support Kiribati's 20-year development plan aimed at saving the island nation from seas rising due to climate change. A repaired derelict airfield on the remote island of Canton was [served up as proof](#) in May 2021 that the Chinese were planning to turn it into a new air base, although [Beijing soon clarified](#) the repairs were for civilian use, as the island had once been a tourist hub.

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US Raises COVID Travel Advisory for Canada to 'Level 4, Do Not Travel' - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - The United States has raised its travel alert for Canada due to the spread of the coronavirus and is urging American citizens not to travel to the country, the State Department said on Tuesday.

"The Department of State has updated the following Travel Advisories to reflect CDC's recent methodology update to its science-based THNs for COVID-19 that outline current issues affecting travelers' health," the State Department said in a press release. "This week, the following Travel Advisories have been assessed and reissued with updates, raised to a Level 4 – Do Not Travel: Azerbaijan, Canada, Estonia, Laos, North Macedonia, Saint Lucia, Switzerland."

The US also raised travel advisories to "Level 3 – Reconsider Travel," for three additional nations, Germany, Bermuda and Moldova, the release said.

The changes reflect US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Travel Health Notices based on the prevalence of COVID-19, as well as secondary factors related to the pandemic such as

commercial flight availability, restrictions on US citizen entry and difficulty obtaining coronavirus test results within three calendar days, the release added.

On Monday, the European Union (EU) issued a non-binding recommendation that its 27 member nations reinstate restrictions on US citizen entry, also due to a rise in COVID-19 cases.

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Australian Police Arrest Over 150 People During Lockdown Protests

MOSCOW, August 30 (Sputnik) - More than 150 people were arrested on Tuesday in the Australian state of New South Wales for taking part in anti-lockdown protests amid strict COVID-19 isolation measures, the Australian broadcaster ABC reported.

According to the outlet, 570 people were fined for violations of the lockdown regime.

In just one day, police were deployed to disperse 57 protests in the state, where restrictive measures in various areas have been in force since late June. Protests took place in Sydney and other districts, according to ABC.

An unsanctioned rally took place near the Australian Parliament building in Canberra, which also required police intervention.

Many protesters did not comply with the authorities' demand to wear protective masks everywhere and not to leave their areas of residence, and, if possible, always stay at home.

According to Johns Hopkins University, the death toll in Australia has risen to 1,008 people and the number of detected cases to more than 53,851 people.

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Heavy Flood Disrupts Humanitarian Assistance in Disaster Ridden Haiti

MOSCOW, August 30 (Sputnik) - The UN World Food Programme (WFP) said on Tuesday rescue and relief efforts in Haiti are being disrupted by heavy rain and flooding.

"Lives have been lost, homes have been reduced to rubble due to the devastating earthquake in Haiti. Heavy rain and flooding are now complicating rescue and relief efforts," the agency said in a video published on Twitter.

On August 14, a deadly 7.2 magnitude earthquake struck Haiti, with the death toll topping 2,200 people. Over 12,000 people sustained injuries of different degrees of severity. The earthquake was shortly followed by a tropical storm that brought floods to many regions and swept away precarious mud roads, isolating entire chunks of the impoverished country.

While the disaster-ridden nation is in dire need of humanitarian assistance, charity operations have been disturbed by rain and flooding, WFP said.

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Lavrov Does Not Rule Out Relocation of Konev Monument in Prague to Russian Embassy Grounds

MOSCOW, August 30 (Sputnik) - Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on Tuesday that the monument to World War II hero Marshal Ivan Konev in Prague may be relocated to the territory of the Russian Embassy in the Czech Republic.

"There was an initiative of a head of the one of the Prague areas to place it [the statue] on their territory, we are ready to do this. So far, this idea has not been really formed... Well, we do not rule out the option of moving the monument to the embassy territory, this is a worthy place in Prague," Lavrov said at a meeting with representatives of national and cultural associations.

The authorities of the Prague-6 district dismantled the monument to Marshal Konev, who led the Prague liberation effort by the Soviet Red Army in 1945, in April of the last year, with what they said was an intention to install it later in the museum of the history of the 20th century that is under construction.

Moscow branded the move as "outrageous and cynical," adding that it would prefer to see the monument restored in the Czech Republic or in Russia. The Russian Investigative Committee launched a criminal case on the desecration of the symbols of the Russian military glory.

Czech President Milos Zeman called the dismantlement of the monument a folly.

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German Space Agency Hopes to Foster More Cooperation With Russia - Chief

COLORADO SPRINGS, August 30 (Sputnik) - The German Space Agency at DLR is making efforts to boost cooperation with Russia, agency Head Walther Pelzer told Sputnik.

"Russia is, from our point of view, a very, very important partner. And this is the reason why I actually try to have even more meetings, not only one with Roscosmos but also with former astronauts," Pelzer said. "I try to get in touch to actually foster our cooperation."

Speaking with Sputnik at the sidelines of the 36th Space Symposium in Colorado Springs, US, Pelzer pointed out that the German-Russian monitoring system for animal migration Icarus is an example of successful collaboration.

"When we look, for example, at ICARUS, we are very proud that we jointly set up this project on the ISS. We have few other projects we do together," he explained. "So, from this point of view, I think there's a lot of room we can do more together."

Icarus was launched in early 2020 as a joint project between the Max Planck Society, the DLR and Roscosmos to observe the migration patterns and behavioral movement of birds, mammals and insects across the world.

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New German Government Likely to Support ISS Extension - Space Agency Chief

COLORADO SPRINGS, August 30 (Sputnik) - The new government in Berlin will likely support extending the International Space Station (ISS) to the year 2030, head of German Space Agency at DLR, Walther Pelzer, told Sputnik.

Germany is set to hold a crucial Bundestag election on September 26, in effect electing a new chancellor as longtime leader Angela Merkel is set to step down after 15 years at the helm.

"We will get the new government in a few weeks' time. But I'm positive that they will support this decision to go to 2030 at least," Pelzer said on the sidelines of the 36th Space Symposium in Colorado Springs, US,

NASA Administrator Bill Nelson told Sputnik that he hopes that the cooperation between the United States and Russia in the ISS will continue beyond 2030.

When asked whether he expects the ISS exploration to be extended, Nelson said: "Yes. To 2030. And Russia is our partner on the ISS."

Russian State Space Corporation Roscosmos chief Dmitry Rogozin is expected to discuss the possibility of extending the ISS operation beyond 2024 at his meeting with Nelson, set to take place in the fall, Roscosmos Deputy Director General for International Cooperation Sergey Saveliev told Sputnik earlier this week.

Russia is planning to stop using the ISS by 2028 and create a national space station instead given risks posed by ISS worn-out equipment.

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German Space Agency Chief Says Will Discuss Moon Base Project With Roscosmos

COLORADO SPRINGS, August 30 (Sputnik) - Head of the German Space Agency at DLR, Walther Pelzer, told Sputnik he plans to discuss the International Lunar Research Station (ILRS) initiative with Roscosmos in an upcoming meeting, which he hopes will be attended by its head Dmitry Rogozin.

In March, Russia reaffirmed its lunar exploration ambitions by signing a memorandum on cooperation with China's National Space Administration on the creation of the ILRS.

"I'm going to discuss it [ILRS] with Roscosmos. We already have an appointment as far as I know, and then we can go more into detail but right now we are not so far," Pelzer said.

Pelzer, speaking to Sputnik on the sidelines of the 36th Space Symposium, said he does not know whether Rogozin will be part of the meeting but expressed hope that he will participate.

ESA Director General Josef Aschbacher told Sputnik earlier that the member states of the European Space Agency (ESA) are discussing an offer made by Russia and China on possible participation on the ILRS, but that no decision has yet been reached.

Pelzer refrained from giving any exact policy statements on the matter to maintain a unified cross-agency position.

"We are aware of this offer and as Josef said, he is now in the discussion and coming back with more details of the offer... but we will not come up with separate positions prior to the discussion," Pelzer said.

The ILRS was conceived as a scientific experiment base on the lunar surface and orbit aimed at carrying out multi-disciplinary and multi-objective scientific research activities, including lunar exploration and observation.

In late March, Russian scientists also announced plans to send a capsule with microorganisms to the moon and leave it for several years to assess the effect of lunar conditions on biological objects.

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German Space Agency Chief Says Happy Russia Added Nauka Module to ISS

COLORADO SPRINGS, August 30 (Sputnik) - Head of the German Space Agency at DLR, Walther Pelzer, told Sputnik that he is glad that Russia has brought the Nauka multipurpose laboratory module to the International Space Station (ISS).

Nauka docked with the ISS on July 29 after 14 years of waiting on the Earth and eight days of orbital flight. This is the first Russian module sent to the station in 11 years. The module was originally scheduled to go into orbit in 2007, but the launch was postponed multiple times for various reasons.

"From my point of view and, I'm very happy that Russia brought up this new element," Pelzer said on the sidelines of the 36th Space Symposium.

Nauka docked to the ISS on July 29. Three hours after the docking, its engines spontaneously activated, which led to a 45-degree turn of the station. The space station's engines had to be switched on in order to compensate for the change.

Roscosmos Executive Director for Piloted Spaceflights Sergey Krikalev said in early August that a special commission was formed to establish causes of unscheduled activation of engines of Russia's Nauka multipurpose laboratory module after its docking to the ISS.

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German Space Agency Chief Says Committed to ISS Amid Talk of Russian Orbital Station

COLORADO SPRINGS, August 30 (Sputnik) - Head of the German Space Agency at DLR, Walther Pelzer, told Sputnik they are committed to and focused on the International Space Station (ISS) at the moment, commenting on possible cooperation with Russia on a separate spacecraft.

"Right now we have, we have a clear commitment to ISS. This is what we focus on," Pelzer said on the sidelines of the 36th Space Symposium when asked about a potential Russian orbital station.

At the end of July, the Scientific and Technical Council of Roscosmos recommended laying the groundwork for construction of a new national space station "in order to avoid risks related to the technical condition of the Russian section of the ISS, and [due to] the plans to end its use by 2028."

On Monday, Roscosmos Deputy Director General for International Cooperation Sergey Saveliev told Sputnik that Dmitry Rogozin, the chief of Russian space agency Roscosmos, is expected to discuss the possibility of extending the operation of the ISS at a meeting with NASA

Administrator Bill Nelson in October in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Asked whether the possibility of extending the space station's life beyond 2024 will be discussed at the meeting in Dubai, Saveliev said "Absolutely."

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RPT: REVIEW - 'Every Single' US Troop Exits Afghanistan, Ending America's Longest War

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - For the first time in two decades there are zero US troops on the ground in Afghanistan after Washington executed a successful final extraction - one day ahead of a looming deadline - leaving the country's fate in the hands of the Taliban movement (banned in Russia as a terrorist group).

On Monday, US CENTCOM chief Kenneth McKenzie announced that all remaining US service members have been removed from Afghanistan ahead of the August 31 deadline. The last US C-17 military aircraft left Kabul airport at 3:29 p.m. EST with Ambassador to Afghanistan Ross

Wilson aboard, which put an end to a botched evacuation which has become a political disaster for President Joe Biden.

The move puts to an end to America's longest war, which began on October 7, 2001, initially in search of the al-Qaeda terrorist group (banned in Russia) and its leader Osama Bin Laden. However, after toppling the Taliban the original occupation morphed into a counterinsurgency effort while Washington backed what many perceived as a corrupt government in Kabul, which guaranteed an insurgent comeback.

In the end, the very same Taliban movement the United States ousted in 2001 is now back in power after a lightning-seizure of Kabul earlier in August.

FINAL EXIT

US and coalition forces evacuated more than 123,000 civilians from Afghanistan before the final departure, while American military leaders acknowledged the final evacuation would not be possible without assistance from the Taliban, who established a firm perimeter around the Kabul airport on Monday that prevented terrorists from taking advantage of the situation.

"Every single US service member is now out of Afghanistan. I can say it with 100 percent certainty," McKenzie said during a press briefing on Monday. "The military phase of this operation has ended, diplomatic sequel to that will now begin."

However, the CENTCOM chief also warned that that some 2,000 "hardcore" IS fighters are in Afghanistan right now, and the terror threat remains high. He also said that although all evacuees have left, less than 200 Americans still remain in Afghanistan.

After the exit, the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) issued a notice warning that Kabul airport is no longer controlled and aircraft should use extreme caution when landing there.

In addition to pulling all forces, the US closed its diplomatic presence in Kabul and transferred operations to Doha, including consular affairs and administration of aid, which would be delivered under certain conditions.

"The United States will continue to support humanitarian aid to the Afghan people... [but] consistent with our sanctions on the Taliban, the aid will not flow through the government, but rather through independent organizations, such as UN agencies and NGOs," Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a speech after announcing the diplomatic move to Doha.

Biden said he will address the American people on Tuesday about the complete withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan. He also said he asked Blinken to coordinate with international partners to ensure safe passage for any Americans, Afghan partners, and foreign nationals who want to leave.

Meanwhile, also on Monday, the UN Security Council adopted a resolution that says it expects the Taliban to allow Afghans and foreigners to safely leave the country, with abstentions by China and Russia.

IN TALIBAN HANDS

US Special Representative for Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad said Afghans may now choose the path for their country in full sovereignty following the complete withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan.

"With the departure of our military and those of the many partners who stood with us, Afghans face a moment of decision and opportunity," Khalilzad said via Twitter on Monday. "Their country's future is in their hands. They will choose their path in full sovereignty. This is the chance to bring their war to an end as well."

However, the Taliban would make clear that the country of Afghanistan was now in their hands. "The last foreign serviceman has left the territory of Afghanistan. Now the entire territory of the country is under the control of the Taliban. Now our state has become free and independent," Mohammad Naim, a spokesman for the movement's political office, told Sputnik.

The Taliban also called on the international community to provide support to the Afghan people in the economy, education and health care, a spokesman for the movement told Al Jazeera television.

CHAOS & DEATH: BIDEN'S POLITICAL NIGHTMARE

The Biden administration was blindsided by the Taliban's lightning seizure of Kabul on August 15, despite having intelligence and plenty of warnings that a collapse was imminent. Shortly before Kabul fell, several Biden administration officials repeatedly claimed that the 300,000-strong Afghan Army would defend the capital and the government.

Instead, the Taliban took Kabul, President Ashraf Ghani fled the country, and the remnants of the Northern Alliance have taken up in the Panjshir Valley where the civil war is still ongoing. The botched evacuation left thousands of Afghans and Americans at the Kabul airport as sitting ducks for an attack by the IS-Khorasan terror group (banned in Russia) which left some 90 dead including thirteen US troops.

Trump exploited the situation of course, and has a solid argument to do so considering if the Pentagon had listened to him, all American troops possibly could have been home by Christmas.

On Monday, Trump criticized the Biden administration's handling of the exit saying that never in history has a withdrawal been handled so poorly. He also slammed Biden for letting the Taliban get their hands on so much US equipment and weaponry.

Adding insult to injury, later in the day, nearly 90 former US military officers in an open letter called on Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Joint Chiefs Chairman Mark Milley to resign over the "disastrous" withdrawal from Afghanistan.

In hindsight, one could reasonably argue the entire catastrophe could have potentially been avoided if Biden had followed the withdrawal plan left by his predecessor, which was the result of a deal US and Taliban negotiators struck and signed in February of 2020. The Doha agreement called for a full American force extraction by May 1 in exchange for counterterrorism assurances.

However, the Biden administration put the Trump plan "on hold" and conducted an internal review, which forced Washington to delay the exit by four months.

Former CIA Analyst Ray McGovern, who personally briefed four US presidents during his career, wondered why the Biden team never issued a new National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on how to exit Afghanistan and the likely consequences of such a move.

"Were the CIA and the other intelligence agencies elbowed out because it was recognized their analysts might pose awkward questions that could not easily or conveniently be answered?" McGovern told Sputnik.

LEGACY & AFTERMATH

After losing more than 2,400 troops and spending some \$2.26 trillion, the United States has little to show for its involvement in Afghanistan – which surpassed the length of the Vietnam War by nearly six months.

Washington also spent \$140 billion on rebuilding, up to 30 percent of which was potentially wasted, according to a US reconstruction inspector general.

World Beyond War Executive Director David Swanson summed up what the Americans left behind.

"They leave 2 to 5 million dead, millions injured, millions traumatized, millions homeless, the rule of law eroded, the natural environment devastated, government secrecy and surveillance and authoritarianism increased worldwide," Swanson told Sputnik.

Terrorism and weapons sales increased across the globe, Swanson added, while racism and bigotry spread and trillions of dollars were wasted.

He also said the war in Afghanistan corroded a culture, generated a drug epidemic, while "wealth transferred upward to a handful of profiteers."

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RPT - UN to Adjust Footprint in Afghanistan Depending on Needs, Security Situation -
Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, August 30 (Sputnik) - The United Nations will adjust the number of its personnel in Afghanistan depending on the organization's operational needs and the security situation on the ground, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric told Sputnik.

Earlier, Russian Special Presidential Representative for Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov called on the United Nations to return its officials who have been evacuated back to the country to address the possible outflow of Afghan refugees to other countries.

"The UN will adjust our footprint depending on our operational needs as well as the security situation," Dujarric said.

Earlier, the last US troops left Afghanistan, ending America's longest war.

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REVIEW - 'Every Single' US Troop Exits Afghanistan, Ending America's Longest War

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - For the first time in two decades there are zero US troops on the ground in Afghanistan after Washington executed a successful final extraction - one day ahead of a looming deadline – leaving the country's fate in the hands of the Taliban movement (banned in Russia as a terrorist group).

On Monday, US CENTCOM chief Kenneth McKenzie announced that all remaining US service members have been removed from Afghanistan ahead of the August 31 deadline. The last US C-17 military aircraft left Kabul airport at 3:29 p.m. EST with Ambassador to Afghanistan Ross Wilson aboard, which put an end to a botched evacuation which has become a political disaster for President Joe Biden.

The move puts to an end to America's longest war, which began on October 7, 2001, initially in search of the al-Qaeda terrorist group (banned in Russia) and its leader Osama Bin Laden. However, after toppling the Taliban the original occupation morphed into a counterinsurgency effort while Washington backed what many perceived as a corrupt government in Kabul, which guaranteed an insurgent comeback.

In the end, the very same Taliban movement the United States ousted in 2001 is now back in power after a lightning-seizure of Kabul earlier in August.

FINAL EXIT

US and coalition forces evacuated more than 123,000 civilians from Afghanistan before the final departure, while American military leaders acknowledged the final evacuation would not be possible without assistance from the Taliban, who established a firm perimeter around the Kabul airport on Monday that prevented terrorists from taking advantage of the situation.

"Every single US service member is now out of Afghanistan. I can say it with 100 percent certainty," McKenzie said during a press briefing on Monday. "The military phase of this operation has ended, diplomatic sequel to that will now begin."

However, the CENTCOM chief also warned that that some 2,000 "hardcore" IS fighters are in Afghanistan right now, and the terror threat remains high. He also said that although all evacuees have left, less than 200 Americans still remain in Afghanistan.

After the exit, the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) issued a notice warning that Kabul airport is no longer controlled and aircraft should use extreme caution when landing there.

In addition to pulling all forces, the US closed its diplomatic presence in Kabul and transferred operations to Doha, including consular affairs and administration of aid, which would be delivered under certain conditions.

"The United States will continue to support humanitarian aid to the Afghan people... [but] consistent with our sanctions on the Taliban, the aid will not flow through the government, but rather through independent organizations, such as UN agencies and NGOs," Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a speech after announcing the diplomatic move to Doha.

Biden said he will address the American people on Tuesday about the complete withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan. He also said he asked Blinken to coordinate with international partners to ensure safe passage for any Americans, Afghan partners, and foreign nationals who want to leave.

Meanwhile, also on Monday, the UN Security Council adopted a resolution that says it expects the Taliban to allow Afghans and foreigners to safely leave the country, with abstentions by China and Russia.

IN TALIBAN HANDS

US Special Representative for Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad said Afghans may now choose the path for their country in full sovereignty following the complete withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan.

"With the departure of our military and those of the many partners who stood with us, Afghans face a moment of decision and opportunity," Khalilzad said via Twitter on Monday. "Their country's future is in their hands. They will choose their path in full sovereignty. This is the chance to bring their war to an end as well."

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Blinken Says US Aid Will Not Flow Through Taliban Gov't But Through Independent Agencies

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - The United States will continue to provide humanitarian aid to the Afghan people through independent organizations, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a press conference.

"The United States will continue to support humanitarian aid to the Afghan people," Blinken said on Monday. "Consistent with our sanctions on the Taliban, the aid will not flow through the government, but rather through independent organizations, such as UN agencies and NGOs [non-governmental organizations]."

Blinken added that the Taliban (banned in Russia as a terror group) are not expected to impede on humanitarian aid operations in Afghanistan.

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Blinken Says Under 200 Americans Remain in Afghanistan Who Want to Leave

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - There are between 100 and 200 Americans left in Afghanistan who still wish to leave the country despite the US completing its withdrawal on Monday, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.

"We believe there are still a small number of Americans – under 200 and likely closer to 100 – who remain in Afghanistan and want to leave. We're trying to determine exactly how many," Blinken said at a presser on Monday.

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US to Use Doha Post to Run Consular Affairs, Administer Aid in Afghanistan After Departure

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - The US will be moving its diplomatic base of operations for Afghanistan to Doha, Qatar after completing its withdrawal of military forces from the country's capital city of Kabul, Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced.

"As of today, we've suspended our diplomatic presence in Kabul and transferred our operations to Doha, Qatar, which will soon be formally notified to Congress," Blinken said at a presser on Monday. "For the time being, we will use this post in Doha to manage our diplomacy with Afghanistan, including consular affairs, administering humanitarian assistance, and working with allies, partners, and regional and international stakeholders to coordinate our engagement and messaging to the Taliban."

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US Envoy Khalilzad Says Afghans Can Now Choose Path 'In Full Sovereignty'

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - US Special Representative for Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad said Afghans may now choose the path for their country in full sovereignty following the complete withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan.

"With the departure of our military and those of the many partners who stood with us, Afghans face a moment of decision and opportunity," Khalilzad said via Twitter on Monday. "Their country's future is in their hands. They will choose their path in full sovereignty. This is the chance to bring their war to an end as well."

The last US flight left Kabul airport at 3:29 EST, marking the end of the United States' 20-year war in Afghanistan and leaving the Taliban (designated as a terror group and banned in Russia) with full control of the entire country.

Khalilzad said the Taliban face a test on whether it can lead Afghanistan to a prosperous future. In 2019, former Afghan national security adviser Hamdullah Mohib accused the Trump administration of trying to unseat former Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and replace him with Khalilzad.

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New Orleans Airport Cancels All Flights Monday After Hurricane Ida Hits City Over Weekend

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - The Louis Armstrong International Airport in New Orleans, Louisiana, cancelled all of the flights scheduled for Monday after Hurricane Ida made landfall a day earlier, the airport authorities announced.

"All airlines have cancelled flights scheduled for today. There are already 141 reported cancellations tomorrow, and could be more. We ask that passengers maintain contact with their carriers as airport and airline staffs work to resume operations," the airport authority said via Twitter on Monday.

Earlier in the day, US President Joe Biden said at least one person was killed during as Hurricane Ida advanced and the number is likely to increase. Hurricane Ida hit Louisiana as a Category 4 storm before weakening to a Category 1 as it moved across the coast of the Gulf of Mexico.

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Russia Did Not Vote on UN Afghanistan Resolution Because It Omitted Terrorism, IS - Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, August 30 (Sputnik) - Russia abstained from voting on the UN Security Council resolution on Afghanistan because the document did not include a passage on terrorism and did not mention the Islamic State terror group (banned in Russia), Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said.

On Monday, the 15-member UN Security Council adopted a resolution that expects the Taliban (designated as a terror group and banned in Russia) to allow Afghans and foreigners to safely leave Afg. Russia and China abstained while 13 others voted in favor.

"Despite the fact that the resolution was proposed against the backdrop of a terrible terrorist attack, the authors categorically refused to refer to a passage on the fight against terrorism, containing internationally recognized terrorist organizations ISIL [Islamic State] and the East Turkistan Islamic movement," Nebenzia said on Monday.

Chinese Deputy Representative to the United Nations Geng Shuang said his country abstained from voting because it had doubts about the balance of the resolution's content. Nevertheless, China took part in the discussion and together with Russia proposed amendments that were not fully adopted, Geng said.

The diplomat also said China believed the recent terrorist attack at the Kabul airport was directly related to what it believes was a disorderly withdrawal of foreign troops.

"The terrorist attack in Kabul once again proved that the war in Afghanistan did not achieve the goal of eliminating terrorists," Geng said. "The hasty withdrawal of foreign troops is likely to have provided opportunities for various terrorist organizations to make a comeback."

On Thursday, several explosions hit the Kabul airport and its outskirts, killing more than 150 people, including 13 American troops. The Islamic State-Khorasan terror group (banned in Russia) claimed responsibility for the attacks.

Washington has admitted its security services' failure to thwart the terrorist attacks amid a chaotic US evacuation from Afghanistan. The White House confirmed that President Joe Biden gave the US military all the authority needed to carry out attacks against the Islamic State-Khorasan without congressional approval.

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Number of Americans Left Behind in Afghanistan in 'Very Low Hundreds' - CENTCOM Chief

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - The number of US citizens left behind in Afghanistan numbers in the very low hundreds, US Central Commander (CENTCOM) chief Kenneth McKenzie said during a press briefing.

"We think the citizens that were not brought out number in the very low hundreds," McKenzie said on Monday evening.

McKenzie added that he believes the United States will soon be able to rescue the Americans left behind.

Moreover, McKenzie said the United States will negotiate very aggressively with the Taliban (designated as a terror group and banned in Russia) to get other Afghan partners out of Afghanistan.

US and Coalition forces were able to evacuate more than 123,000 civilians from Afghanistan before the final US flight out of the country earlier in the day, McKenzie added.

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Biden Says Will Address American People Tuesday About US Withdrawal From Afghanistan

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden said he will address the American people on Tuesday about the complete withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan.

"Tomorrow afternoon, I will address the American people on my decision not to extend our presence in Afghanistan beyond 8/31," Biden said on Monday evening.

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Biden Says Asked Blinken to Work With International Partners on Safe Passage for Evacuees

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - The US will be working in coordination with international partners to ensure safe passage for any individuals wishing to leave Afghanistan, President Joe Biden said following news that the US completed its withdrawal.

"I have asked the Secretary of State to lead the continued coordination with our international partners to ensure safe passage for any Americans, Afghan partners, and foreign nationals who want to leave Afghanistan," Biden said in a statement on Monday.

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CDC Advisory Panel Says Endorses Pfizer COVID-19 Vaccine for Persons 16 and Above

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - A key advisory panel of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said on Monday that it has unanimously endorsed the full approval of the Pfizer-BioNTech's COVID-19 vaccine for Americans aged 16 and older. "The Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine is recommended for people 16 years of age and older under FDA's Biologics License Application (BLA) Approval," the panel, which voted earlier to endorse the vaccine for the age group, said in an announcement on Tuesday. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) gave full approval for the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine a week earlier.

The approval, which marks the first full endorsement for a COVID-19 vaccine in the United States, has kicked off a wave of vaccine mandates by private employers and schools across the United States.

The panel's endorsement to allow individuals 16-year-old and above to receive the vaccine came as the US Education Department opened on Monday a civil probe against five US states that have barred face mask mandates in schools.

More than half of the US population has received at least one dose each of a COVID vaccination, prompting Biden to call the recent resurgence of coronavirus cases in the country as "the pandemic of the unvaccinated".

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US CENTCOM Chief Says Military Stage of Operation in Afghanistan 'Ended'

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - US Central Command (CENTCOM) Commander Kenneth McKenzie said during a press briefing that the military part of the United States' operation in Afghanistan has ended and now it will be followed by diplomacy.

"The military phase of this operation has ended, diplomatic sequel to that will now begin," McKenzie said on Monday. "I think our Department of State is going to work very hard to allow any American citizens that were left... I believe we are going to be able to get those people out. I think we are also going to negotiate very hard and very aggressively to get our other Afghan partners out."

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Taliban Promised Not to Interfere With US Withdrawal - CENTCOM Commander

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - US Central Command (CENTCOM) Commander Kenneth McKenzie said during a press briefing that the Taliban (designated as terror group and banned in Russia) promised not interfere with the United States withdrawal from Afghanistan. "They [Taliban] promised not to interfere with our withdrawal," McKenzie said during a press briefing on Monday.

McKenzie said the Taliban established a firm perimeter outside of the airfield to prevent people from coming on the airfield during the final US departure flight and added that the United States will do everything possible to ensure the Kabul international airport is operational for civilian traffic.

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US Demilitarized Some Equipment in Afghanistan Before Withdrawing - CENTCOM Chief

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - The United States demilitarized some of the military equipment in Afghanistan that it was unable to bring back during the withdrawal from that country, US Central Command chief Kenneth McKenzie said.

"We brought some of [the equipment] out and we demilitarized some of it," McKenzie said on Monday. "We've also demilitarized equipment that we did not bring out of the airport that included a number of MRAPs (Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles), up to 70 MRAPs that we demilitarized that will never be used again by anyone."

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US CENTCOM Chief Warns Terror Threat in Afghanistan to Be 'Very High'

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - US Central Command (CENTCOM) Commander Kenneth McKenzie said that Afghanistan is facing "very high" terror threat in the upcoming days and weeks.

"I think that the terror threat is going to be very high," McKenzie said during a press briefing on Monday afternoon.

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'Every Single' US Service Member Now Out of Afghanistan - Central Command

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - All US service members present in Afghanistan have left the country, US Central Command (CENTCOM) Commander Kenneth McKenzie told reporters. "Every single US Service member is now out of Afghanistan. I can say it with 100 percent certainty," McKenzie said during a press briefing on Monday.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON August 30 (Sputnik) -
AFGHANISTAN

- * The last US aircraft has left the Kabul airport bringing to an end the almost two decades-long presence of the United States in Afghanistan, US media reported on Monday afternoon.
- * The UN Security Council adopted a resolution that expects the Taliban (banned in Russia) to allow Afghans and foreigners to safely leave Afghanistan, but two permanent members - China and Russia - abstained from the vote, Indian Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla, who presides with the Security Council in August, said.
- * Russia abstained from voting because the text of the resolution did not include a passage on terrorism and did not mention the Islamic State (banned in Russia), Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said.
- * UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) Representative in Afghanistan, Herve De Lys, said on Monday at least seven children were killed in the Afghan capital of Kabul during a drone strike, yet the agency is unaware who carried out the attack.
- * Russian Special Presidential Representative for Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov called on the United Nations to return its officials back to Afghanistan to address the possible outflow of Afghan refugees to other countries.
- * The threat of another terror attack targeting the Kabul airport is still "real" and "active," Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said.
- * The US military is not in a position to dispute reports of civilian casualties resulting from an airstrike on a vehicle belonging to the Islamic State-Khorasan terror group (banned in Russia) that was reportedly loaded with explosives, Kirby said.
- * The United States estimates there are some 2,000 Islamic State terror group (banned in Russia) fighters in Afghanistan, US Central Command (CENTCOM) Commander Kenneth McKenzie said during a press briefing.

NORD STREAM 2

- * Nord Stream 2 AG, the operator of the gas pipeline, is reviewing the Dusseldorf court's decision on excluding the project from the EU gas directive and considers appealing the ruling, Russia's Gazprom said on Monday.

CORONAVIRUS

- * The European Union removed five countries, including the United States, from the list of states with which it was recommended to open the bloc's external borders, the European Council said on Monday.
- * The US Education Department has opened a civil investigation against five US states that have barred mask mandates in schools, a circular showed.
- * The Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention has suggested that the coronavirus disease entered Wuhan via frozen food imported from another country.

DRAFT 2022 DEFENSE BILL

* US House Armed Services Committee Chairman Adam Smith on Monday released a summary of his 2022 defense bill proposal that includes \$275 for security assistance to Ukraine and \$175 million for the Baltic Security Initiative.

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US Estimates 2,000 Islamic State Fighters in Afghanistan at Present - Central Command

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - The United States estimates there are some 2,000 Islamic State terror group (banned in Russia) fighters in Afghanistan, US Central Command (CENTCOM) Commander Kenneth McKenzie said during a press briefing. "There are at least 2,000 hardcore ISIS fighters in Afghanistan now," McKenzie said on Monday.

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Wall Street's Tech, Blue-Chip Stocks Rally Continues as Fed Taper Worry Vanishes

NEW YORK, August 30 (Sputnik) - Blue-chip and tech stocks on Wall Street extended their record highs on Monday as investors threw caution to the wind after last week's clear signal by the Federal Reserve that it was not about to halt the stimulus it was providing to the US economy.

The S&P 500, which groups the top 500 stocks on the New York Stock Exchange, hit a record high of 4,537 before closing at 4,528, up 19 points, or 0.4 percent on the day. The blue-chip index has gained 1.3 percent over the past two sessions alone.

Nasdaq, which includes technology giants such as Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix and Google, reached an all-time high of 15,288 before settling at 15,266 for a gain of 136 points or 0.9 percent. The tech bellwether has gained 2.1 percent since Thursday's close.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average, the broadest US equity barometer on the New York Stock Exchange that lists mostly industrial stocks, was the only major index that bucked Wall Street's upward momentum on Monday as investors remained concerned about companies in sectors impacted by COVID-19 Delta variant. The Dow finished the day down 56 points, or 0.2 percent, at 35,400.

Blue-chip and tech stocks have been buoyed since Friday, after Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell resisted setting a timetable for the taper of the central bank's asset purchases that had indirectly boosted stock prices over the past 18 months.

The Federal Reserve has been buying at least \$80 billion in Treasury securities and \$40 billion in agency mortgage-backed securities each month since March 2020 to insulate the US economy from the effects of the coronavirus pandemic. It has also kept US interest rates at a record low of between zero and 0.25 percent.

Risk assets from stocks to commodities, including oil, have rallied in that time, responding to the higher inflationary pressure caused by the Federal Reserve's actions and trillions of more dollars in COVID-19-relief spending by the Biden administration.

Subject: Wall Street's Tech, Blue-Chip Rally Continues as Fed Taper Worry Vanishes

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US, Coalition Evacuated More Than 123,000 Civilians Before Leaving - CENTCOM Commander

WASHINGTON August 30 (Sputnik) - US and Coalition forces evacuated more than 123,000 civilians from Afghanistan before the United States fully withdrew its military forces from the country by the August 31 deadline, US Central Commander (CENTCOM) Commander Kenneth McKenzie said on Monday.

"In total, US and Coalition combined to evacuate more than 123,000 civilians," McKenzie said during a press briefing.

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US Colonial Pipeline Expects to Resume Operations on Lines 1, 2 Monday Evening - Statement
WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - US Colonial Pipeline said on Monday that it expects to return service to two lines in the evening after they were temporarily shutdown amid Hurricane Ida.

"In less than 48 hours after Hurricane Ida made landfall as a devastating category 4 storm, Colonial Pipeline crews are now able to safely access facilities to complete required damage assessment and safety checks in accordance to its emergency response start-up plan," the company said in a press release. "The company expects to return Lines 1 & 2 to service the evening of Monday, August 30, 2021, pending successfully completion of all restart protocols." The two pipelines connect from Houston, Texas, to Greensboro, North Carolina.

Ida made landfall in Louisiana on Sunday as a category four hurricane but has been downgraded to a tropical storm.

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US Ambassador Left Afghanistan Aboard Last Flight Out of Country - CENTCOM Commander

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - US Ambassador to Afghanistan Ross Wilson left Afghanistan on the last C-17 flight out of the country, Central Command (CENTCOM) Commander Kenneth McKenzie said on Monday.

"The last C-17 lifted off from Hamid Karzai international airport on August 30 this afternoon at 3:29 p.m. East Coast time, the last manned aircraft is now clearing the airspace above Afghanistan... with Major General Chris Donahue and the US Ambassador to Afghanistan Ross Wilson aboard," McKenzie said in a briefing.

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US Federal Aviation Agency Issues Notice to Airmen Warning Kabul Airport 'Uncontrolled'

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - The US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has issued a notice warning that Kabul airport is no longer controlled and aircraft should use extreme caution when landing there.

The warning was sent out at 7:40 UTC (19:40 GMT) and will be effective until the end of September 12.

"Effective immediately Hamid Karzai Int'l. Airport (OAKB) is uncontrolled. No air traffic control or airport services are available. Aircraft operating into, out of, or through Kabul for landing OAKB should use extreme caution," the FAA said.

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US Disappointed With Abstentions of Russia, China on Afghanistan Resolution - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, August 30 (Sputnik) - The United States was disappointed with the abstentions from Russia and China during the UN Security Council vote on a resolution calling on the Taliban (banned in Russia) to provide safe departure from Afghanistan, US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield said on Monday.

Earlier in the day, with the support of 13 Security Council members, the body adopted a resolution that "expects" the Taliban to allow Afghans and all foreign nationals to leave the country.

"We were disappointed with these abstentions of Russia and China," Thomas-Greenfield told reporters. "Within the P5 [China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States], we consulted very closely; we took into account some of the concerns that both the Chinese and the Russians raised in the draft resolution that was eventually approved."

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US Not Ready to Recognize Taliban, Needs to See Government They Will Form - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, August 30 (Sputnik) - The United States is not in a place yet to recognize the Taliban (banned in Russia) as Afghanistan's new government and needs to see what kind of government they will form, US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield said on Monday.

"We are not in a place yet, where we are prepared to recognize the Taliban... We need to see what kind of government they form," Thomas-Greenfield said. "We insist that that government be inclusive, and that it allows for the participation of women, and that it takes into consideration as it forms itself the rights of all Afghans, including minorities. So, we will see what kinds of actions they take before any decisions are made about recognition."

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UN Security Council Could Consider Further Sanctions on Afghanistan - UK Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, August 30 (Sputnik) – The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) can consider imposing new sanctions on Afghanistan as well, UK Ambassador to the United Nations Barbara Woodward said on Monday.

"We know that the Taliban [banned in Russia] want to see the lifting of some of the sanctions on Afghanistan and that will be an important consideration. The flip side of that is of course the Security Council could consider further sanctions on Afghanistan," Woodward said during a UNSC meeting on Afghanistan.

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Final US Plane Leaves Kabul, Ending 20-Year Presence in Afghanistan - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - The last US aircraft has left from the airport in Kabul, bringing the nearly two-decade-long engagement of the United States in Afghanistan to an end, Newsweek editor said via Twitter citing US official.

"final plane is wheels up. War is over," Naveed Jamali said citing a US official.

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Russia Did Not Vote on Afghanistan Resolution Because It Omitted Terrorism, ISIS – Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, August 30 (Sputnik) – Russia abstained from voting on the Afghanistan resolution at the United Nations Security Council meeting earlier in the day because the text of the document didn't include a passage on terrorism and didn't mention the Islamic State

(banned in Russia), Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia told the UN Security Council on Monday..

The 15-member council adopted a resolution that expects the Taliban (banned in Russia) to allow Afghans and foreigners to safely leave the country. Russia and China abstained while 13 others voted in favor.

"Despite the fact that the resolution was proposed against the backdrop of a terrible terrorist attack, the authors categorically refused to refer to a passage on the fight against terrorism, containing internationally recognized terrorist organizations ISIL and the East Turkistan Islamic movement," Nebenzia said.

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UNSC Adopts Resolution On 'Safe' Departure from Afghanistan - President

UNITED NATIONS, August 30 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council adopted a resolution that expects the Taliban movement (banned in Russia) to allow Afghans and foreigners safely leave the country, with the abstentions from two permanent members - China and Russia - the council's president, Indian Foreign Secretary, Harsh Vardhan Shringla, said on Monday.

"The result of the voting is as follows: 13 votes in favor, zero votes against, two abstentions. The draft resolution has been adopted," Vardhan said.

The resolution, drafted by France, the United Kingdom and the United States, calls on the Taliban to deliver on their commitments that Afghans will be able to travel and may leave Afghanistan anytime they want, including through the Kabul airport, with no one preventing them from traveling.

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White House Says Reports That US Provided Lists of Evacuees to Taliban 'Misconstrued'

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - The reports saying that the United States provided the lists of evacuees to the Taliban group (terrorist group, banned in Russia) are mischaracterized, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said on Monday at a briefing.

Reports have recently emerged that the US officials gave the Taliban a list of US citizens as well as Afghan allies to grant access to Kabul's airport.

"There have been reports that we provided lists of people who want to leave Afghanistan to the Taliban. That's inaccurate, that's misreported, that's misconstrued," Psaki told reporters.

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US Education Dept. Opens Probe Against States Barring Masks in Schools

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - The Education Department has opened a civil probe against five US states that have barred mask mandates in schools, a circular showed Monday, amid resistance against warnings by health officials that children were vulnerable to a renewed COVID-19 surge in the country despite half of the population being vaccinated.

The Education Department circular, signed by its Acting Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights Suzanne Goldberg, told the state education boards of Utah, Oklahoma, Iowa, Tennessee and South Carolina that they were being investigated for possible violation of individual rights by the department's Office for Civil Rights (OCR).

"OCR's investigation will focus on whether, in light of this policy, students with disabilities who are at heightened risk for severe illness from COVID-19 are prevented from safely returning to in-person education, in violation of Federal law," the circular said.

The OCR investigation follows up on President Joe Biden's promise earlier this month that the Education Department would use its authority to try to stop states from interfering with school districts that wished to mandate masks for the personal safety of school-going children.

Governors of the five states that were being investigated — all run by rival Republican administrations opposed to Biden's — have argued that masking should be a personal choice for parents and families. The disputes have escalated in recent months amid a COVID-19 resurgence via the Delta variant affecting mostly unvaccinated people largely in Republican-run states.

More than half of the US population has received at least one dose each of a COVID-19 vaccination, prompting Biden to call the recent resurgence of coronavirus cases in the country as "the pandemic of the unvaccinated."

Education Secretary Miguel Cardona said in a statement on Monday that his agency has been flooded with complaints from parents wishing for mask mandates to protect their children who were too young to be vaccinated.

"It's simply unacceptable that state leaders are putting politics over the health and education of the students they took an oath to serve," Cardona said. "The Department will fight to protect every student's right to access in-person learning safely and the rights of local educators to put in place policies that allow all students to return to the classroom full-time in-person safely this fall."

The circular sent to the state education boards on Monday noted significant increases in coronavirus cases among children, including those under age 12 who are not yet eligible for vaccination.

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US Death Toll From Hurricane Ida Likely to Rise After 1 Confirmed Dead - Biden

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) – The death toll from Hurricane Ida will be rising after at least one death was confirmed, US President Joe Biden said on Monday.

“There has been at least one confirmed death, and that number is likely to grow,” Biden said during a meeting with governors and mayors from the US states affected by the hurricane. Biden said that over 5,000 of the US National Guard have been deployed from the states of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Texas to support the ongoing search and rescue operations in impacted states. He added that more than 1 million residents in Louisiana alone remain without power.

Speaking at a Sunday meeting of the US Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Biden warned that Hurricane Ida was going to be a major life-threatening storm and promised all the necessary federal assistance to Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama.

Biden approved emergency disaster declarations for Louisiana and Mississippi on Friday and Saturday, respectively, authorizing direct federal help, including power generation.

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Trump Says US Should Demand Taliban Return Equipment Under Threat of Military Force

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - The US should demand that the Taliban (banned in Russia) return all the American equipment that was seized during its takeover of the country from Afghan security forces or employ military force against the group, Former US President Donald Trump said on Monday.

“All equipment should be demanded to be immediately returned to the United States, and that includes every penny of the \$85 billion dollars in cost,” Trump said in a statement. “If it is not handed back, we should either go in with unequivocal Military force and get it, or at least bomb the hell out of it.”

Trump criticized the Biden administration's handling of the withdrawal in the statement, saying that never in history has a withdrawal been handled so poorly.

Although the US has yet to recognize the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan, the Pentagon has repeatedly said that leadership has been in communication with the group on the ground in Kabul to coordinate free passage and security during the withdrawal.

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UPDATE - US, Ukrainian Trade Chiefs Discuss Opportunities to Strengthen Economic Ties - Statement

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - US Trade Representative Katherine Tai and Ukraine's Economic Minister Oleksiy Lyubchenko met on Monday to discuss opportunities to strengthen

bilateral trade ties and to resolve regulatory issues between the two countries, the Office of the Trade Representative said.

"Ambassador Tai and Deputy Prime Minister Lyubchenko also discussed their commitment to increase investment between the two countries as well as regulatory issues, digital trade issues, intellectual property issues and shared concerns about excess capacity in steel and aluminum industries from non-market economics," the US Office of the Trade Representative said in a press release.

Tai and Lyubchenko also discussed Ukraine's economic reform initiative, the release said. Tai emphasized the need for transparency and accountability in the Ukrainian government, the release also said.

Tai emphasized that building trust in the Ukrainian government will create an environment that allows commerce to prosper, the release added.

President Joe Biden will meet with his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the White House on Wednesday. Biden was expected to welcome Zelenskyy to the White House on Tuesday for talks on politics, the economy and security, but the deteriorating security situation in the Afghan capital of Kabul forced a change in plans.

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UNSC Draft Resolution 'Expects' Taliban to Allow Afghans, Foreigners to Leave Afghanistan

UNITED NATIONS, August 30 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council will vote later on Monday on a resolution by France, the United Kingdom and the United States that expects the Taliban movement (banned in Russia) to allow Afghan citizens and foreigners to safely leave the country.

The resolution, obtained by Sputnik, "expects that the Taliban will adhere to... commitments, including regarding the safe, secure, and orderly departure from Afghanistan of Afghans and all foreign nationals."

On August 27, the Taliban stated that Afghans will be able to travel and may leave Afghanistan anytime they want, including through the Kabul airport, with no one preventing them from traveling.

The resolution also notes the "dangerous security situation" around the airport and calls on the relevant parties to work with international partners to strengthen security.

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UN Hopeful Taliban Will Provide Secure Functioning of Kabul Airport - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, August 30 (Sputnik) - The United Nations hopes the Taliban movement (banned in Russia) will be able to secure the Kabul airport and enable its functioning after the departure of foreign troops from Afghanistan, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Monday.

"We very much hope that the Taliban will be able to secure the airport and provide an environment in which the airport can function,... in which aircraft operators feel that their planes can land and take off safely," Dujarric said.

On August 26, the Kabul airport and its surroundings were targeted by explosive devices. The Islamic State-Khorasan terror group (banned in Russia) claimed responsibility for the attacks. A source in the Afghan Ministry of Health told Sputnik that over 1,300 people had been injured in a series of terrorist attacks, with the death toll standing at 110 people. At least 13 US service members were killed in the attack, according to Defense Department.

Earlier on Monday, Defense Department spokesperson John Kirby said the threat of another terror attack targeting the Kabul airport was still "real" and "active."

The US military's withdrawal from Afghanistan its scheduled to end on August 31. Since July, the United States and allied countries have evacuated approximately 122,000 people out of Afghanistan, including about 5,400 US citizens.

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Turkmen, Tajik, Austrian Officials Discuss Issue of Afghan Refugees - Ashgabat

ASHGABAT, August 30 (Sputnik) - Diplomats and migration officials from Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Austria discussed on Monday the issue of Afghan refugees during an online meeting, the Turkmen Foreign Ministry said.

"Today, on the 30th of August an online meeting on the issues of Afghanistan was held between the representatives of external policy agencies and organizations in charge of migration issues of Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and the Republic of Austria," the ministry said in a statement. The participants discussed the situation in Afghanistan, specifically its effect on regional stability and security.

"Also, the situation with the refugees and immigrants was considered, including the overview of acceptable mechanisms of cooperation on the regional and international scales. An exchange of views took place on the enhancement of humanitarian assistance to the Afghan population," the ministry added.

The sides agreed to carry on the active dialogue in order to implement specific tangible measures to assist Afghanistan's social and economic restoration.

In mid-August, the Taliban (a terrorist group, outlawed in Russia) entered Kabul, prompting the US-supported civilian government to collapse. The seizure of power has forced thousands of Afghans to try to escape from the country out of fear of reprisals by the militants.

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Kabul Residents Line Up to Withdraw Cash Fearing Probable Limitations - Reports

MOSCOW, August 30 (Sputnik) - People willing to withdraw money formed long lines around banks in Kabul on Monday over concerns about possible new restrictions by the Taliban (a terrorist group banned in Russia), the national Ariana News broadcaster reported.

On Saturday, that the central bank of Afghanistan ordered the private banks to resume their operations and imposed a \$200 cash withdrawal limit per person a week.

"The working situation is zero because banks and exchange markets are closed. We call on the Islamic Emirate [the Taliban] to build the Afghan economy as soon as possible," Shah Agha, the local resident, complained to Ariana News.

Amid the economic turbulence in Afghanistan, prices for necessities and basic food are rocketing while the national Afghani currency is falling.

On Saturday, hundreds of people in Kabul protested the closure of all the bank institutions in Afghanistan. The bank sector in the post-conflict state was shut down for almost a fortnight, which left many Afghans short of cash and barred employers from paying out salaries to the staff.

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Russian Diplomats Conduct Visiting Consular Services in Seattle, Salt Lake City - Embassy

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - Russian diplomats have provided visiting consular services in the US states of Washington and Utah, the Russian Embassy in the United States said on Monday.

"On August 23-28, diplomats of the Russian Embassy in the United States carried out visiting consular services for Russian citizens in Seattle [Washington] and Salt Lake City [Utah]," the embassy said in a statement. "In the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the Embassy staff received people taking into account the sanitary and epidemiological requirements of local authorities, including using masks and disinfectants."

Some 550 Russian citizens were assisted during the consular service sessions and particular attention was paid to assisting retirees, the disabled and large families, the statement said. The Russian Embassy also said it will continue conducting visiting consular sessions in the future, the statement added.

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Thailand Planning to Use Mix-and-Match COVID-19 Vaccines in Near Future - Health Authority

BANGKOK, August 30 (Sputnik) - The Thai health authorities are considering the use of a mix-and-match COVID-19 vaccine made of Sinovac and AstraZeneca in the near future to fend off new strains of coronavirus, the Disease Control Department (DCD) said on Monday.

"Soon we can switch from the Sinovac and AstraZeneca vaccines, which still prevail in our immunization program, to a new vaccination scheme. For those who have not yet received the shots, Sinovac will be used as the first dose, and AstraZeneca as the second," DCD's Emergency Health Hazard and Disease Control Director Chawetsan Namwat told reporters. According to the health official, such a combination protects against new COVID-19 strains. The doses will be administered within an interval of 12 weeks.

The mix-and-match vaccine has already been used in Thailand for two months to immunize healthcare workers, and volunteers who were in direct contact with COVID-19 patients. Pfizer vaccine is used as a booster shot.

Thailand initially aimed at vaccinating at least 70% of the 69 million population by the first quarter of 2022. Delays in the vaccination program have occurred mostly because the Thai AstraZeneca vaccine manufacturer had not managed to produce 60 million doses, which the government ordered in 2020, on time. Moreover, according to the protocol from AstraZeneca, only one-third of the output can be used domestically, while the remaining part must be exported.

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Czech Republic to Start Administering Booster Coronavirus Shots on September 20 - Minister

PRAGUE, August 30 (Sputnik) - The Czech Republic will implement third vaccination doses for vulnerable population groups starting September 20, Health Minister Adam Vojtech said on Monday.

"The third vaccine doses will be given primarily to people who are at risk. These include people aged 60 years and older, as well as chronic patients. Vaccinations will be carried out at least eight months after the end of the previous vaccination," Vojtech told a press conference.

So far, the Czech authorities have delivered nearly 11.5 million doses, with more than 5.6 million people fully vaccinated and nearly 6 million having received at least one shot.

As of Monday, the country has confirmed more than 1.6 million COVID-19 cases with 81 fresh infections over the past day, and over 30,000 related fatalities.

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At Least 7 Children Killed in Airstrike in Afghanistan - UNICEF

UNITED NATIONS, August 30 (Sputnik) - UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) Representative in Afghanistan, Herve De Lys, said on Monday at least seven children were killed in the Afghan capital of Kabul during a drone strike, yet the agency is unaware who carried out the attack. On Sunday, the US has reported carrying out drone strikes against The Islamic State-Khorasan terrorist group (ISIS-K, banned in Russia) in Kabul and other areas of Afghanistan, allegedly killing high-ranking members of the group. The Taliban (banned in Russia) condemned the strike in Kabul and claimed it resulted in scores of civilian casualties.

"The number of children that we are able to report... is seven children that have been killed. We don't know who is behind the strike," De Lys said in a press briefing.

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Most Afghans Evacuated to Prague Plan to Stay in Czech Republic – Interior Minister

PRAGUE, August 30 (Sputnik) - The majority of Afghans recently evacuated from Kabul to Prague plan to stay in the Czech Republic, Jan Hamacek, the Czech First Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister said on Monday.

Earlier in August, the Czech defense ministry evacuated 195 people from Kabul, 170 of them were Afghan nationals who collaborated with Prague, and their family members.

"Interviews with Afghans evacuated from Kabul showed that most of them would like to stay in the Czech Republic in the future. This is caused by their cooperation with our embassy and military contingent in Afghanistan. They know our republic well and are ready to adapt here," Hamacek said at a press conference.

The Czech authorities already know who exactly desires to stay in the country, the minister added.

Hamacek denied a possible large flow of migrants from Asian and African countries to Europe, saying that the country remains in contact with the EU and Balkan countries concerning this issue.

On August 15, the Taliban (a terrorist group, banned in Russia) completed their takeover of Afghanistan by entering Kabul. Ashraf Ghani resigned as president and fled the country. Many countries have resorted to evacuating their citizens and diplomatic personnel from Afghanistan due to the precarious security situation, and some have pledged to take in a limited number of Afghan asylum seekers.

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US Sends 3,500 Troops From 4 States to Rescue After Hurricane Ida - National Guard

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - The US government has activated more than 3,500 military state reservists to help in rescue and relief work in the aftermath of Hurricane Ida's path through the states of Louisiana and Mississippi, the National Guard announced on Monday.

"Almost 5,300 National Guard members from four states are activated to assist with rescue and relief efforts in the wake of Hurricane Ida's destructive path through Louisiana and Mississippi," the National Guard said in a news release.

The hurricane made landfall in the state of Louisiana on Sunday with 150 miles per hour (250 kilometer per hour) winds and heavy rains that caused widespread flooding and power outages, the release said.

"About 5,000 Guard members from the Louisiana National Guard were staged to protect lives and property, maintain communications and ensure continuity of operations and government. The rest of the support is from Guard units in Mississippi, Alabama and Texas," the release added.

The Louisiana National Guard deployed 195 high-water vehicles and 73 rescue boats with 34 helicopters ready to support search and rescue, evacuation and reconnaissance missions as needed, according to the release.

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Japan Mulls Withdrawing Evacuation Forces from Afghanistan By September 1 - Reports

MOSCOW, August 30 (Sputnik) - Japan is considering pulling out its Self-Defense Forces (SDF) from its mission to evacuate people from Afghanistan on September 1, Kyodo News reported on Monday, citing government sources.

The consideration comes after Japan assessed the present security risk around the Kabul airport and the likely risk after the departure of the US on August 31. Apart from the explosion at

the airport on August 26, an estimated five rockets fired at the airport were reportedly intercepted by the US on Monday.

According to the media, about 500 people are expected to be evacuated from Afghanistan by Japan as the August 31 deadline for the evacuation of US soldiers approaches. Japan has been looking into other options for evacuating them, including utilizing commercial planes, the agency reported.

Presently, two SDF aircraft are stationed in Islamabad in neighboring Pakistan, where several foreign governments evacuate their nationals.

Foreign troops are under pressure to wrap up evacuation by August 31, as the Taliban (outlawed in Russia) warned they would not extend the deadline. However, the string of suicide blasts near airport gates on August 26 has further heightened tension for countries evacuating their citizens and Afghan workers.

At least 170 people were reported dead and hundreds wounded in three attacks by IS (terrorist organization outlawed in Russia) suicide bombers.

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US House Proposed 2022 Defense Bill Includes \$275Mln for Ukraine Security Aid - Summary

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - US House Armed Services Committee Chairman Adam Smith on Monday released a summary of his 2022 defense bill proposal that includes \$275 million for security assistance to Ukraine and \$175 million for an initiative to ensure Baltic security.

"Includes \$275 million for the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative (USAI), which provides support and assistance to the Ukrainian Armed Forces, an increase of \$25 million above the budget request," the summary said. "Includes \$175 million for the Baltic Security Initiative (BSI)."

Smith's \$744 billion defense bill also includes \$6.2 billion for the Pacific Deterrence Initiative to counter China.

The bill would fund additional research and development for laser technology for ballistic and hypersonic defense capabilities, the summary said.

The draft copy of the bill shows nearly \$400 million to support research and development of hypersonic missiles.

The legislation would support the procurement of 75 F-35, 12 F-15EX, and 12 F-18 fighter jets for the US military, the summary said.

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Successful Elimination of Leaded Gasoline to Save 1.2Mln Lives Per Year - UN Agency

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - The successful global effort to end the use of leaded gasoline, or petroleum will save 1.2 million lives and save \$2.45 trillion a year, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) announced on Monday.

"Official end of [the] use of leaded petrol will prevent more than 1.2 million premature deaths and save \$2.45 trillion a year," UNEP said in a press release.

When service stations in Algeria stopped providing leaded petrol in July, the use of leaded petrol ended globally, following an almost two decades long campaign by the UNEP-led global Partnership for Clean Fuels and Vehicles, the release said.

"[The year] 2021 has marked the end of leaded petrol worldwide, after it has contaminated air, dust, soil, drinking water and food crops for the better part of a century. Leaded petrol causes heart disease, stroke and cancer. It also affects the development of the human brain, especially harming children," the release added.

Since 1922, the use of tetraethyllead as a petrol additive to improve engine performance has been a catastrophe for the environment and public health. When UNEP began its campaign to eliminate lead in petrol in 2002, it was one of the most serious environmental threats to human health, according to the release.

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UN to Adjust Footprint in Afghanistan Depending on Needs, Security Situation - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, August 30 (Sputnik) - The United Nations will adjust the number of its personnel in Afghanistan depending on the organization's operational needs and the security situation on the ground, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric told Sputnik on Monday.

Earlier, Russian Special Presidential Representative for Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov called on the United Nations to return its officials who have been evacuated back to the country to address the possible outflow of Afghan refugees to other countries.

"The UN will adjust our footprint depending on our operational needs as well as the security situation," Dujarric said.

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US Military Continues Evacuation, Operations Until The 'Very End' of Withdrawal - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - The US military will continue its evacuation mission in Afghanistan as well as its other operations until the very end of the withdrawal from that country, Army Maj. Gen. William Taylor said during a press briefing on Monday.

"We continue to have the capability to evacuate and fly out those [who want to leave] until the very end, but as you talk about the active piece, we continue to work with the Department of State on that, and continue evacuation and military operations," Taylor said.

As of Monday, the evacuation mission has successfully moving some 122,000 people, including 5,400 Americans, out of Afghanistan.

The threat environment around the Kabul airport from which the US military is conducting its evacuation mission is active and dynamic, Defense Department spokesperson John Kirby said. The United States will maintain self-defense authorities and capabilities throughout the retrograde, he added.

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US in Communication With Taliban Regarding US Withdrawal From Afghanistan - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) – US military commanders on the ground in Afghanistan maintain communication with Taliban (a terrorist group banned in Russia) leaders to prevent any conflicts during the evacuation and withdrawal operations from the Kabul airport, Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby said on Monday.

"Our commanders on the ground remain in communication with Taliban leaders around the airfield to deconflict and to prevent miscalculations and misunderstandings and so far that communication has been effective," Kirby said during a press briefing.

Kirby also noted that the situation around the airport remains dangerous and the threat of possible ISIS-K (banned in Russia) attacks will continues to exist.

The US military withdrawal from Afghanistan paired with the massive evacuation operation nears its scheduled end on August 31. Since July, the US and allied countries have evacuated approximately 122,000 people out of Afghanistan, including about 5,400 American nationals.

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Biden Admin to Tackle Collusion by US Oil Firms to Hike Fuel Prices - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is acting to stop US energy companies from possibly colluding to push up fuel prices, the Washington Post reported on Monday citing an internal government memo.

Federal Trade Commission Chair Lina Khan said in the memo to the White House last week, seen by the Post, that the FTC plans to ramp up enforcement of anti-competitive practices to ensure the consolidation of large oil and gas firms do not lend to "collusive practices" and unusually high gasoline prices for motorists.

In the memo, addressed to White House National Economic Council Director Brian Deese, Khan also cited steps to "deter unlawful mergers" in the oil and gas industry and to investigate whether "the power imbalance favoring large national chains" were forcing fuel station franchisees to sell gasoline at higher prices.

US gasoline was retailing at an average of \$3.15 per gallon on Monday, up 41 percent from just a year ago, according to records kept by the American Automobile Association. The surge came after crude oil prices rallied sharply over the past 12 months on supply cuts by the OPEC+ group of producing countries responding to the demand decrease caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

The FTC action against the US energy sector comes as part of the White House's broader antitrust push aimed at deterring corporate consolidation in a handful of major economic sectors.

In July, Biden signed an executive order with 72 separate directives calling on federal agencies to challenge the business practices of America's enormous technology, health care, agricultural and manufacturing firms while also aiming to shake up smaller sectors dominated by only a handful of companies, such as the hearing aid industry.

Khan, a 32-year-old antitrust crusader, was tapped by Biden for the powerful FTC position in June. The administration has faced political attacks from rival Republican lawmakers over high energy prices — particularly at the pump — and sought to demonstrate to voters that it is trying to cool inflationary trends.

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US House Proposed 2022 Defense Bill Includes \$275Mln for Ukraine Security Aid - Summary

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - US House Armed Services Committee Chairman Adam Smith on Monday released a summary of his 2022 defense bill proposal that includes \$275 for security assistance to Ukraine and \$175 million for an initiative to ensure Baltic security.

"Includes \$275 million for the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative (USAI), which provides support and assistance to the Ukrainian Armed Forces, an increase of \$25 million above the budget request," the summary said. "Includes \$175 million for the Baltic Security Initiative (BSI)."

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Threat to Kabul Airport Real, Active - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - The threat of another terror attack targeting the Kabul airport is still "real" and "active," Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said on Monday.

"The threat stream [to the Hamid Karzai International Airport] is still real, it's still active and, in many cases, it's still specific," Kirby told reporters.

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US Not in Position to Dispute Reports of Civilian Casualties in Kabul Airstrike - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) - The US military is not in a position to dispute reports of civilian casualties resulting from an airstrike on a vehicle belonging to the Islamic State-Khorasan terror group (banned in Russia) that was reportedly loaded with explosives, Defense Department spokesperson John Kirby said on Monday.

"We are not in a position to dispute [reports of civilian casualties] right now. As the General said, we're addressing and we're investigating," Kirby said.

The Defense Department will be transparent about any verifiable evidence of civilian casualties should an investigation into the airstrike produce such evidence, Kirby added.

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Unmanned SpaceX Cargo Ship Successfully Docks at International Space Station – NASA

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) – The SpaceX Dragon spacecraft carrying more than 4,800 pounds of supplies and new scientific experiments successfully docked with the International Space Station more than 260 miles above the earth, NASA confirmed in a podcast on Monday.

"We have confirmed contact and capture at 9:30 a.m. [US] Central Time, or 10:30 a.m. Eastern Daylight Time (EDT) over Western Australia," a NASA official said during live coverage of the docking procedure on the podcast.

After a successful initial "soft" docking, the Dragon was secured by 12 hooks in a regular docking procedure, the NASA official explained.

The mission was launched on Sunday on a Falcon 9 rocket from Launch Complex 39A at NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida, the agency said in a press release.

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US-Led Coalition 'Focused' on Bringing ISIS-K Members to Justice – Statement

WASHINGTON, August 30 (Sputnik) – The US-led Global Coalition to Defeat Daesh/ISIS (terror group, banned in Russia) says it remains focused on identifying and bringing members of the terror group to justice following last week's bombing attacks in Kabul, a statement published by the State Department said on Monday.

"We are focused on leveraging the Coalition's expertise and the efforts of its working groups to counter Daesh/ISIS' global branches, including Daesh/ISIS-Khorasan, and to identify and bring their members to justice," the statement said. "We will continue working closely together under the auspices of the Global Coalition to Defeat Daesh/ISIS to effectively counter this dangerous threat."

The coalition is determined to apply all kinds of power – military, intelligence, diplomatic, economic – to ensure the terrorist group is defeated, the statement said.

On August 26, several explosions targeted Kabul airport and its outskirts. The Islamic State-Khorasan terrorist group (Afghan wing of ISIS, banned in Russia) claimed responsibility for the attacks. A source in the Afghan Ministry of Health told Sputnik that over 1,300 people had been injured in a series of terrorist attacks, with the death toll standing at 110 people. At least 13 US service members were killed in the attack, according to Pentagon.

The US has reported carrying out drone strikes against IS targets in Kabul and other areas of Afghanistan, allegedly killing high-ranking members of the group. The Taliban (banned in Russia) condemned the strike in Kabul and claimed it resulted in scores of civilian casualties.

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UN Security Council to Vote on Draft Resolution on Afghanistan Monday - Source

UNITED NATIONS, August 30 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council will vote on Monday on a draft resolution by France, the United Kingdom and the United States, urging for the safe evacuation of eligible Afghan citizens from the country, a diplomatic source told RIA Novosti.

"The draft resolution by the United Kingdom, France and the United States will be voted today at 3:00 p.m.," the source said. "The main aim of resolution is to demand a safe evacuation of Afghan people."