

**9/14/21 Tuesday**

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US Gen. Milley Reassured China Twice in Trump's Last Days POTUS Wouldn't Attack, Woodward Book Says  
By - Morgan Artyukhina

A new book by Washington Post journalists Bob Woodward and Robert Costa reveals some of the behind-the-scenes actions taken by senior members of the US defense and intelligence agencies and political establishment during the final weeks of Donald Trump's presidency, as he refused to accept defeat to now-US President Joe Biden.

According to the [New York Times](#), which obtained an advance copy of the book prior to its September 21 release date, US Army Gen. Mark A. Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and seniormost officer of the US Armed Forces, was one of the central figures coordinating the mitigation effort to ensure Trump didn't do anything illegal before leaving office on January 20, 2021.

'He's Been Crazy for a Long Time'

At the top of the list of fears was that Trump might try to hold onto power by provoking some kind of incident that would give him emergency powers, similar to the Reichstag fire incident in 1933 that saw dictatorial powers given to Germany's then-chancellor, Nazi leader Adolf Hitler. Milley told Woodward that fear included a potential attack on China, which he said he had already warned Trump off of doing previously.

On January 8, two days after the insurrection by Trump supporters at the US Capitol that failed to block certification of the November 2020 election results, Milley phoned his counterpart in China, Gen. Li Zuocheng, chief of the Joint Staff Department of the Central Military Commission, to reassure him there was no danger to the People's Republic of China.

"Things may look unsteady," Milley said, according to Woodward and Costa, "but that's the nature of democracy, General Li. We are 100% steady. Everything's fine. But democracy can be sloppy sometimes."

The phone call reportedly lasted 90 minutes. According to Milley, Li "remained unusually rattled" even after. He was particularly concerned about the stability of the US government and if the military was willing to act against another attempted seizure of power. US troops had already been deployed to the US Capitol after the failed attack, a number that would swell to [more than 26,000 troops](#) - ten times the number of US troops in Afghanistan at the time.

Later that day, Milley received a phone call from House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), who similarly fretted that Trump might stage an even more drastic action than that on January 6. "This is bad, but who knows what he might do?" Pelosi told him. "He's crazy. You know he's crazy. He's been crazy for a long time. So don't say you don't know what his state of mind is." "Madam Speaker," Milley said, "I agree with you on everything," adding he was "going to prevent anything like that in the United States military."

'Aggressively Watch Everything'

After their conversation, Milley said he summoned his top military commanders to the Pentagon and ran an impromptu review of the step-by-step process for launching a nuclear weapon. While Trump was the only one who could order a nuclear strike, Milley wanted his top generals to be reminded in person that he also had to be involved.

"If you get calls," General Milley said, "no matter who they're from, there's a process here, there's a procedure. No matter what you're told, you do the procedure. You do the process. And I'm part of that procedure. You've got to make sure that the right people are on the net." The general added: "The strict procedures are explicitly designed to avoid inadvertent mistakes or accidents or nefarious, unintentional, illegal, immoral, unethical launching of the world's most dangerous weapons."

According to Woodward and Costa, Milley then went around the room to each officer and directly asked them if they understood the process.

Milley said he then turned the most powerful parts of the US national security state into a tool for catching another potential Trump coup attempt. He told the head of each military branch to watch everything "all the time" and reached out to both National Security Agency director Paul Nakasone and CIA Director Gina Haspel, urging them to "aggressively watch everything, 360." Haspel similarly feared Trump might stage an attack against Iran.

"We are on the way to a right-wing coup. The whole thing is insanity. He is acting out like a six-year-old with a tantrum," [Haspel told Milley](#) after Trump rejected the November election outcome. "This is a highly dangerous situation. We are going to lash out for his ego?"

#### Reminding Troops Of Their Oaths

Four days after Milley's meetings, on January 12, all eight members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued [an unprecedented memo](#) to all active and reserve US troops reminding them that the January 6 insurrection had been a violation of US law.

"The violent riot in Washington, DC, on January 6, 2021, was a direct assault on the US Congress, the Capitol building, and our Constitutional process," the memo said. "We witnessed actions inside the Capitol building that were inconsistent with the rule of law. The rights of freedom of speech and assembly do not give anyone the right to resort to violence, sedition and insurrection."

The memo was also likely provoked by [sympathy among](#) law enforcement and active duty and reserve military members for the insurrectionists, and came as units across the country investigated reports that their members might have gone to Washington to be part of the attack. In addition, several top Pentagon officials had resisted attempts by US Capitol Police to deploy National Guardsmen around the national legislature prior to the riot, which began as a rally hosted by Trump outside the White House. The USCP chief at the time, Steven Sund, [later told lawmakers](#) his ability to respond to the escalating situation had been [hamstrung by the Pentagon](#), which took hours to respond to his emergency requests after Trump supporters began mobbing the building's western terrace.

Five people died in the attack, including retired Air Force veteran [Ashli Babbitt, who was shot](#) by a USCP officer outside the US House of Representatives chamber as she and others attempted to bash down the door. The officer, whose name has not been released, has been cleared of criminal and professional wrongdoing.

Trump was subsequently impeached in early February for incitement to insurrection, but the Senate acquitted him, with some senators feeling it was improper for him to be impeached after leaving office.

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Presence of US Troops in Eastern Syria is 'De Facto Partition', Russian Foreign Ministry Says  
By - Morgan Artyukhina

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov warned Tuesday that the continued presence of American troops in eastern Syria amounts to a de facto partition of the country.

"One of the main reasons for the instability and continuation of the conflict in Syria is the illegal presence of the United States in the country," Ryabkov told RT Arabic on Tuesday.

"I think that in their arsenal there is a scenario of a de facto partition of Syria. We are against this and are acting in accordance with the existing resolutions of the UN Security Council, which has confirmed the territorial integrity of Syria," he added.

US troops have been deployed to Syria since late 2015, when then-US President Barack Obama began deploying US Special Forces units to support Kurdish militias fighting Daesh\*, although US and allied air forces had been bombing Daesh positions since the year prior. Greater numbers of US troops arrived in subsequent years after Daesh was forced out of Iraq, and US forces in Syria's Deir-ez-Zor Governorate began building large facilities for a more permanent presence near the country's primary oil fields.

In 2018, then-US Secretary of State [Rex Tillerson said](#) the US intended to keep troops in eastern Syria until its goals of forcing Syrian President Bashar al-Assad from power and training a large proxy force of Kurds and other ethnic minorities in the region who were oppressed by Daesh rule. However, he also said the US intended to stay in order to keep Iran's position in Syria weak, a very open-ended mission goal.

Roughly 900 US troops [remain in Syria](#), officially serving as advisors to the Kurdish-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces.

Iran, unlike the United States, was invited to send forces into Syria by the Syrian government to assist in the fight against Daesh and other terrorist forces allied to al-Qaeda, such as the al-Nusra Front, now known as Hay'at Tahrir ash-Sham\*. Many of those groups, hailed by Washington as "moderate rebels," also received funding, training, and material support from the United States, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Israel, among other states.

Ryabkov's comments come hours after Assad [traveled to Moscow](#) to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin. At their meeting, Putin similarly pointed to the presence of US and Turkish forces in Syria "without your consent" and against international law, which "does not give you the opportunity to make maximum efforts to consolidate the country, in order to move along the path of its restoration at a pace that would be possible if the entire territory was controlled by the legitimate government."

Since US President Joe Biden took office in January, he has ordered two sets of airstrikes in eastern Syria, both of which ostensibly attacked Shiite militias the US claimed were responsible

for attacking US forces in Iraq. The US has claimed the militias are controlled by Iran - claims both the militias and Tehran have denied.

However, Biden also claimed just last month in [a bizarre gaffe](#) that the US had no troops in Syria.

In late July, as the US was preparing for its final withdrawal from Afghanistan and began pulling back on its presence in Iraq, some also wondered if the US would withdraw from Syria, as well. However, a senior administration [official told Politico](#) their mission has "been quite successful, and that's something that we'll continue."

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Three Former US Intelligence Officers Admit to Spying for Emirati Cyber Group Darkmatter  
By - Morgan Artyukhina

Three former US intelligence operatives have admitted to charges they gave the United Arab Emirates advanced spy tools and helped them break into computers around the globe, including in the United States.

According to [court documents filed](#) in a Washington, DC, federal court on Tuesday, Marc Baier, Ryan Adams and Daniel Gericke left their intelligence jobs in the US to work for Project Raven, an advanced cyber ops program run by Emirati intelligence company DarkMatter.

"Defendants used illicit, fraudulent, and criminal means, including the use of advanced covert hacking systems that utilized computer exploits obtained from the United States and elsewhere, to gain unauthorized access to protected computers in the United States and elsewhere and to illicitly obtain information," the court document says.

The men are charged with violating the Arms Export Control Act and the International Traffic in Arms Regulations; and conspiracy to commit access device fraud and computer hacking offenses.

However, because they have admitted to their crimes, they have been offered a deferred prosecution agreement: if they cooperate with an FBI investigation, give up their security clearances, agree to never work for Emirati law enforcement or other government companies, and agree to pay fines equal to their UAE salaries, the US Department of Justice will drop their prosecution.

Project Raven was revealed in a [Reuters report](#) in 2019 that was based on the testimony of former NSA intelligence analyst Lori Stroud, a former DarkMatter employee who became a whistleblower after discovering the company was conducting cyber ops against American targets. Baier, one of the three charged in the Tuesday documents, was also mentioned in the Reuters report as one of Stroud's colleagues.

The program began as a US company called Cyberpoint, a Baltimore-based firm whose clients included both the US Department of Defense and the Emirati government - [just one of many](#) American firms to do so. However, the company backed away from its UAE work when Abu Dhabi pushed for more and more [aggressive operations](#), including gaining entrance to sites

housed on American servers, which would have been a violation of US law for the American employees.

Undeterred, the UAE started up Project Raven and lured much of the Cyberpoint staff with high salaries and the promise of engaging in some of the most difficult and exciting hacking work of their lives. Project Raven later became part of the purview of DarkMatter.

However, as US citizens the employees were still subject to US law, and the FBI began pressing them for information about DarkMatter's targets. Stroud told Reuters that the identity of their American targets was kept secret, and she only found them by looking for them.

The firm also targeted critics of the Emirati government, including journalists and civil society figures. However, they also claimed to have broken up a Daesh operation in the country and interrupted planned operations by other groups, as well.

In addition to tools like Karma, brought to DarkMatter by the Americans, the Emiratis also used software developed by the Israeli intelligence firm NSO Group, including the [infamous Pegasus spyware](#). One target, Emirati human rights activist Ahmed Mansoor, was known to DarkMatter by the code name "Egret" and his discovery of a [failed installation](#) in 2016 led to the discovery of Pegasus' ability to break Apple's iOS operating system primarily used for iPhones.

Video: Alleged Airstrike Reportedly Hits PMF Vehicles Along Syria-Iraq Border  
By - Morgan Artyukhina

Reports on social media late Tuesday night indicated airstrikes were being conducted near al-Bukamal, a town in Syria on the border with Iraq.

According to the [ELINT News Twitter](#) page, the airstrikes struck several vehicles owned by the 46th Brigade of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), which it says are dominated by Kata'ib Hezbollah. The Shiite militia, which played a major part in the war against Daesh\*, is considered by the US to be a terrorist organization backed by Iran and has been [targeted for airstrikes](#) by the US before.

The news account added that it was likely the US was behind Tuesday's strikes as well. However, there has been no official claim of responsibility by any party and the aircraft responsible for the attack were not identified.

Shortly after reports surfaced of the incident, OIR spokesperson Col. Wayne Marotto confirmed that the US did not take part in the airstrikes.

Lebanese outlet Al-Mayadeen reported that two vehicles were on fire, citing a reporter in Baghdad. They reported no casualties, but noted three explosions were heard. Video posted on social media showed two fires raging in the night purported to be the struck vehicles.

On Saturday, two explosives-laden [drones targeted Erbil](#) International Airport in the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan, but failed to cause any damage. It's unknown if the Tuesday strikes are in response to the incident, as attacks against the airport or other Iraqi bases have in the past served as justification for US airstrikes against PMF militias. However, in the case of Saturday's attack, no one was injured or killed, as has been the case in prior instances where the US responded with airstrikes. The city of Al-Bukamal is located in Syria's Deir-ez-Zor Governorate and was liberated from Daesh\* by the Syrian Arab Army in 2017.

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Why California Recall Election Procedure Triggers GOP Suspicion  
By - Ekaterina Blinova

The outcome of the recall election may not become clear before 22 October, after each of the state's 58 counties submits their final results to the Secretary of State. The state's peculiar recall election process, as well as the enhanced use of mail-in voting, has prompted some GOP members to doubt the fairness of the election.

Californians have started to cast ballots in the recall elections, well before the 14 September deadline. Every registered voter in the state received a ballot by mail. Altogether, officials issued 22.2 million mail ballots. As of 12 September, over 8 million ballots, or roughly 37% of all ballots sent to Californians, have been returned by mail or voted in person, [according](#) to ABC 7. After polling places close at 8 p.m. local time, voters will be able to see preliminary results for each of 58 counties at the Secretary of State (SOS) website. Election results will be regularly updated as vote-by-mail ballots, provisional and other ballots are tallied, [according](#) to the website.

The SOS further notifies California voters that each county processes ballots differently and the distances poll workers must travel in some cases, from polling places to county offices, also varies. In addition, the state allows every ballot to count as long as it is postmarked by Election Day and received within seven days.

Although California state law requires county officials to send their first batch of results to the SOS no later than two hours after they begin tallying votes, it may take up to 30 days to come up with a final result. During this period, county officials are required to verify voter records and determine whether the ballots were cast by eligible voters, according to the SOS.

Typically, the first batch of ballots consists of votes submitted before Election Day, such as ballots from voters overseas and those who used mail-in voting, according to Newsweek. The results from all the 58 counties won't be compiled and certified by the SOS until 22 October. Some media outlets, including NPR and CapRadio, [announced](#) that they would rely on the Associated Press to call the winner in the recall race before the official numbers are announced. If 50% or more voters choose to keep Newsom, the recall will have failed. If a majority of voters opt to remove the governor, the replacement candidate who gets the most votes will be elected for the remainder of the term of office, through 2 January 2023.

Some Republicans have raised an alarm over the possibility of election fraud in the state. Conservative talk show host Larry Elder's campaign website [has asked for reports of incidents of "any irregularities, interference, or intimidation."](#)

Elder's concerns are primarily driven by a GOP distrust of mail-in and absentee voting, as well as the practice of receiving ballots after the official Election Day, a long-standing electoral process they claim invites election fraud. Republicans in a number of US states are currently reviewing 2020 election results in a similar effort denounced by the Biden administration as the "Big Lie." A recent Yahoo News poll suggested that as many as 66% of Republican voters

continue to believe baseless claims that last year's election was "stolen" from the former US president, Donald Trump.

"Does anybody really believe the California Recall Election isn't rigged?" Trump commented on 13 September. "Millions and millions of mail-in ballots will make this just another giant election scam, no different, but less blatant, than the 2020 presidential election scam!"

Conservative media outlet Townhall published an [op-ed](#) on 14 September, self-titled "Very Concerning Evidence of Vote Fraud in California Recall Election." In particular Townhall refers to a case in Torrance in which police claimed to have found "300 recall ballots and multiple California drivers' licenses in a felon's car" and a case in the San Fernando Valley in which unnamed election officials told Republican voters that they had already voted. Although California authorities pledged to investigate these claims, the conservative media outlet suggested that [the allegations of possible irregularities could be the tip of an iceberg](#).

Left-leaning mainstream media in the state bash the GOP for "setting the stage to blame a loss on voter fraud." While polls increasingly note that Newsom has high odds of staying at the helm, media observers admit that California has long been a Democratic stronghold and the GOP has very little chance of winning. A Republican has not won a statewide race since 2006. In addition, the Republican Party claims just 24% of registered voters in California, compared with 46.5% for Democrats, [according](#) to AP.

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The Forever Recall - Cartoon

By - Ted Rall

The embattled California governor is facing a strong push from the opposition to oust him from the state's governorship post. The latest recall effort against the official kicked off late last year. California's Democrat Gov. Gavin Newsom is on the verge of possibly being booted from his post, should the \$287 million recall election brought up by the GOP opposition manage to gain the backing of the Golden State's voters.

Among the top GOP contenders running in the recall election against Newsom are conservative radio talk show host Larry Elder, the former Olympian Caitlyn Jenner and a businessman, John Cox.

If voters ultimately choose to give Newsom the pink slip, the contender with the most votes will serve out the remainder of the former's term. This term for the California governor is due to wrap in early 2023. Results aren't expected to begin trickling in until after 8 p.m., local time, when polls officially close; however, it could take several days before the results are announced.

The latest effort to boot Newsom is the sixth, to date. It managed to gain steam over a backlash fueled by the governor's troubled COVID-19 mandates and his maskless dinner at an exclusive restaurant during the pandemic. A multibillion-dollar scandal involving the state's unemployment department has also proved a major hurdle.

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Recall: California's Governor Faces the Music

By - Richie Greenberg

The pretty boy of San Francisco politics, Gavin Newsom, is facing a reckoning: are his staunchest, long-time believers successful in convincing those on the fence to keep him in office, or has a long list of failures as governor come to haunt him?

Newsom has risen from member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors (our city council), to mayor, and now governor. Along the way, he used his charm and gruff voice to rally his democrat party voters to victory. His positions on controversial matters such as gay marriage earned him a place in history.

During the Trump presidency, Newsom focused on pushing back against his administration at every chance possible, earning him further points along the way. But since Biden is now in the White House, and here in California the state government (and local San Francisco city hall government) is occupied by the various flavors of Democrats and even socialists, there is little case to be made that Trump nor remnants of Trump are anywhere to be found in governance to justify influence nor blame.

And yet, this is exactly what Newsom and his supporters are doing.

Governor Newsom is [facing a recall](#). Along with elections, impeachments, appointments and resignations, a recall is one component of a healthy democracy. Voters choose a candidate for office, and voters have a chance to remove. It's a publicly-participatory impeachment if you will. Our golden state of California has been hurting for years, and yet under Newsom's administration, we've seen a marked increase in failures. Businesses fleeing, homelessness and crime spiking, taxes climbing and fires burning so much of our pristine forests and our homes.

Newsom deserves much of the blame, as he's failed to lead in preparation for fire and electrical grid disasters, ignores the plight of homelessness and drug addiction, and spent much of the past year pointing the finger at others – mostly the rival political party and at the ghost of a president past.

Newsom and allies in democrat party leadership used to scream Trump at every opportunity to defect blame; lately, when criticism is made against the governor, the knee-jerk rebuttal is to call the accuser racist, Trumpian, and more recently, "White Supremacist", even when the critic is black or Asian. Adding further insult, the leading contender to replace Newsom is Larry Elder, an African-American conservative who's been labelled a "black face of white supremacy." Vile indeed.

Such slanderous accusations have become so commonplace to be boring, as very little in San Francisco or California state politics can currently be blamed on Trump nor on conservative supporters. A "supermajority" of city mayors, city council members, state legislators, the governor, attorney general and more, effectively prevents any republican initiative (or pushback against policy, by a republican) to have any effect at all.

Tuesday, September 14, 2021, is the deadline for voting in Newsom's recall. Voters in San Francisco will cast ballots against a recall, this is clear. Governor [Newsom is very popular](#) in this city, even with so much crime, homelessness and drug dealing, failing education, high taxes, businesses leaving and tourism down.

Regardless of the humanitarian crisis right in our midst, when the tally becomes official, we should expect to see Newsom survive his recall in an overwhelming fashion, at least here in the city. After all, the Bay Area is the birthplace of hard-core, counter-culture and prominent figures in politics such as Nancy Pelosi, Dianne Feinstein and Kamala Harris.

They've all come out in support of Newsom, as has the local Democrat Party itself. So have the biggest names in Hollywood elite, actors, singers- of course, these are some of the least affected by the decline in the California quality of life. President Biden is also now making an appearance to bolster support prior to the deadline. Will it help in the end? Time will tell.

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Court-Packing or Term Limits? Why Any SCOTUS Reform Is Highly Unlikely  
By - Ekaterina Blinova

The upcoming conclusions of The Presidential Commission on the Supreme Court of the United States will not translate into actual reform, given ongoing partisanship in the US Congress, say legal observers discussing the rationale behind "court-packing" and SCOTUS justice term limits. Bill Clinton-appointed Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer [warned against "court-packing" and the lamented politicisation](#) of the US Supreme Court (SCOTUS) in a 12 September interview on Fox News.

Court-packing [has been actively circulated by Democrats](#) after former US President Donald Trump appointed three conservative judges to the US Supreme Court's nine-member bench. Left-leaning politicians and pundits advocate increasing the number of justices to neutralise what some suggest is a "conservative" bias.

In April 2021, US President Joe Biden created a presidential commission tasked with weighing the pros and cons of SCOTUS reform, including an expansion of the bench. However, Breyer believes that if one party is able to "pack" a court, the other will attempt to do the same. However, 18-year term limits instead of life terms on the bench "would make life easier" for everyone, according to the 83-year old justice.

Term Limits vs Court Packing

Justice Breyer's suggestion of term limits appears reasonable, believes David Levine, professor of law at the University of California, Hastings College of Law.

"Term limits would seem less political than having one party add some justices and then having the other party add more justices at a later date," Levine says. "If there were a regular turnover of the justices (for example, if they all had 18-year terms, spaced so that one had to step down every two years), then the political games around the timing of nominations would be eliminated."

In addition to that, term limits "might lead to selecting judges with more experience," the professor points out. He explains that with life tenure, there is a temptation to select very young nominees who can serve for a long time. To illustrate his point he refers to Justice Amy Coney Barrett, 49. "If there were term limits, youth would matter less as a criterion for selection," Levine remarks.

The Constitution provides for life tenure for a good reason, argues Robert A. Sedler, a law professor at Wayne State University Law School. In particular, this prevents politicisation of the court, according to him. Sedler opposes any major changes to the Supreme Court, including court-packing, even though he identifies politically as a liberal.

"My views about the Court are shaped by my long experience as a constitutional scholar and an active litigator in cases involving individual rights, most often as a lawyer for the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)," he says. "These views are conservative in the sense that I am not in favor of significantly changing the court."

Any new reforms are unlikely to "remove politics from the assessment of SCOTUS," deems Charles Anthony Smith, professor of political science and Law at the University of California Irvine. US politicians will continue to play political bias cards if a court decision goes contrary to their agenda, he explains.

When it comes to term limits, it mostly depends on its length, Smith believes. If long terms were adopted, say 25 or 35 years, it wouldn't be very different from lifetime appointments, in the eyes of the public. If these terms were reduced to four or six years "the public would begin to see the justices as little more than politicians," according to the political scientist.

Nothing Will Change for US Supreme Court

The Presidential Commission on the Supreme Court of the United States is due to fulfill its bipartisan analysis in October 2021. Any possible reforms to the court, however, would have to be approved in the US Congress. SCOTUS reforms do not seem likely, given an increasingly divisive atmosphere in both congressional chambers, legal observers say.

"Any such change would require a vote of Congress for a new statute or a vote of Congress plus ratification by three thirds of the state legislatures for any new constitutional amendment," explains David Levine. "I think it is extremely unlikely that either of these things would happen in the present climate."

It's highly probable that nothing will change following the publication of the commission report, believes Sedler, but from a liberal viewpoint that's not a bad thing, according to the academic. He notes that liberals are concerned about the possibility that the US Supreme Court would upend the constitutional protection of individual rights, such as a woman's reproductive freedom. These particular concerns were fanned by [a recent SCOTUS refusal to block a new Republican abortion ban in Texas](#), labeled the Heartbeat Act. The law prohibits abortions as early as six weeks after conception, and encourages private citizens to surveil, report and sue those who violate the legislation.

The latest SCOTUS decision almost nullifies Roe v Wade, a landmark 1973 ruling qualifying abortion as a woman's constitutional right. SCOTUS earlier already overturned a White House eviction moratorium, and rejected Biden's effort to reverse Trump's 'Remain in Mexico' policy. These moves are only the beginning, warned Steve Benen, a producer for "The Rachel Maddow Show," in a recent [op-ed](#) for NBC News.

According to Sedler, the fears are exaggerated, as in cases of constitutional rights, "the court has not overruled any prior decisions."

"The Court will continue to render narrow decisions, which will be criticised by liberals," Sedler says. "But the court will not overrule *Roe v. Wade* or any other major decisions protecting individual rights, such as the right of same-sex couples to marry. There will be a lot of noise, but nothing will change. The Supreme Court will continue to play its role in the American constitutional system.

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'We Said Yes to Science': Gavin Newsom Gives Remarks After Holding Off California Recall Vote

By - Oleg Burunov

California's Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom staved off an effort to oust him from office in Tuesday's special election.

During remarks after holding off the recall vote, [California Governor Gavin Newsom](#) said that "no" was "not the only thing that was expressed tonight".

"We said 'yes' to science, we said 'yes' to vaccines, we said 'yes' to ending this pandemic", he underscored.

The governor added that "we [also] said 'yes' to [a] woman's fundamental constitutional right to decide for herself what she does with her body [...], we said 'yes' to diversity [...] and inclusion". Newsom pointed out that he was "humbled and grateful to the millions and millions of Californians that exercised their fundamental right to vote".

He spoke as about 60 percent of votes have already been tallied, indicating that around 67% of voters opposed the recall effort vs 33%, who supported the measure.

This came after the governor said earlier this year that the campaign to remove him from office had nothing to do with dissatisfaction in his leadership but was instead a challenge to California's progressive policies on immigration, diversity, healthcare, and criminal justice.

"It's about our clean air, clean water programmes, meeting our environmental strategies", he told KQED radio in a reference to the policies.

Anthony Pahnke, a political analyst and assistant professor of international relations at San Francisco State University, has meanwhile argued "that Newsom so easily beating back the recall attempt shows the power that the Democrats have in the state of California".

"There, as they outnumber Republicans 2 to 1, the early results from the recall effort show that the state is as blue as ever. This still may not stop Newsom's principle challenger, Larry Elder, from making claims that there was voter fraud. Regardless, the margin of victory is so large that even if there was fraud, it would not have made an impact", Pahnke says.

Recall Effort Against Newsom

The recall effort in California was triggered earlier in the year by state residents unhappy with Newsom's pandemic-related policies, his approach to handling economic problems, and other issues.

Initially, the authors of the anti-Newsom campaign berated the governor for implementing laws they said "are detrimental to the citizens of this state and our way of life". They also accused him of failing to address the issue of homelessness and blamed him for high taxes.

After [the COVID-19 pandemic erupted](#), Californians reacted angrily to Newsom introducing a number of strict measures aimed at curbing the spread of the disease - in particular, his decision to close businesses and schools. The discontent reached a boiling point when the governor was spotted in a fancy restaurant surrounded by friends at a time when he had told California residents to stay home.

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#### North Korea Reportedly Launches Two Ballistic Missiles Towards Sea of Japan

North Korean authorities earlier claimed they had successfully tested new long-range cruise missiles. The US and its allies condemned the action.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said in a statement on 15 September that North Korea had fired what is believed to be two ballistic missiles towards the exclusive economic zone of Japan.

South Korea's JCS noted that it is carefully analysing the information with US intelligence agencies. Seoul is also expected to convene its National Security Council over the incident. Japan's Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga condemned North Korea's launch of ballistic missiles, dubbing the action a threat to peace and security in the region. Suga also ordered to urgently convene the country's National Security Council.

"North Korea's ballistic missile launches threaten the peace and security of our country and the region. They are in violation of the UN Security Council's decisions. We express our strong protest and strongly condemn [them]", Suga said.

Prior to the official statement by the South Korean and Japanese authorities, the nations' media reported about two unidentified projectiles launched within the space of several minutes.

The state-run Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported on 13 September that Pyongyang had [carried out](#) a successful test of a cruise missile. North Korean experts reportedly held thrust tests for missile engines on the ground, flight tests, control and guidance tests, and a number of others. The said missiles are reportedly capable of hitting targets at a distance of 1,500 kilometres.

Following the reported launch, Japan's Defence Minister Nobuo Kishi noted that if the information on the success of North Korea's cruise missile tests is confirmed, it could become a potential threat to the [peace and security](#) of the region.

On 14 September, diplomats from Japan, South Korea, and the United States [held a trilateral meeting](#) on North Korea in Tokyo. The meeting was attended by US special envoy for North Korea Sung Kim, head of the Japanese Foreign Ministry's Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau

Takehiro Funakoshi, and the South Korean Foreign Ministry's special envoy for peace and security on the Korean Peninsula Noh Kyu-duk.

One of the key topics of discussion was a possible response to the statement by Pyongyang about successful missile tests. The parties agreed to continue cooperation on the [denuclearisation of North Korea](#) by combining dialogue with North Korean authorities and sanctions pressure.

North Korea last test-fired ballistic missiles in March. Two cruise missiles were reportedly launched towards the Yellow Sea at low altitude at a short range, and two ballistic missiles were launched toward the Sea of Japan.

Hundreds of Thousands Without Power as Tropical Storm Nicholas Brings Deadly Floods to US South

By - Evan Craighead

With wind gusts up to 90 miles-per-hour (145 kilometers-per-hour), Tropical Storm Nicholas was upgraded to a Category 1 hurricane before touching down in Texas early Tuesday morning. In addition to widespread power outages, the National Hurricane Center (NHC) expects "life-threatening" flash floods in the southern US within the coming days.

Although Hurricane Nicholas was downgraded to a tropical storm as it traversed inland from the gulf coast on Tuesday morning - around 3:00 a.m. CDT - the [NHC has issued several advisories](#) for many areas of Texas and the neighboring state of Louisiana.

As of 1:00 p.m. CDT, the NHC recorded that [Tropical Storm Nicholas](#) has averaged maximum sustained winds between 45 mph (72 kph) to 65 mph (105 kph). Forecasters have warned that an already storm drenched Louisiana may be hit with life-threatening flood-waters as the system stalls over the southern US state.

Texas appears to be on the road to recovery in terms of power outages, as nearly 500,000 power outages were reported around the time Nicholas made landfall.

Presently, over 266,000 homes are said to still be without power, according to PowerOutage.US. Louisiana has also been hit hard with outages, reporting an excess of 96,000 outages, as of this article's publication.

CenterPoint Energy, a major electric and natural gas utility service, [told Houston outlet ABC13](#) that crews have been deployed in the hopes of restoring power, but customers may observe outages that last for five to seven days.

"We are committed to restoring service to our customers as safely and quickly as possible," said Kenny Mercado, CenterPoint Energy's executive vice president for electric utility. "However, patience will be important as some areas of our system and equipment may be difficult to reach for our crews due to safety-related issues, such as downed trees."

Some 3,200 resources have been deployed by CenterPoint, according to officials. Customers have been warned to stay clear of downed power lines.

Nicholas is expected to continue to weaken throughout Tuesday, and is expected to become a tropical depression later in the week, perhaps by Wednesday.

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Hawley Pans Biden a 'Disgrace' Over Afghan Withdrawal, Vows Hold on Defense & State Dept. Nominees

By - Evan Craighead

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken acknowledged in Monday testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee that, as of the end of last week, the US "had about 100 hundred American citizens in Afghanistan who told us that they wish to leave the country."

US Sen. Josh Hawley (R-MO) took to the Senate floor on Tuesday to blast US President Joe Biden and the nation's top foreign policy officials for a botched US-led pullout and evacuation of both troops and civilians from Afghanistan.

"As American planes finally departed, hundreds of American civilians left behind to the enemy," he said, before repeating himself.

Hawley pushed back against a Biden assertion that the recent US-led evacuation mission from Kabul, Afghanistan, was an ["extraordinary success," as the US president termed it](#) in his August 31 address to the nation.

The Missouri Republican argued the abandonment of American civilians and the recent death of 13 US service members in Kabul was not indicative of a successful mission.

"Make no mistake, this president is a disgrace," Hawley proclaimed. "His behavior is disgraceful. He has dishonored this country with his shameful leadership in this crisis."

"And it is time for him to resign," the senator added.

Hawley focused on Biden's cabinet, vowing to work against fast-tracking any Pentagon or State Department nominee until he saw the resignation of three top foreign policy officials: US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan.

"I will not consent to the nomination of any nominee for the Department of Defense, or for the Department of State, until Secretary Austin and Secretary Blinken and Jake Sullivan resign," he said. "Leaders take responsibility for their failures ... There must be accountability."

Hawley is not the only US lawmaker to take issue with the US president's handling of the Afghan evacuations.

Robert Menendez (D-NJ), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, told Blinken on Tuesday that the operation from Kabul was "clearly and fatally flawed," [according to Bloomberg](#). Menendez also claimed that "Congress has been misled" because assessments on the situation in Afghanistan "were definitely overly rosy to say the best."

"And if we're not to repeat the past we need to learn from it," the New Jersey Democrat said.

While Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer on September 3 falsely claimed that all US civilians who "have wanted to come out have come out," it has since been revealed that an estimated 100 Americans reportedly wishing to leave Afghanistan remain in the country.

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B-2 Spirit Stealth Bomber Damaged in Emergency Landing at US Air Force Base in Missouri

By - Evan Craighead

A B-2 Spirit stealth bomber was recently seen flying above the Atlantic Ocean with fellow US Air Force F-15s and Eurofighter Typhoons of the British Royal Air Force during a training mission that sought to build NATO relationships and mitigate certain "security risks" present in the European theater.

The US Air Force confirmed on Tuesday that a B-2 Spirit stealth bomber was damaged during an in-flight malfunction that recently took place on the runway at Whiteman Air Force Base, Missouri.

The costly stealth bomber withstood damage as it was attempting to conduct an emergency landing amid a routine training mission early Tuesday morning, according to an Air Force Global Strike Command memo [obtained by The Drive](#).

"There were no personnel injuries and no fire associated with the landing," the memo detailed. The severity of the damage is unknown, as no further details were provided about the event, which is reportedly under US military investigation.

The Federal Aviation Administration has also issued a Temporary Flight Restriction (TFR) for the immediate area.

The TFR is slated to be lifted on September 17, at 11:59 p.m. UTC.

This incident comes just days after a B-2 Spirit stealth bomber was spotted carrying out a training mission with British allies over the North Sea.

The publication of new images of the typically elusive stealth bomber and accompanying fighter jets [was viewed by some as a message to Russia](#). Although only 20 of the aircraft exist within the US Air Force, it is unclear if this was the same stealth bomber that was later damaged on Tuesday.

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Trump Says Reports of Milley Contacting Chinese General Would Amount to 'Treason' if True  
By - Evan Craighead

New excerpts from "Peril", an upcoming book by Washington Post journalists Bob Woodward and Robert Costa, alleged that US Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, reassured his Chinese counterpart on two occasions that the US government was stable and then-US President Donald Trump would not wage an attack on China.

The 45th president of the US took time on Tuesday to address recent reports that Milley, the seniormost officer of the US Armed Forces, [conferred with China on two separate occasions](#) regarding the possibility of a US attack.

"So, first of all, if it is actually true, which is hard to believe, that he would have called China and done these things and was willing to advise them of an attack or in advance of an attack -- that's treason", Trump asserted to "Spicer & Co." host Sean Spicer during a Tuesday Newsmax broadcast.

"I've had so many calls today saying that's treason", he added.

The calls reportedly took place on 30 October 2020 - prior to the 2020 presidential election - and on 8 January, just two days after Trump supporters stormed the US Capitol building to contest the Electoral College results of the election.

The former US president went on to argue that Milley is simply trying to distract from the [botched US-led pullout and evacuation](#) of both troops and civilians from Afghanistan.

He also clarified that such an act was not even up for consideration by his administration, despite his tough stance toward China.

"For the record, I never even thought of attacking China—and China knows that", Trump asserted.

"The people that fabricated the story are sick and demented, and the people who print it are just as bad. In fact, I'm the only president in decades who didn't get the US into a war—a well known fact that is seldom reported".

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Republican Governor Candidate Larry Elder Claims 'Voter Fraud' in Recall Election  
By - Nevin Brown

With polls showing that California's incumbent governor, Gavin Newsom, is likely to survive a recall election, his primary opponent, Republican Larry Elder, has raised the alarm of voter fraud. California's gubernatorial recall election has taken another dramatic turn. Incumbent Governor Gavin Newsom weathered a series of uninspiring polls that painted the election as a 50-50 proposition for his removal and enters election day with a double-digit lead in the polls. While the polling data points to a clear Newsom win, Republican candidate Larry Elder, Newsom's biggest competitor, [has already made claims of voter fraud](#).

"What I believe is that no matter what they do -- and I believe that there might very well be shenanigans, as it were in the 2020 election -- no matter what they do, so many Californians are angry about what's going on," Elder claimed.

On [Larry Elder's gubernatorial campaign](#) website, he links to another website that seeks to [fight California election fraud](#). The site claims that the statistical tool known as Benford's law has already detected election fraud in early voting. However, Benford's law's usefulness, when detecting election fraud, has been heavily contested. A [2017 study found](#) that its ability to predict election fraud comes in at about 50%. Furthermore, it is a red-flag test and cannot conclusively prove fraud.

The website provides a form to allow people to report any incidents of "irregularities, interference, or intimidation while voting." The site's sponsor is not listed, but the donation tab redirects users to Larry Elder's Recall Newsom Ballot Committee donation page.

[Elder's comments](#) that "we have a voter integrity board all set up - most of these are lawyers... so, when people hear things, they contact us; we're going to file lawsuits in a timely fashion," indicate that his campaign's contention of the California recall election results will in some part hinge on reports of interference from private citizens.

California's Recall election has taken fifteen months to be fully realized. The petition for a recall election was approved in June of 2020 and required nearly 1.5 million signatures by November 17th, 2020 to trigger a recall election.

A four-month extension was granted for the petition to accumulate signatures in wake of the worsening pandemic. On November 6th, 2020, Newsom was pictured flaunting his Covid protocols at an upscale French restaurant with lobbyists. The pictures created an uproar amongst those critical of Newsom and helped propel the petition across the finish line as the calendar turned to 2021.

The recall election asks voters two questions. The first is a vote of yes or no to recalling Governor Gavin Newsom. The second is their choice for next the Governor. If over 50% of California's vote yes on recalling Newsom he is ousted and the leading vote-getter will be installed as California's next Governor.

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US Capitol Police Prepare for September 18 'Justice for J6' Rally  
By Nevin Brown

The US Capitol Police have made preparations for the September 18 'Justice for J6' demonstration to bolster their security capabilities.

In the aftermath of the January 6 Capitol insurrection, the US Capitol Police have gone to [great lengths to strengthen security](#). USCP has "improved training, created a Critical Incident Response Plan, acquired additional equipment and technology, and launched a now Department-wide operation planning process."

The new security will be put to the test on September 18, when a 'Justice for J6' rally is set to commence. USCP is re-introducing fencing around the Capitol building and issued an emergency declaration, set to go into effect around the time of the rally, to "deputize outside law enforcement officers as United States Capitol Police Special Officers."

The department says it will continue to protect individuals' First Amendment right to demonstrate, with USCP Chief Tom Manager adding, "I urge anyone who is thinking about causing trouble to stay home. We will enforce the law and not tolerate violence." The heightened security has been spurred by "concerning online chatter" coming from those that support the Justice for J6 rally.

The rally, organized by Look Ahead America, is a demonstration against the treatment of those arrested during the January 6 Capitol insurrection. The organization's executive director, Matt Braynard, said the event was organized "on behalf of the political prisoners who have been persecuted as a result of their participation in the January 6 rallies," during [an appearance on the "Bannon's War Room"](#) podcast.

He goes on to say that many of the people arrested have been in solitary confinement for the past nine months and stresses that the demonstration will be peaceful.

“If we identify anybody in our crowd that we think might be causing a problem, that’s not going along with the program, we are going to raise their profile to the Capitol Police,” he added. Look Ahead America has stressed that the protest and demonstrations will be peaceful, but far-right groups have [been flagged by the department](#) over their online activity. Two far-right groups are expected to have their followers in attendance. The Proud Boys have encouraged their members to attend the rally, and White Lives Matter is promoting a nationwide protest on the same day.

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Russia’s T-62 Tank Reportedly to Remain in Service With Russian Army Until 2030  
By - Nevin Brown

The T-62 tank, originally manufactured in the Soviet Union from 1961 to 1975, will remain a part of the Russian Army, in a limited capacity, until 2030, according to reports.

While the tank was quickly surpassed by more sophisticated and economic tanks developed for the Soviet Army, thousands remain in active service in militaries across the globe.

The T-62 will likely remain in [service in the Russian Army through 2030](#). Many have remained in warehouses throughout Russia, with plans to update and export their remaining inventory. The Cold War-era tank has been predominantly deployed throughout the Middle East over the past decade, and has been used by Ethiopia in the Tigray Civil War.

The T-62 tank was originally designed by the Soviet Union to replace their T-55 tank, which fell behind the armory of Western tanks, and proved unable to sufficiently support a cannon capable of piercing their frontal armor.

The T-62 maintained a similar design to the T-55, but proved to be large enough to carry newer armor-piercing weaponry. Production began in 1961 in Kharkiv and stopped in 1973, with 20,000 units being produced. Production ultimately ceased in 1975 in the Soviet Union.

The tank was first featured in the Sino-Soviet border conflict, with the People’s Liberation Army disabling and capturing one of the tanks. It later turned out that the captured T-62 was studied and used to help design the PLA’s Type 69 tank, which was the first battle tank to be independently developed by China.

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Hypocrisy of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s ‘Tax the Rich’ Met Gala Dress Exposed  
By - Nevin Brown

New York Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s dress at the Met Gala has sparked an uproar. The white dress read “Tax the Rich” in bright red, and the hypocrisy was not lost on some.

The Met Gala is one of the most exclusive charity events in the world, with celebrities and socialites frequently attending. A single ticket can cost anywhere from \$30,000 to \$50,000. It is an event where the rich go to flaunt their wealth. AOC wearing a “tax the rich” dress to the Gala is, as GOP political consultant Anthony Angelini, put it, “akin to wearing a fur coat to a PETA meeting.”

AOC appears to have been prepared for the backlash with a [well-timed post](#) .

However, it has been reported that Vogue, who organizes the event, [did not give AOC a free ticket](#). The situation raises real questions over who funded AOC’s Met Gala trip. AOC likely expected the cries of hypocrisy, especially from conservatives, but has placed her supporters in an uncomfortable position, as well.

Professor David Woodard, of Clemson University, issued a warning for AOC. “I think a lot of Ocasio-Cortez supporters are going to be critical of her and they should be critical of her.... She doesn't care if the conservatives are critical of her, but I think her own people are now put in a very embarrassing position.”

The most tone-deaf or hypocritical aspect of AOC’s attendance at the Met Gala has nothing to do with social media or politics, but rather section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or charitable contribution deductions.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art is the benefactor of the Met Gala and [donations made to it are tax-deductible](#). In many respects, the attendees of the event are going for free. They make millions of dollars a year and can simply deduct the \$50,000 from their taxes.

The donations go to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, but it represents a serious loss of tax revenue that the state could use to help those in more need, and runs counter to everything AOC supposedly stands for. If AOC was committed to her vision of the United States, she would have pointed out the hypocrisy of the Met Gala. By attending, she only made a hypocrite out of herself.

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Senate Foreign Relations Committee Grills Blinken Over 'Fatally Flawed' Afghanistan Withdrawal

By - Nevin Brown

Secretary of State Anthony Blinken has been sent to the US Capitol to answer for the Biden administration’s handling of the withdrawal from Afghanistan. Blinken faces sharp criticism from Republicans, but has adamantly defended the handling of the troop pullout.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee has spent the past two days questioning the Biden administration’s withdrawal from Afghanistan. A cohort of largely Republican lawmakers [spent Monday grilling Blinken](#), but the Committee’s head, Bob Menendez (D-NJ), was equally as critical as his colleagues across the aisle.

Menendez blasted the withdrawal procedures during the day's testimony, telling Blinken that the steps taken to remove soldiers "was clearly and fatally flawed." He further went on to threaten that he would subpoena Biden officials who refused to testify.

Blinken has steadfastly defended the administration's withdrawal and attempted to ease concerns over the US leaving \$80 billion worth of military technology, noting that none of the hardware is operable or provide a strategic threat to the US.

However, it's worth noting that the abandoned technology and equipment can be sold for pieces, effectively providing the Taliban\* with a new revenue stream.

Blinken refused to produce an [internal state department memo from July](#) that warned of the collapse of the Afghan government following the exit of US troops. The dissent memo went directly to Blinken as a Taliban offensive was already sweeping through the country. Blinken defended his decision to keep it from the committee, claiming that dissent cables are "only to be shared with senior officials in the department."

At the heart of Blinken's defense was how the Biden White House inherited the withdrawal from the Trump administration, as it was former US President Donald Trump who initiated negotiations with the [Taliban for nine rounds over 18 months](#).

A peace deal was finally [struck on February 29, 2020](#), with the basic agreement being that the US would withdraw all troops from Afghanistan, and in return, the Taliban would not allow Afghanistan to become a haven for terrorist groups. It was also outlined that the Taliban would start peace talks with the Afghan government.

Although the Trump administration began withdrawing troops from the war-torn nation, some 3,500 soldiers still remained by the start of the US President Joe Biden's first term in office.

Touching on the situation Biden found himself, Blinken told lawmakers that the Biden administration was left with one of two options: continue to conduct the withdrawal as it played out, or send more troops in and effectively tear up the previous agreement.

After initially pushing back a withdrawal date, the US officially closed its near 20-year occupation of Afghanistan on August 31 after weeks' worth of chaotic withdrawal measures were implemented. However, while the US may no longer have boots on the ground, Biden has indicated that a "over the horizon" counterterrorism strategy is in the works.

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Manchester United Fall to BSC Young Boys in Shocking Fashion

By - Nevin Brown

Manchester United fell to BSC Young Boys to start their Champions League Campaign. The loss raises fresh concerns over the direction of the team under Ole Gunnar Solskjaer and could put their Champions League future in peril.

Defending Swiss Champions BSC Young Boys were the dominant side in the fixture. The boys from Bern outshot United nineteen to two. However, the game started well for United as they dominated the ball and held Young Boys to long-range efforts. For as much possession as United enjoyed, they were unable to create chances with it. Instead, their lone goal came in transition when, in the 13th minute, Bruno Fernandes played a lovely outside foot cross from the left side into a streaking Ronaldo, who converted the chance with poise.

The game turned on its head in the 35th minute when Aaron Wan-Bissaka was shown a straight red for a clumsy challenge. The referee decision is sure to draw the ire of United fans, but the Champions League, unlike the Premier League, has not directed referees to be as lenient with bookings. The sending-off prompted Solksjaer to sub off Jadon Sancho for Diego Dalot, and sacrificed offensive firepower for defensive solidity.

United went into the half up a goal, but down a man, and their halftime substitutions painted a clear plan to defend their one-goal lead. Out went Donny Van De Beek and in went Raphael Varane giving United three centre backs and a back-five to see out the final 45 minutes. After dominating possession in the first half United was all too comfortable conceding it to Young Boys in the second half. United's plan to sit back and counter almost came to fruition when Ronaldo was played in on goal and had a one-on-one with the keeper. Ronaldo, sensing the pressure of the defender, went to ground in an attempt to draw a penalty. The referee was not in a charitable mood and signaled no foul. Just like that, United's best chance of the second half disappeared.

Young Boys kept up the pressure, and found an equalizer in the 66th minute when Nicolas Ngamaleu tapped in a cross from the right wing. With the game knotted at 1-1, United continued to favor defense over attack with their two 72nd minute substitutions. Solksjaer opted to bring on Nemanja Matic for Bruno Fernandes and Jesse Lingard for Cristiano Ronaldo.

In the 77th minute, a fan ran onto the field in front of Young Boys' goal before being apprehended by security. It was the last time the Young Boys' defense would be breached. However, United's strategy of bunkering down almost worked. With the score still 1-1 and in the final minute of extra time, Jesse Lingard played a porous back pass that effectively played Jordan Siebatcheu in on goal. Siebatcheu calmly finished his chance and gave Young Boys a 2-1 lead as his teammates swarmed him in celebration.

United's opening defeat could spell doom for their Champions League prospects. Atalanta and Villarreal are both higher quality opponents than BSC Young Boys and represent four of their five remaining matches. United remains the most talented team in the group and making it out to the round of 16 is still a possibility. However, their loss to Young Boys will make it much harder to win the group, and their inability to create chances has to be a major concern for a team with aspirations to win the Premier and Champions League titles.

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Foreign Aid Remains Crucial for Future of Afghanistan  
By - Nevin Brown

Amir Muttaqi, Afghanistan's acting Minister of Foreign Affairs, has urged the international community to recognize the new government and recommence aid.

The [US is sending \\$64 million to Afghanistan](#) and the [UN has pledged \\$1 billion](#) to help curtail the worsening humanitarian crisis. The pledges of aid come at a crucial time as the Taliban\* seeks to form a new government, combat a humanitarian crisis, and stare down an economic crisis.

The international community has not yet recognized the Taliban government, and the US Federal Reserve, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have cut off Afghanistan's access to funds. Without recognition from world governments, foreign investment will likely be minimal leaving the economic situation very few avenues to improve.

The situation is a dangerous balancing act between world governments and the Taliban. Governments believe that aid can be used as a way to gain concessions from the Taliban, but are wary of recognizing the government.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres put it frankly, "It is impossible to provide humanitarian assistance inside Afghanistan without engaging with the de facto authorities."

According to the World Bank, aid makes up 40% of Afghanistan's gross domestic product. Without aid, Afghanistan's economy will crater, but the only way to get aid to the country is to engage with the Taliban.

There is the possibility that the Taliban understand this dynamic, and that the threat of their economy worsening the humanitarian crisis is their best avenue to continue to receive aid. The situation remains in flux and how it all shakes out could shape the future of Afghanistan.

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UN Calls for Moratorium on AI Systems That Put Rights at Risk - Bachelet

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet is calling for a moratorium on the proliferation of all Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems that put human rights at risk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights office said on Wednesday.

"UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet on Wednesday stressed the urgent need for a moratorium on the sale and use of artificial intelligence (AI) systems that pose a serious risk to human rights until adequate safeguards are put in place. She also called for AI applications that cannot be used in compliance with international human rights law to be banned," the statement said.

A report published by Bachelet's office on Wednesday found that AI now reaches into almost every corner of physical, mental spaces and has a profound impact on the course of people's lives.

"AI systems are used to determine who gets public services, decide who has a chance to be recruited for a job, and of course they affect what information people see and can share online," she said.

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RPT - Canada People's Party Poll Surge Shows Voters 'Fed Up' With Establishment - Leader Bernier

TORONTO, September 14 (Sputnik) - The People's Party of Canada (PPC) has surged in the polls recently because voters are fed up with government control including mandatory covid measures and want to send a strong message to the establishment, PPC Leader Maxime Bernier told Sputnik.

Most pollsters have popular support for the PPC, founded by Bernier just three years ago, ranging from 5 to 11 percent, launching the conservative populist party into fourth place with less than a week before the September 20 election. Although the PPC only won 1.6% of the vote in 2019, it could play a spoiler role this time around by splitting the right-of-center vote and preventing the Conservative Party from unseating Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Liberal Party. "I believe that people want to send a strong signal to these establishment politicians - they don't want more government control. I believe they want more freedom," Bernier said. "I believe that some of our candidates will be elected and we will have a real freedom voice in Ottawa, a common sense voice in Ottawa that will be ready to fight for all Canadians."

The PPC has vehemently opposed mandatory vaccination measures, including those for all federal government employees and inter-provincial travelers as well as plans to introduce proof of immunization documents, better known as "vaccine passports."

Bernier said Canadians are "fed up" with mask mandates, which are still in place in most parts of the country despite its high vaccination rates, as well as talk of mandatory vaccination and vaccine passports.

In addition to a strong ground game and social media outreach, Bernier credited the party's rise to a backlash from sparse coverage from traditional news sources along with exclusion from the two national leaders' recent debates. He also cited exclusion from the debates as evidence of a political system that refuses change.

"That was not a debate... that was conversation between socialist leaders," Bernier, who has sought to position the PPC as the authentic conservative party and distinguish it from the established Conservative Party of Canada, said.

Meanwhile, Bernier is pushing back against assertions that the national election campaign is getting "ugly," as some have claimed.

While polls show that 80 percent of Canadians support vaccine passports in their province, the conversation around the public health mandates is growing increasingly inflammatory.

The heated debate has led to ugly scenes at Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's campaign stops and other settings around the country, including an incident where the Liberal Party leader was pelted with gravel during a stop in London, Ontario.

Many have pointed fingers at the PPC and its supporters for the increased vitriol. The People's Party booted a party official over allegations was responsible for the gravel-throwing incident. The official has since been charged with assault with a weapon.

The PPC chief, who himself was egged during a stop in Saskatchewan, emphasized that politically motivated violence is unacceptable, but noted that it is Trudeau who must own the increased divisiveness.

"You have a prime minister that is the most divisive prime minister in the history of our country," Bernier concluded.

PPC CANDIDATES ALL IN AS CAMPAIGN ENTERS FINAL WEEK

As Canada's 44th election campaign enters the home stretch, David Freiheit, who is running as a PPC candidate in the riding of Notre-Dame-de-Grace-Westmount, told Sputnik, that he, along with other PPC candidates, is looking to build on the momentum.

Freiheit said "suppression" of the PPC messaging is a doubled-edged sword, with the information vacuum enticing voters to get to know the party through alternative means.

"To some extent, the media suppression helps drive the growth as well because people have seen the way media works... and tend to... place more value, more credibility on the voices that get more overtly suppressed," Freiheit, a former commercial litigator turned political YouTuber, said, noting that voters are increasingly frustrated by the perceived status quo in the country's political system.

Freiheit added that he believes there is no "meaningful opposition" in Canada, emphasizing that little separates the Liberal, Conservative, New Democrat and Green Parties from one another. Likewise, Gilbert Jubinville, a PPC candidate in the riding of Oakville-North Burlington - located 40 minutes west of Toronto - cited the party's stance on vaccine passports as well as a libertarian approach to free speech and economic policy as the reason he chose to campaign on behalf of the party.

"This is about power and control and individual

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Canada People's Party Poll Surge Shows Voters 'Fed Up' With Establishment - Leader Bernier

TORONTO, September 14 (Sputnik) - The People's Party of Canada (PPC) has surged in the polls recently because voters are fed up with government control including mandatory covid measures and want to send a strong message to the establishment, PPC Leader Maxime Bernier told Sputnik.

Most pollsters have popular support for the PPC, founded by Bernier just three years ago, ranging from 5 to 11 percent, launching the conservative populist party into fourth place with less than a week before the September 20 election. Although the PPC only won 1.6% of the vote in 2019, it could play a spoiler role this time around by splitting the right-of-center vote and preventing the Conservative Party from unseating Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Liberal Party. "I believe that people want to send a strong signal to these establishment politicians - they don't want more government control. I believe they want more freedom," Bernier said. "I believe that some of our candidates will be elected and we will have a real freedom voice in Ottawa, a common sense voice in Ottawa that will be ready to fight for all Canadians."

The PPC has vehemently opposed mandatory vaccination measures, including those for all federal government employees and inter-provincial travelers as well as plans to introduce proof of immunization documents, better known as "vaccine passports."

Bernier said Canadians are "fed up" with mask mandates, which are still in place in most parts of the country despite its high vaccination rates, as well as talk of mandatory vaccination and vaccine passports.

In addition to a strong ground game and social media outreach, Bernier credited the party's rise to a backlash from sparse coverage from traditional news sources along with exclusion from the two national leaders' recent debates. He also cited exclusion from the debates as evidence of a political system that refuses change.

"That was not a debate... that was conversation between socialist leaders," Bernier, who has sought to position the PPC as the authentic conservative party and distinguish it from the established Conservative Party of Canada, said.

Meanwhile, Bernier is pushing back against assertions that the national election campaign is getting "ugly," as some have claimed.

While polls show that 80 percent of Canadians support vaccine passports in their province, the conversation around the public health mandates is growing increasingly inflammatory.

The heated debate has led to ugly scenes at Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's campaign stops and other settings around the country, including an incident where the Liberal Party leader was pelted with gravel during a stop in London, Ontario.

Many have pointed fingers at the PPC and its supporters for the increased vitriol. The People's Party booted a party official over allegations was responsible for the gravel-throwing incident.

The official has since been charged with assault with a weapon.

The PPC chief, who himself was egged during a stop in Saskatchewan, emphasized that politically motivated violence is unacceptable, but noted that it is Trudeau who must own the increased divisiveness.

"You have a prime minister that is the most divisive prime minister in the history of our country," Bernier concluded.

#### PPC CANDIDATES ALL IN AS CAMPAIGN ENTERS FINAL WEEK

As Canada's 44th election campaign enters the home stretch, David Freiheit, who is running as a PPC candidate in the riding of Notre-Dame-de-Grace-Westmount, told Sputnik, that he, along with other PPC candidates, is looking to build on the momentum.

Freiheit said "suppression" of the PPC messaging is a doubled-edged sword, with the information vacuum enticing voters to get to know the party through alternative means.

"To some extent, the media suppression helps drive the growth as well because people have seen the way media works... and tend to... place more value, more credibility on the voices that get more overtly suppressed," Freiheit, a former commercial litigator turned political YouTuber, said, noting that voters are increasingly frustrated by the perceived status quo in the country's political system.

Freiheit added that he believes there is no "meaningful opposition" in Canada, emphasizing that little separates the Liberal, Conservative, New Democrat and Green Parties from one another.

Likewise, Gilbert Jubinville, a PPC candidate in the riding of Oakville-North Burlington - located 40 minutes west of Toronto - cited the party's stance on vaccine passports as well as a libertarian approach to free speech and economic policy as the reason he chose to campaign on behalf of the party.

"This is about power and control and individual sovereignty," Jubinville said.

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#### Grichishkin, Skorodumov Sentencing in US Delayed Due to COVID-19 - Lawyer

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - A US court delayed the sentencing of Russian citizen Aleksandr Grichishkin and co-defendant Aleksandr Skorodumov from Lithuania, both charged with cybercrimes, due to COVID-19, Skorodumov's lawyer Brenton Martin told Sputnik. US District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan originally scheduled sentencing for August 20, but postponed it until a later date.

"My understanding is that the date was canceled because the court's chambers were exposed to COVID-19," Martin said.

All parties are in the process of scheduling the next hearing, he added.

Grichishkin and Andrei Skvortsov from Russia, Skorodumov from Lithuania, and Pavel Stassi from Estonia were members of a hosting organization that allegedly helped a number of cybercriminals evade detection by US law enforcement after they caused millions of dollars in losses to victims in the United States, the Justice Department had claimed.

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#### Biden Fails Attempt to Secure Bilateral Meeting With Xi in Recent Call - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden failed in his attempt to secure a bilateral meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping during their recent telephone call, the Financial Times reported citing multiple people briefed on the call.

The report said on Tuesday that Biden proposed to Xi having a bilateral summit between the two leaders, but the Chinese president did not take him up on his offer and instead suggested Washington ease its tensions with Beijing.

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#### Majority of Americans Disapprove of Biden's Performance After Afghan Pullout - Poll

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - A majority of Americans disapprove of how President Joe Biden is handling his job as president after the United States withdrew from Afghanistan, a new poll revealed.

"Americans' views have dimmed on the way President Joe Biden is handling his job as president, with 42 percent approving and 50 percent disapproving, according to a Quinnipiac University national poll of adults," a news release explaining the poll on Tuesday.

Quinnipiac University said this was the first time Biden's job approval has dropped into negative territory since he took office in January. In early August, 46 percent of Americans approved and 43 percent disapproved of the way the president was handling his job.

"In today's poll, Democrats approve 88-7 percent, while Republicans disapprove 91-7 percent and independents disapprove 52-34 percent," Quinnipiac University said.

More than half of Americans, 54-41 percent, said they supported Biden's decision to withdraw all US troops from Afghanistan and nearly seven in ten, 69 to 24 percent, agreed with ending the war there. However, they gave the president a negative 31 to 65 percent for the way he handled withdrawing all US troops from the country, the poll said.

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#### Trump Says Allegations He Considered Attacking China 'Ridiculous'

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump said in an interview that new allegations accusing him of conspiring to attack China in the last months of his presidency are ridiculous.

The Washington Post reported on Tuesday that US Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Mark Milley feared so much that Trump might start a war with China after his failed reelection bid that he called his Chinese counterpart to assure Beijing an attack from the United States was not imminent.

"For him to say that I was going to attack China is the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard and everybody knows it," Trump said on Tuesday in an interview with Newsmax.

The accusations are revealed in an upcoming book called "Peril" by the newspaper's Associate Editor Bob Woodward and reporter Robert Costa. The book is based on more than 200 interviews with officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Milley reportedly made two phone calls on his own to his Chinese counterpart Gen. Li Zuo Cheng to ease tensions and assure them that he would warn them of any US plans to attack China.

Trump said Milley's intention to warn China in advance of any US attack is treason. He added that the general's accusations are an attempt to distract from an embarrassing US withdrawal from Afghanistan.

The book is scheduled to come out on September 21.

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#### Three US Persons Charged With Conspiring to Violate Iran Sanctions - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - A US federal court charged three individuals for conspiring to violate Iran sanctions by sending United States-made genetic sequencing equipment to the country, the Justice Department said.

"Three Florida residents have been charged in federal district court in Miami with crimes related to their alleged violations of US sanctions on Iran, and money laundering," the Justice Department said in a press release on Tuesday.

The defendants - Mohammad Faghihi, his wife Farzaneh Modarresi and his sister Faezeh Faghihi - operated a company in Florida called Express Gene, which had received nearly \$3.5 million in numerous foreign wire transfers from China, Turkey, Singapore, Malaysia and the United Arab Emirates between 2016 and 2020.

Some of the funds were allegedly used to purchase genetic sequencing equipment from US manufacturers that were then shipped to Iran without a license from the Treasury Department, the release said.

In addition, US Customs and Border Protection officers caught Mohammad Faghihi trying to smuggle 17 vials of unknown biological substances at Miami International Airport after returning from Iran. He had served as an assistant professor at the University of Miami's school of medicine from 2013 to 2020, the release noted.

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Civilians Plan to Advance Space Tourism Industry in 3-Day Orbit Adventure - SpaceX

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - SpaceX plans to take another step in expanding the civilian commercial space tourism industry when it launches a Crew Dragon manned vehicle into low earth orbit on its Inspiration4 mission with four civilians and non-astronauts on board on Wednesday.

It will be the first manned orbital mission in the history of human spaceflight to be crewed only by tourists and other passengers who are also not professional astronauts, SpaceX has said. The mission will be launched from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida on Wednesday evening or night at a time from 8:02 p.m. and 1:02 a.m. Eastern Time (ET), provided storms or other weather problems do not delay it, SpaceX said.

The mission is scheduled to stay in orbit for three days before re-entering the atmosphere for a sea splashdown in the Atlantic Ocean east of Florida, according to published reports. The spacecraft will complete each orbit of the earth in about 90 minutes and will orbit more than 100 miles higher than the International Space Station.

The Crew Dragon is also equipped with a specially-designed zero-gravity toilet, the reports said. The mission is financed by US billionaire Jared Isaacman, 38 who created the payment processing company Shift4. Isaacman personally selected Hayley Arceneaux, a cancer survivor from Memphis, Tennessee, for the flight. She is now a physician's assistant at St. Jude's Hospital in Memphis.

Arceneaux will be the first person with a prosthetic body part to participate in any space mission: She will also be the flight's chief medical officer.

Sian Proctor, 51, a geologist and educator, was chosen for the mission from a presentation she posted on social media. She will be only the fourth US African-American woman to travel in space in the 60 year history of US human space flight.

Chris Sembroski, 42, from Seattle, Washington, worked for defense contractor Lockheed Martin and had the most convoluted route to the space flight. A friend of his won the flight seat in a raffle but decided not to go and passed on the ticket to him.

The first civilian to buy a private flight into space was US billionaire investment manager Dennis Tito who bought an eight day visit on the International Space Station 20 years ago. He was flown there and back on a Russian Soyuz spacecraft.

Published estimates put the likely cost of Wednesday's mission at more than \$200 million.

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UNGA President Aims to Make Vaccines Available to Everyone Across Globe By End of 2022

UNITED NATIONS, September 14 (Sputnik) - New UN General Assembly President Abdulla Shahid said he will do his very best during his time in office to achieve the goal of bringing COVID-19 vaccines to every individual in the world by the end of next year.

Earlier on Tuesday, Shahid took an oath of office and became the new president of the 76th session of the UN General Assembly.

"I'm going to do everything possible to make sure that we are able to reach the target to get every single person vaccinated by the end of 2022," Shahid said on Tuesday evening.

Shahid pointed out that combating the COVID-19 pandemic and addressing the unequal access to vaccines worldwide would be top priorities during his tenure in office.

The UN general Assembly president said earlier that in early 2022 he will convene a high-level emergency debate on vaccine equity.

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Scheme to Fill Prison Orders With Drones Earns Ex-Inmate 43-Month in Jail - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) – A former US prison inmate was sentenced to return to jail for 43 months for using drones to smuggle contraband into a federal prison in the state of New Jersey, the Justice Department said on Tuesday.

"Jason Arteaga-Loayza, aka 'Juice,' 30, of Jersey City, New Jersey, a former inmate at Fort Dix, previously pleaded guilty by videoconference before US District Judge Susan D. Wigenton," the Justice Department said in a press release.

Wigenton imposed the 43-month sentence on Tuesday by video conference, the release said. From inside the prison, Adrian Goolcharran, Nicolo Denichilo and Johansel Moronta also face charges in the scheme. The three inmates took orders from fellow prisoners and coordinated deliveries with contraband cellphones, the release added.

Arteaga-Loayza, an inmate at Fort Dix from June 2017 to September 2018, participated in multiple drone deliveries of items that included cellphones, cell-phone accessories, tobacco, weight-loss supplements, eyeglasses and other items, according to the release.

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#### US-Led Coalition Denies Allegations It Conducted Air Strikes in Syria's Al-Bukamal

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The US-led coalition against the Islamic State terror group (banned in Russia) has not carried out any air strikes in the Syrian city of Al-Bukamal, Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF OIR) spokesperson Col. Wayne Marotto said.

"CJTF OIR can confirm we did not conduct air strikes in Al-Bukamal, Sept. 14, 2021," Marotto said on Tuesday.

A source in the Iraqi militia, the Popular Mobilization Forces, told Sputnik earlier on Tuesday that a military aircraft, presumably belonging to the US Air Force, hit on Wednesday night two cars on the Syrian-Iraqi border. The source said the strike was allegedly inflicted by the US Air Force.

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#### UNGA President Says Plans to Hold High-Level Debate on Vaccine Equity in Early 2022

UNITED NATIONS, September 14 (Sputnik) - The new President of the UN General Assembly, Maldivian diplomat Abdulla Shahid, said he plans to convene a high-level emergency debate to address the issue of global COVID-19 vaccine equity at the beginning of the next year.

"I intend to call a high-level emergency debate on vaccine equity with leading experts and world leaders for early 2022," Shahid said on Tuesday after he assumed the position.

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#### SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) -

#### US-RUSSIA RELATIONS

\* Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said on Tuesday that he believes the United States has a scenario for a de facto partition of Syria.

\* Moscow hopes that the new round of US-Russia consultations on strategic stability will not turn into a "dialogue for the sake of dialogue" and clear goals are needed, Ryabkov said.

\* Moscow is pursuing a balanced policy on Afghanistan and remains in contact on the situation in the country with interested parties, including the United States, Ryabkov said.

\* The second round of the Russian-US strategic stability consultations will be held on September 30 in Geneva, a high-ranking diplomatic source told Sputnik.

#### UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

- \* UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Tuesday opened the 76th session of the UN General Assembly.
- \* Guterres welcomed the new President of the UN General Assembly, former Foreign Minister of the Maldives, Abdulla Shahid.
- \* Guterres called on the international community to accelerate the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and meet climate-related targets.

#### AFGHANISTAN DEVELOPMENTS

- \* France is working with partners, including Russia and China, to ensure that international terrorism does not return to Afghanistan, Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said.
- \* Afghan acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi, who is under UN sanctions, thanked foreign countries for humanitarian assistance provided to Kabul and also called on banks and donor states to provide financial assistance.
- \* The Chinese ambassador to Afghanistan has congratulated the country's new government organized by the Taliban (banned in Russia), spokesman Mohammad Naeem said.

#### COVID-19

- \* The World Health Organization (WHO) considers vaccination passports for travel to be discriminatory given the shortage of vaccines in some regions, but believes the measure could be considered when vaccine coverage increases globally, WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom said on Tuesday.
- \* The US state of Arizona is suing the Biden administration over the federal vaccine mandate, making it the first lawsuit in the United States to be filed against the administration on the issue, the office of state Attorney General Mark Brnovich said.
- \* A US federal judge has temporarily blocked the state of New York from forcing its medical workers to be vaccinated, citing a violation of their constitutional rights, a court order showed.
- \* Russian President Vladimir Putin confirmed to the national cabinet that he is quarantining after being in contact with several coronavirus-positive people.
- \* Putin quarantining will not affect the intensity of his work, but his face-to-face meetings will be canceled, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

#### RUSSIAN CITIZEN DETAINED IN PRAGUE

- \* A Czech court ruled on Tuesday to send the Russian citizen Alexander Franchetti, detained at the request of Ukraine, to a pre-trial detention cell, his lawyer Jan Svarc told Sputnik following the court session.
- \* Franchetti characterized the accusations against him as a "step toward fascism."
- \* Russia has sent inquiries to the Czech Republic to establish all circumstances of the recent detention of Franchetti, the Russian Investigative Committee said.

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US Envoy For Yemen to Visit Saudi Arabia, Oman - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking is visiting Saudi Arabia and Oman to hold meetings with government officials, US State Department announced in a release on Tuesday.

"U.S. Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking is in Saudi Arabia today where he will meet with senior officials from the Governments of the Republic of Yemen and Saudi Arabia," the release said. "He will then travel to Oman to meet with senior Omani officials."

Besides, Lenderking will meet with UN Special Envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen David Gressly, and UN Security Council permanent member state ambassadors to Yemen, the State Department added.

"Special Envoy Lenderking's efforts are focused on advancing an inclusive, UN-led peace process and bringing immediate relief to the people of Yemen," the release said. "He will also continue to press the parties on the need for the regular, free flow of essential commodities and humanitarian aid into and throughout Yemen."

In the early months of the new US administration, President Joe Biden announced a suspension of US support for Saudi Arabian offensive operations in its conflict with Yemen. The US has been the principal supplier of arms to Saudi forces and has frequently targeted alleged terrorists in the country with drone strikes.

Yemen has been engulfed in an internal conflict between government forces and the Houthi movement since August 2014. The situation in the Middle Eastern nation is further complicated after Saudi Arabia joined the conflict on the Yemeni government's side in 2015 and began conducting occasional air, land and sea operations against the Islamist rebel movement.

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Nearly 6Mln Canadians Vote in Advance Polls, Up 18.5% Over 2019 Election – Elections Board

TORONTO, September 14 (Sputnik) – Canadians took advantage of advance polling in larger numbers than the 2019 election, with an estimated 5.78 million casting their ballot during the four-day early voting period, the country's election board said on Tuesday.

"According to the preliminary figures, some 5,780,000 electors voted at the advance polls in this general election. This is a 18.46% increase from the 4,879,312 electors who voted in advance in the 2019 general election," Elections Canada said in a press release.

Canadians had the opportunity to cast their ballot between Friday and Monday, in advance of election day, which is scheduled for September 20.

Additionally, the commission has issued 1,088,550 special ballots of which 533,859 have been mailed back.

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#### Guterres Opens 76th Session of UN General Assembly

UNITED NATIONS, September 14 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Tuesday opened the 76th session of the UN General Assembly.

"It's a pleasure to join you again for the opening of the 76th session of the General Assembly," Guterres said speaking at the 193-member body.

The UN chief also welcomed the new President of the General Assembly, former Foreign Minister the Maldives, Abdulla Shahid.

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#### Five US Major Tech Firms to Develop Artemis Program Lunar Landing Concepts - NASA

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - NASA has chosen five leading US advanced technology and defense contractors to help it develop concepts for repeated manned landings and missions on the Moon as part of the Artemis Program, the agency announced on Tuesday. "NASA has selected five US companies to help the agency enable a steady pace of crewed trips to the lunar surface under the agency's Artemis program," the release said. "These companies will make advancements toward sustainable human landing system concepts ...to cultivate industry capabilities for crewed lunar landing missions."

The awards were issued under the Next Space Technologies for Exploration Partnerships (NextSTEP-2) and are worth a combined value of \$146 million, and the work will be conducted over the next 15 months, the release said.

"The selected companies will develop lander design concepts, evaluating their performance, design, construction standards, mission assurance requirements, interfaces, safety, crew health accommodations, and medical capabilities. The companies will also mitigate lunar lander risks by conducting critical component tests," the release said.

The companies are: Blue Origin Federation of Kent, Washington, \$25.6 million; Dynetics of Huntsville, Alabama, \$40.8 million; Lockheed Martin of Littleton, Colorado, \$35.2 million; Northrop Grumman of Dulles, Virginia, \$34.8 million and SpaceX of Hawthorne, California, \$9.4 million, the release added.

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#### Arizona Sues Biden Administration Over Federal Vaccine Mandate - Attorney General

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The US state of Arizona is suing the Biden administration over the federal vaccine mandate, making it the first lawsuit in the United States to be filed against the administration on the issue, the office of state Attorney General Mark Brnovich announced on Tuesday.

"Attorney General Mark Brnovich announced his office (AGO) is suing President Biden and other officials in his administration over their unconstitutional COVID-19 vaccine mandate for federal employees, federal contractors, and private businesses with more than 100 employees. This is the first lawsuit in the country to be filed against the Biden Administration's radical actions requiring COVID-19 vaccines," the office said in a statement.

Brnovich argues the federal government cannot force US citizen to get the vaccine against COVID-19, also hinting that the US border with Mexico is porous and hundreds of thousands of migrants cross it without having a vaccine requirement imposed on them.

"The Biden administration is once again flouting our laws and precedents to push their radical agenda. There can be no serious or scientific discussion about containing the spread of COVID-19 that doesn't begin at our southern border," he said.

Last week, Biden announced that US government is imposing compulsory vaccination against COVID-19 for all employees of the US federal government. Biden also said will order the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to issue rules for private businesses over 100 employees to get vaccinated.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said in a study published in late August that the vaccine effectiveness appears to have dropped from 91 percent to 66 percent with the Delta variant accounting for the majority of the new infections.

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Three Ex-US Intelligence Officers Settle for \$1.68Mln on Hacking Charges - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - Three former US intelligence operatives have agreed to pay a total of \$1.68 million in order to settle a federal case brought against them for allegedly conspiring to provide hacking services to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the Justice Department said in a statement on Tuesday.

"On Sept. 7, US citizens, Marc Baier, 49, and Ryan Adams, 34, and a former US citizen, Daniel Gericke, 40, all former employees of the US Intelligence Community (USIC) or the US military, entered into a deferred prosecution agreement (DPA) that restricts their future activities and employment and requires the payment of \$1,685,000 in penalties to resolve a Department of Justice investigation regarding violations of US export control, computer fraud and access device fraud laws," the statement said.

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Guterres, Ahead of UNGA76, Urges to Accelerate Global Action on COVID-19, Climate Change

UNITED NATIONS, September 14 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres at the opening of the 76th session of the UN General Assembly on Tuesday called on the global community to accelerate response to the COVID-19 pandemic and meet targets on climate.

"We need to speed up our response to COVID-19, with vaccines, treatment and equipment for all — not only those with the most," Guterres said ahead of the high-level week starting September 21, which will see world leaders coming to New York City to address issues of international concern in-person.

"We need countries to commit and live up to bold climate targets at COP26 in Glasgow. The war on our planet must end," Guterres added.

The UN chief also stressed it was time to end wars on each other and commit to peace fighting the common enemy - the pandemic.

The new session of the UN General Assembly starts on Tuesday. The high-level week of the assembly will be held September 21-27.

US President Joe Biden plans to virtually convene the Global COVID-19 Summit: Ending the Pandemic and Building Back Better on the margins of the UN General Assembly on September 22.

Between October 31 and November 12, the United Nations will convene the Climate Change Conference, also known as COP26, in Glasgow, Scotland.

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US Sentences Iranian Man to 63 Months for Exporting Military Items - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - Iranian national Mehrdad Ansari has been sentenced to more than 5 years and two months in prison for illegally exporting dual-use military items in violation of United States sanctions against Iran, the US Justice Department said on Tuesday.

"An Iranian national was sentenced today to 63 months in prison followed by three years of supervised release for violating the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA)," the Justice Department said in a release. "Mehrdad Ansari, 40, a resident of the United Arab Emirates and Germany, was convicted by a federal jury in May 2021 for his role in a scheme to obtain military sensitive parts for Iran in violation of the Iranian Trade Embargo."

The Justice Department said in the release that between October 9, 2007 and June 15 2011, Ansari conspired with two other co-defendants to obtain multitude of parts that could be used in nuclear weapons, for missile guidance, offensive electronic warfare, radio jamming, radar warning and surveillance.

The three co-conspirators obtained or attempted to obtain over 105,000 parts worth \$2,630,800 and conducted 599 transactions with 63 US companies without informing them the parts were destined for Iran, the release said.

In May, Ansari was convicted on one count of conspiracy to violate the Iran sanctions regime, one count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud, one count of conspiracy to defraud the US

Treasury Department and two counts of aiding and abetting the making of false statements, the release added.

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US Arrests, Indicts 10 Leaders of Prominent Mafia Family for Racketeering - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - An unsealed indictment charges 14 defendants, including ten members and associates of the Colombo crime family, the US Justice Department said on Tuesday.

"The charges in the indictment against the Colombo crime family members relate to multiple charged schemes in a long-running effort by the crime family to infiltrate and take control of a Queens-based labor union ('Labor Union') and its affiliated health care benefit program ('Health Fund') that provides medical benefits, including dental, optical and pharmacy benefits, to the members of the Labor Union," the Justice Department said in a press release.

Queens is one of the five boroughs in New York City.

Among those charged with racketeering are Andrew "Mush" Russo, the boss of the Colombo crime family, Benjamin "Benji" Castellazzo, the underboss and Ralph DiMatteo, the consigliere. The takedown represents the entire administration of the Colombo organization, the release said.

The indictment names another four defendants, including Bonanno crime family soldier John Ragano, who is charged with loansharking, fraud and drug trafficking, the release added.

All 14 defendants were arrested on Tuesday, according to the release.

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US Charges Three Former US Intel Operatives Who Worked as Hackers for UAE - Court Document

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - Three US citizens who formerly worked as intelligence operatives are facing federal charges for working as hackers for the United Arab Emirates according to court documents filed on Tuesday by Acting US Attorney for the District of Columbia Channing Phillips.

Marc Baier, Ryan Adams, and Daniel Gericke allegedly conspired to provide computer network exploitation skills to the UAE in violation of US law.

"Defendants used illicit, fraudulent, and criminal means, including the use of advanced covert hacking systems that utilized computer exploits obtained from the United States and elsewhere, to gain unauthorized access to protected computers in the United States and elsewhere and to illicitly obtain information, material, documents, records, data and personal identifying

information, including passwords, access devices, login credentials and authentication tokens, from victims from around the world," the document said.

Charges detailed in the document include conspiracy to violate the Arms Export Control Act and International Traffic in Arms Regulations and conspiracy to commit access device fraud and computer hacking offenses.

The alleged criminal conduct took place between December 2015 and November 2019, the document said.

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Republicans United Against Any Democrat Move to Raise Federal Debt Ceiling - McConnell

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - Senate Republicans are united in opposing any effort by the Democrats to raise the US federal debt ceiling to accommodate massive new spending plans they hope to pass into law, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell said on Tuesday. "Republicans are united in opposition to raising the debt ceiling," McConnell told a weekly press conference of the Republican Senate leadership.

The Senate Republican Leader acknowledged that raising the debt ceiling was necessary. However, the spending plans that the Democrats were trying to push through Congress were so great that they risked forcing the federal government to default into bankruptcy, he added. Therefore they must take sole responsibility for preventing that from happening.

If the Democrats raise the federal debt ceiling on a partisan basis, "they will have the ability and the responsibility to make sure that the federal government [does] not default on that," he said.

McConnell said he believed the current efforts of the Democrats in Congress to expand the range and spending of the federal government were unprecedented.

Measures to raise the debt ceiling must clear both houses before October 1 to avoid the US government defaulting on its obligations. With majorities in both houses, Democrats must overcome internal divisions, especially in the upper house where consensus is necessary, to adopt the measure forthwith.

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Boeing MQ-25 Drone Successfully Refuels F-35 Jet in Flight for First Time - US Navy

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - A MQ-25 drone has for the first time refueled an F-35 Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter in flight, the Boeing Company announced on Tuesday.

"The US Navy and Boeing have used the MQ-25TM T1 test asset to refuel a US Navy F-35C Lightning II fighter jet for the first time, once again demonstrating the aircraft's ability to achieve its primary aerial refueling mission," Boeing said in a news release.

It was the third refueling mission for the Boeing-owned test asset in just over three months, advancing the test program for the Navy's first operational carrier-based unmanned aircraft. A T1 refueled an F/A-18 Super Hornet in June and an E-2D Hawkeye in August, the release said.

"Every test flight with another Type/Model/Series aircraft gets us one step closer to rapidly delivering a fully mission-capable MQ-25 to the fleet. Stingray's unmatched refueling capability is going to increase the Navy's power projection and provide operational flexibility to the Carrier Strike Group commanders." US Navy's Unmanned Carrier Aviation program manager Captain Chad Reed said in the release.

During a test flight on September 13, an F-35C test pilot conducted a successful wake survey behind the MQ-25TM T1 to ensure performance and stability before making contact with T1's aerial refueling drogue and receiving fuel, the release said.

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#### New York Medical Workers Win Ruling to Stop Their Own Vaccinations - Court Order

NEW YORK, September 14 (Sputnik) - A federal judge has temporarily blocked the state of New York from forcing its medical workers to be vaccinated, citing a violation of their constitutional rights, a court order showed.

"The plaintiffs' motion for a temporary restraining order is granted," Judge David Hurd in Utica city of New York wrote in the order, seen by Sputnik.

The decision was in favor of 17 health professionals, including doctors and nurses, who claimed in a lawsuit that their rights were violated with a vaccine mandate that disallowed the exemptions.

The state of New York issued the order on August 28, requiring at least one shot of a COVID-19 vaccine by September 27 for health care workers at hospitals and nursing homes.

The not-to-vaccinate right has been a stumbling block to New York state's plan to get at least 80% of its nearly 20 million population inoculated. As of this week, just about 62% of the state's people had been vaccinated.

In their lawsuit against the state, the healthcare workers — comprising practicing doctors, nurses, a nuclear medicine technologist, a cognitive rehabilitation therapist and a physician's liaison — all cited their Christian faith and strong objection to abortion as reasons for resisting the vaccination.

The plaintiffs argued that all of the available vaccines employ aborted fetus cell lines in their testing, development or production. To further bolster their case, they said they were not typical "anti-vaxxers" who opposed all vaccines.

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## UN Headquarters in New York Prepares to Open Doors for High-Level Week

UNITED NATIONS, September 14 (Sputnik) - UN headquarters complex in New York City is preparing for the opening of the 76th session of the UN General Assembly and the high-level week starting September 21.

After 3:00 p.m. [19:00 GMT] on Tuesday, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres will close the 75th session of the General Assembly and deliver remarks to mark the opening of a new chapter at the main policymaking UN body.

Inside the General Assembly hall, which will welcome at least 83 world leaders next week, UN staff can be seen arranging chairs to maintain the six feet distance to avoid the spread of the COVID-19 disease among the diplomats.

Over the past week, the hallways at the United Nations, separated by signs suggesting to keep two-way traffic to avoid congregation, have seen a noticeable increase in the number of diplomats who had arrived to work in the upcoming General Assembly.

To prevent personnel and delegates from catching COVID-19, the United Nations placed signs all over the building reminding visitors always to wear a mask, avoid face-to-face meetings and regularly wash hands.

Although the United Nations said earlier no side meetings were planned for the high-level week, cubicles for bilateral negotiations are being installed in some areas, along with metal detectors and improvised gates.

Outside the building, personnel can be seen installing UN flags, constructing podiums for speakers and trimming trees and lawns.

UN K-9 Teams have also already arrived at the headquarters and are seen walking with dogs to get them accustomed to the territory and diplomats who sometimes stay in lines to greet the animals.

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## Six US States Get Additional \$13Bln in Emergency Housing Aid Amid Pandemic - Treasury

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The US Treasury Department said on Tuesday it was providing an additional \$13 billion in emerging housing funds to jurisdictions in six states whose residents were struggling to pay rent amid continued struggles from the coronavirus pandemic.

"Treasury is happy to provide these state and local government programs with additional resources to support Americans in need of rental assistance," Deputy Secretary Wally Adeyemo said in a statement. "We are also committed to reallocating resources to ensure assistance reaches struggling tenants and landlords during the pandemic."

The six jurisdictions receiving the funds under the second wave of Emergency Rental Assistance, or ERA 2, will be Philadelphia in Pennsylvania, the island of Oahu in Hawaii, the city of Des Moines and Polk County in Iowa, Houston and Harris County in Texas, Leon County in Florida and New Orleans in Louisiana.

Prior to the latest disbursement, the Treasury had provided \$8.6 billion under the ERA 2. In the first assistance program, dubbed ERA 1, it had allocated \$25 billion to state, local, and tribal governments.

Aside from providing rental assistance, the Biden administration has asked Congress to extend a moratorium on evictions that expired in July, saying many renters still faced financial difficulties and those driven from their homes could face heightened risk from the more dangerous Delta variant of COVID-19.

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**UN Needs to Renew Afghan Mission Mandate, Expand Staff to Monitor Abuses – Rights Group**

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) – The UN Security Council must extend its mission in Afghanistan in an upcoming vote and supply additional staff and resources to monitor and report on rights abuses, a prominent rights group said on Tuesday.

"The Taliban takeover poses grave risks to vulnerable groups, especially journalists, ethnic minorities, women and girls, and those who worked with the former government, foreign states, and contractors," Amnesty International's Senior Advocate at the UN Lawrence Moss said in a press release. "It is essential that UN human rights monitors remain on the ground and show support for the rights of Afghans at this perilous time."

Present in the country since 2002, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) monitors the country's human rights situation and provides oversight through the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the release said.

UNAMA's mandate is due to expire on Friday unless renewed by the Security Council.

Thus far, the UN has allowed humanitarian and political staff to remain in Afghanistan, but not its human rights monitors, according to the release.

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**Biden Plans to Engage With World Leaders on COVID at UN General Assembly - White House**

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden plans to meet with world leaders on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) next week to discuss efforts to end the coronavirus pandemic, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said on Tuesday.

"We are actively planning COVID-19 engagements for the President on the margins of the UN General Assembly high-level week as part of President Biden's ongoing effort to rally the world to end this pandemic," Jean-Pierre told reporters aboard Air Force One. "I anticipate there will be an opportunity for the President to engage with his counterparts on this issue during UNGA week."

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Drug Firms Block Efforts to Share Vaccine Technology With Poor Countries - Advocacy Group

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) – Lobbying in wealthy nations by powerful pharmaceutical firms have stalled a proposal to temporarily waive global trade and intellectual property rules to expand access to COVID-19 vaccines, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said on Tuesday.

“The pandemic has laid bare the dangers of having manufacturing capacity for life-saving vaccines concentrated in a few countries where governments have refused to prioritize and mandate intellectual property waivers and technology transfers for rapid diversified and global production,” HRW said in a press release.

As a result, access to COVID-19 vaccines remains deeply unequal, with three quarters of more than 5 billion vaccine doses administered in just 10 countries, HRW said, citing World Health Organization (WHO) data.

For example, only 2 percent of Africa’s population is fully vaccinated at a time when some wealthy nations have begun offering booster shots, the release added.

HRW also faulted wealthy countries that spent public funds to develop vaccines for failing condition funding on affordability and sharing technology, leaving companies to decide how, when, and where they will manufacture, distribute, and price vaccines.

In May, the United States signaled that it would support negotiations on a proposed waiver. But the European Commission, representing the European Union member states, Switzerland, and several other high-income governments have consistently stalled and blocked efforts to swiftly adopt the waiver, according to the release.

HRW published the release on the eve of a World Trade Organization meeting in Geneva this week where negotiations on vaccine technology transfers are due to resume.

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Guterres May Participate in US Summit on COVID-19 During UN General Assembly - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, September 14 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres may take part in the global COVID-19 summit scheduled to take place on the margins of the UN General Assembly next week, UN Spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Tuesday. A day prior, the White House said that US President Joe Biden plans to virtually convene the Global COVID-19 Summit: Ending the Pandemic and Building Back Better on September 22.

"We're speaking to our friends in Washington. I don't have confirmation of the Secretary-General's final program for next week, but I'm sure he will participate in one way or another," Dujarric said.

Biden will travel to New York City on September 21 to deliver his first speech at the UN General Assembly since taking office.

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Three Ex-Minneapolis Police Officers Try to Sever Trials From Chauvin's in US Federal Case

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The three former Minneapolis police officers charged alongside Derek Chauvin for violating George Floyd's constitutional rights during the incident that caused his death should not share a trial with him, their lawyers argued before the US District Court in Minnesota on Tuesday.

Tou Thao, J. Alexander Kueng and Thomas Lane's lawyers said the defendants would not receive a fair trial by jury alongside Chauvin because the jurors would already know of his criminal conviction for murder, making the trial prejudicial for their clients.

The prosecution argued in response that the jurors would likely know of the conviction regardless of whether they are sharing the same courtroom as Chauvin and that much of the evidence being presented would overlap.

The men are facing federal charges including willfully depriving Floyd of his rights and failing to intervene to stop said deprivation of rights. All of them pleaded not guilty to the charges brought against them.

Chauvin was already sentenced to 22.5 years in prison after being found guilty on charges of murder and manslaughter, while the other three former officers will face separate state criminal charges in March 2022.

The court entered a recess following the arraignment and discussions of the motion to sever the cases, having agreed to dates for the parties to receive a transcript of the hearing and enter their respective briefs but it did not set a future trial date.

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Vermont Sues 4 Oil Giants For 'Misleading' Statements on Climate Change - Attorney General

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) – The US state of Vermont sued oil giants Exxon Mobil, Shell, Sunoco and CITGO over violations of the Consumer Protection Act for covering up their impacts on climate change, State Attorney General T.J. Donovan announced on Tuesday. "For years, these companies have misled the public about the real and significant impacts of fossil fuels on our environment and public health," Donovan said in a statement.

Residents of Vermont received "false and misleading" information about significant effects of companies' activity on the climate, he said.

The lawsuit seeks to prevent these companies from participating in unfair practices, as well as calling them to take appropriate steps in their further activities.

"The lawsuit contends that the corporations knew about the potential warming effects of greenhouse gas emissions caused by fossil fuel since the 1960s and yet have continued to promote their products while obfuscating and downplaying climate dangers," the statement read.

The companies recently advertised their products as helping climate change issues, hiding the fact that they continue to be the source of the problem, it added.

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Top US General Feared Trump Might Spark War With China After Reelection Loss - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - US Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Mark Milley feared former President Donald Trump might start a war with China after his failed reelection bid that he called his Chinese counterpart to assure Beijing an attack from the United States was not imminent, the Washington Post reported on Tuesday citing an upcoming book by the newspaper's Associate Editor Bob Woodward and reporter Robert Costa.

The US intelligence community determined Beijing was nervous the United States was preparing an attack following rising tensions over military exercises in the South China Sea and Trump's hostile talk toward China, the report said citing the upcoming book "Peril."

The report said Milley made two phone calls on his own to his Chinese counterpart Gen. Li Zuocheng to ease tensions. The first call took place on October 30, 2020 and the second on January 8, two days after pro-Trump supporters temporarily seized the Capitol, the report said. CIA Director Gina Haspel warned Milley ahead of time that the United States was about to face a right-wing coup, the report said.

After the January 6 event, Milley told his senior staff that the Capitol riot may be a precursor to something far worse down the road, the report added.

Woodward and Costa conducted more than 200 interviews with officials on the condition of anonymity, according to the report. vera - k.rivera@sputniknews.com

Subject:

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US Government Launches Probe Into Sex Abuse in Georgia State Prisons - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration has initiated a federal investigation into the conditions of prisoners and dangers of physical harm and sexual abuse to

them in the prison system of the US state of Georgia, the Justice Department said in a release on Tuesday.

"The Justice Department announced today that it has opened a statewide civil investigation into conditions of confinement of prisoners held in Georgia's prisons," the release said. "The investigation will examine whether Georgia provides prisoners reasonable protection from physical harm at the hands of other prisoners."

The Justice Department also will continue its existing investigation into whether Georgia provides lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex prisoners reasonable protection from sexual abuse by other prisoners and by staff, the release said.

"Individuals sentenced to prison in Georgia Department of Corrections facilities deserve to be treated humanely. Our office is committed to ensuring state prisoners are safe while serving their sentences," Acting US Attorney Kurt Erskine for the Northern District of Georgia said in the release.

The investigation will be conducted under the Civil Rights of Institutionalized Persons Act that gives the Justice Department the authority to investigate whether any violations of prisoners' constitutional rights result from a "pattern or practice of resistance to the full enjoyment of such rights," the release added.

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#### UN Food Agency Says Setting Up Humanitarian Hub in Uzbekistan for Afghanistan

UNITED NATIONS, September 14 (Sputnik) - The UN World Food Program (WFP) said on Tuesday that it is establishing a humanitarian logistics hub in Termez, Uzbekistan, to position food for Afghanistan.

"In anticipation of the high food needs and further disruptions to supply chains, WFP is positioning food and other stocks at strategic border points in Pakistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In addition, a logistics hub of 5,000 square meters space is being established in Termez, Uzbekistan," the WFP said in a press release of Tuesday.

Earlier in September, Kazakhstan also proposed establishing a UN logistics hub in Almaty to safely deliver humanitarian aid to Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is facing a major economic crisis exacerbated by the takeover of the Taliban (banned in Russia) on August 15 that caused many countries to halt aid to Afghanistan.

At the United Nations donor conference held in Geneva on Monday, international donors raised \$1.2 billion to help avert the looming humanitarian catastrophe in Afghanistan.

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#### US, NATO Allies Practice Rescuing Sailors From Sunken Submarines in Exercise With Turkey

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The annual rescue and escape from disabled submarines exercises that are underway in the Eastern Mediterranean will run through September 24, NATO said on Tuesday.

"The sea phase will consist of numerous rescue and intervention exercises utilizing submarines, rescue vehicles, recompression chambers, medical teams and equipment, remote operated vehicles, aircrafts, atmospheric diving suits and divers," NATO said in a press release.

The September 12-24 exercise is being run by the International Submarine Escape and Rescue Liaison Office (ISMERLO) in conjunction with the annual Turkish Navy exercise Kurtaran and hosted by Turkey, the release said.

Assets and personnel from Italy, Turkey and the United States together with personnel from Canada, Greece and Spain will also take part in the submarine escape and rescue training scenarios, the release added.

Although established by NATO, ISMERLO is an independent military organization that offers services to all submarine operating nations, according to the release.

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Al-Qaeda May Have Capacity to Threaten US From Abroad in 1-2 Years - DIA Director

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The al-Qaeda terror group (banned in Russia) could have the capability to threaten the US mainland from Afghanistan in one to two years, Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) Director Scott Berrier said at the Intelligence and National Security Summit on Tuesday.

"The current assessment probably conservatively is one to two years for Al Qaeda to build some capability to at least threaten the homeland," Berrier said as quoted by the New York Times.

CIA Deputy Director David Cohen in remarks at the summit said his agency is monitoring al-Qaeda potential movement to Afghanistan, the report said.

Berrier added that the US intelligence community needs to rebuild its intelligence gathering capability in Afghanistan while also improving its ability to monitor China and Russia, the report said.

On Monday, Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines said Somalia, Syria, Iraq and Yemen pose greater security threats to the United States than Afghanistan, however, that was an assessment made prior to the fall of the Afghan government in August .

The Taliban (banned in Russia) has vowed to cut ties with al-Qaeda and to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven for terrorist groups as part of the Doha agreement reached with the Trump administration in February of 2020.

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US SEC Chief Defends Cryptocurrency Crackdown as 'Many Already Hurt' By Trade

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) Chairman Gary Gensler on Tuesday defended tough actions planned by the agency against the cryptocurrency trade, saying too many investors have already been hurt in the loosely-regulated industry.

"It is really just to help bring people into the investor protection remit," Gensler told a US Senate Banking Committee on the SEC's planned policing of Bitcoin and other digital currencies. "Right now, there are many individuals in this country that have already been hurt. And there's, unfortunately, going to be more spills on Aisle 3 so to speak using an old grocery store term." Gensler, a former head of the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) during the Obama administration has a reputation for tough action, clamping down heavily on what he termed as excessive speculation in energy trading in the aftermath of the 2007-08 financial crisis.

The Biden administration appointed Gensler to lead the SEC in April and he has since said reigning in the "Wild West" of the crypto world as one of his top priorities.

Earlier on Tuesday, Senator Pat Toomey, a Republican, accused Gensler of trying to regulate the digital-asset industry with overbearing action similar to his days at the CFTC. Toomey also said Gensler was not being transparent enough on how the SEC determined whether a digital asset was a security - a classification that has brought on a whole new range of strict investor-protection rules.

Gensler denied the assertion, saying there is a fair amount of clarity in determining digital assets as securities.

"I'm not negative or a minimalist when it comes to crypto. I just think it would be best if it was inside the investor-protection regime that Congress has laid out," he said.

In prepared remarks released ahead of his Senate testimony, Gensler said the SEC wanted lawmakers' help to oversee the offer and sales of crypto tokens, crypto trading and lending platforms and so-called stablecoins.

The SEC chief also pleaded for assistance in governing investment vehicles that provide exposure to digital assets or crypto derivatives, as well as custody of virtual assets.

Gensler said swaths of the crypto market were operating outside of the SEC's regulatory frameworks that shield investors and customers from illicit activity.

"Frankly, at this time, it's more like the Wild West or the old world of 'buyer beware' that existed before the securities laws were enacted," he said, echoing his sentiments on the cryptocurrency trade from a month ago. "This asset class is rife with fraud, scams, and abuse in certain applications. We just don't have enough investor protection in crypto finance, issuance, trading or lending."

The SEC was eager to bulk up existing authorities and, with congressional approval, expand its jurisdiction to help close gaps in policing the cryptocurrency trade, he said.

Policing of cryptocurrencies is being mulled as central banks around the world, including the US Federal Reserve, toy with the idea of having their own digital currencies. While central bank authorities agree that the monetary system of the future might largely be dictated by digital currencies, but many are also wary of alleged illegitimate activities from these and have been studying ways to counter them.

Bitcoin, the granddaddy of digital coins, has been volatile this year, rallying more than 800 percent at one point from a year ago before dropping about half in value, causing huge losses for some speculators. Bitcoin is completely banned by India and heavily restricted by China. US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen has also called Bitcoin an "inefficient" payment system that was too volatile for the average user or investor and often misused for illicit finance.

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ICAO Council Did Not Discuss Ryanair Report Probe – Russian Delegation To Sputnik

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Council has not discussed either the Ryanair incident or Belarus' Transport and Communications Minister Aleksei Avramenko's letter on Monday while a new date for discussions has not yet been set, Russian envoy to ICAO Sergey Gudkov told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"Yesterday, the ICAO Council did not discuss the report of the Secretariat team on the investigation of the incident in Minsk and the letter from Belarus' Minister of Transport and Communications Mr. Avramenko because they delayed the discussion of previous issues. A new date for discussing these issues has not yet been set," Gudkov said.

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UN Conducts First Humanitarian Flight to Kabul Since Taliban's Takeover - WFP

UNITED NATIONS, September 14 (Sputnik) - The UN World Food Program (WFP) said on Tuesday that it managed to resume the air link with Kabul after conducting its first humanitarian flight since the Taliban (banned in Russia) took over Afghanistan last month.

"The WFP-led United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) has resumed flights to Kabul, enabling humanitarian responders and much-needed relief items to reach desperate Afghans in multiple locations across the country," the UN agency said in a press release.

Flights to Kabul restarted on September 12 after a temporary pause in the wake of the Taliban's capture of Afghanistan's capital city on August 15, the release said.

However, WFP's flights between Islamabad, Pakistan, and the Afghan towns of Mazar-i-Sharif, Kandahar and Herat have been up and running since August 29, the release added.

WFP said it needs \$30 million to keep air services going on top of the requested \$200 million to replenish its food pipeline.

Food and Agriculture Organization Office of Emergencies and Resilience Director Rein Paulsen has said some 4 million Afghans currently find themselves in emergencies, experiencing extreme gaps in food consumption, very high levels of acute malnutrition and excess mortality.

Earlier in September, the United Nations appealed for \$606 million to support vulnerable Afghans until the end of 2021. On Monday, international donors at the conference in Geneva pledged to provide \$1.2 billion to support humanitarian action in the country, exceeding the amount requested.

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**Chauvin, Other Ex-Officers Plead Not Guilty to Federal Charges of Violating Floyd's Rights**

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - Derek Chauvin and the three other ex-Minneapolis police officers charged in a federal court with violating George Floyd's constitutional rights entered pleas of "not guilty" on Tuesday before the US District Court, District of Minnesota. Chauvin, Tou Thao, J. Alexander Kueng, and Thomas Lane all pleaded not guilty to the federal charges brought against them for their role in the death of Floyd in May of 2020, which sparked worldwide racial justice protests.

The four men are facing federal charges for willfully depriving George Floyd of his constitutional rights while acting under the color of law. Thao and Kueng are facing additional federal charges for failing to intervene and stop the unreasonable use of force by Chauvin.

Chauvin is also being simultaneously charged in connection with a previous incident from September of 2017 in which Chauvin is accused of depriving a 14-year-old of the constitutional right to be free from the use of unreasonable force.

Chauvin was already sentenced to 22.5 years in prison by the State of Minnesota after being found guilty on criminal charges of second-degree unintentional murder, third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter in the death of George Floyd.

The other officers will also face trial on state criminal charges in March 2022.

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**Republican Lawmakers Accuse Biden of Politicizing Booster Jabs to Dodge Other Crises**

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - White House pressure on US health officials to quickly approve COVID-19 booster shots reflects an attempt by President Joe Biden to divert public attention from numerous crises buffeting his administration, senior US House Republicans charged on Tuesday.

"President Biden, instead of following the science, is attempting to distract from his numerous crises by playing politics and moving out ahead of the FDA [Food and Drug Administration] and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) when it comes to the science on coronavirus vaccine booster shots," Republican Whip Steve Scalise and ranking Oversight Committee Congressman James Comer wrote in a letter to acting FDA Commissioner Janet Woodcock.

The request is part of an oversight probe by US House Republicans following Biden's announcement that booster shots would become available on September 20, the letter said. The letter cited a report by former FDA vaccine officials Marion Gruber and Phil Krause, who reportedly resigned over Biden's announcement, which has been widely criticized as premature and politically driven.

A report by the two officials published shortly after their resignation said - as quoted in the letter: "[c]urrent evidence does not, therefore, appear to show a need for boosting in the general population, in which efficacy against severe disease remains high."

The letter requested FDA documents relating to studies on booster shots, communications between the White House and FDA relating to boosters and documents related to Biden's August 18 announcement of booster availability.

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Cable From US Embassy in Kabul Did Not Warn of Govt. Collapse Before US Pullout - Blinken

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - Secretary of State Antony Blinken confirmed during a congressional testimony on Thursday that he had received a cable from the US embassy in Kabul about the likely collapse of the Afghan government after the United States withdrawal from Afghanistan on August 31 but pointed out the cable did not suggest a collapse before the withdrawal.

"Senator, I certainly received this cable in mi-July. I read it. I responded to it," Blinken said.

"What the cable said broadly is two things. It did not suggest that the government and Security Forces were going to collapse prior to our departure."

Blinken emphasized that the expressed serious concerns about the durability of the Afghan government and forces after the United States departure and "focused on the efforts that we were making, particularly on the SIV front, to try to expedite moving them out."

On Thursday, US media reported that the July 13 internal cable warned about the Taliban (banned in Russia) quickly capturing territories throughout Afghanistan and the subsequent collapse of the Afghan security forces.

The US diplomats in Kabul also outlined recommendations on ways to both alleviate the crisis and accelerate the evacuation, the report said.

The cable urged the State Department to use tougher language when describing the Taliban's atrocities, the report added.

In early August, the Taliban stepped up their offensive against the Afghan government forces and entered Kabul on August 15, completing a takeover of the country. The developments prompted a mass evacuation of citizens from Western countries as well as Afghans who had collaborated with or worked for foreign troops and organizations.

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## US Banking Group Wells Fargo Must be Broken Up for its Scandals - Senator Warren

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - US Senator Elizabeth Warren on Tuesday urged the Federal Reserve to break up Wells Fargo, one of the country's main banking groups which she said had continuously put consumers at risk with a rash of scandals.

"The Fed should use its longstanding authority under the Bank Holding Company Act to revoke Wells Fargo's status as a financial holding company and require that it separate its bank subsidiary from its other financial activities," Warren said in a statement. "Wells Fargo is an irredeemable repeat offender; the Fed must act."

Wells Fargo is considered as one of the United States' "Big Four Banks", with 8,050 branches. It also operates in 34 other countries and has over 70 million customers worldwide.

Warren's call came after the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, or OCC, issued a consent order regarding Wells Fargo Bank's ongoing problems related to mortgage foreclosures and the bank's failure to comply with past consent orders issued by the agency.

In making the order, the OCC noted Wells Fargo's "inadequate controls, insufficient independent oversight, and ineffective governance related to loss mitigation activities have caused the Bank's failure to timely detect, prevent, and quantify inaccurate loan modification decisions and impaired the Bank's ability to fully and timely remediate harmed customers."

Warren noted that Wells Fargo had been placed under an asset cap since 2018 by former Fed Chair and current Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen due to consumer abuses and other compliance breakdowns.

She seized on the new revelations by the OCC that she said highlighted Wells Fargo's broken culture to conduct business in its current form, and urged the Fed to act promptly to "eliminate abusive and unlawful practices that have cost consumers hundreds of millions of dollars".

Wells Fargo did not immediately respond to Warren's call.

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## Whelan's Family Confident Court to Consider His Petition Once Information Received

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The family of US citizen Paul Whelan, who is serving a 16-year prison sentence in Russia on espionage charges, is confident that the court in Russia will consider his petition for deportation to the United States,

"I'm confident the Supreme Court will consider the petition once it has the information it requires from the Ministry of Justice, even if the Court decides against the transfer in the end," his brother David Whelan told Sputnik on Tuesday.

Earlier in the day, the supreme court in Russia's Mordovia (where Whelan is serving his sentence) refused to consider the petition and sent it to the justice ministry for collecting more information "for preliminary coordination with the respective US bodies on the transfer of the convict." Whelan's lawyer, Vladimir Zherebenkov, explained to Sputnik that the ministry should find out if the US is willing to accept his client and if he will serve his sentence there.

"The Supreme Court's press announcement does not say that the petition will not be considered, but that additional information is required," David Whelan said. "The Court says that it has left it without consideration. That is wholly different and not at all unexpected because an international prisoner transfer isn't entirely within the discretion of a Russian or US court."

This is a necessary procedural pause, and the court needs to get positions from interested agencies prior announcing further steps, he added.

"If the [Russian] Ministry [of Justice] doesn't support the transfer, or if the US Department of Justice doesn't support the transfer, the Court will need to know that before deciding the petition," he said.

Whelan is currently serving a 16-year prison sentence in Mordovia under a verdict that a Moscow court delivered last June. Whelan did not challenge the court verdict, as he hoped to be exchanged for some Russian citizen convicted in the US.

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**Derek Chauvin, Three Other Ex-Minneapolis Police Officers Plead 'Not Guilty' to Charges**

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - Derek Chauvin and the three other ex-Minneapolis police officers charged in connection with the death of George Floyd on Tuesday entered pleas of "not guilty" before the US District Court, District of Minnesota.

Chauvin, Tou Thao, J. Alexander Kueng, and Thomas Lane all pleaded not guilty to the federal charges brought against them for their role in the death of Floyd in May of 2020, which sparked worldwide racial justice protests.

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**US Bans Use of Chokeholds, Limits No Knock Entries By Law Enforcement - Justice Dept.**

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The US government has prohibited the use of chokeholds and carotid restraints by law enforcement officers and has limited the practice of unannounced entries, the Justice Department said on Tuesday.

"The Department of Justice today announced written department-wide policies explicitly prohibiting the use of 'chokeholds' and 'carotid restraints' unless deadly force is authorized, and limiting the circumstances in which the Department's federal law enforcement components are authorized to use unannounced entries," the Justice Department said in a release.

At the same time, chokeholds and carotid restraints can be used in situations when the officer believes that there is an imminent threat of death or serious injury to anyone emanating from the subject posing a danger, the release explained.

The new policy also limited the use of no-knock entries to only those situations when an agent suspects a threat to physical safety to the agent or any other person as a result of announcing

their presence, the release said. However, an agent is required to get approval from a federal prosecutor and their law enforcement office to conduct such an entry.

The policy is another step to limit the use of force by law enforcement officers in the United States. Following the killing of George Floyd in Minnesota in March 2020, a number of public organizations and political actors have been advocating for police reform. On the first anniversary of George Floyd's murder, US President Joe Biden called upon Congress to act resolutely on the urgent police reform bill to raise the accountability of law enforcement officers.

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US Senator Menendez Says May Subpoena Defense Secretary, Others to Testify on Afghanistan

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The chairman of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Democrat Bob Menendez, said on Tuesday that he may subpoena Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and others to testify on Afghanistan should they fail to show up at hearings.

Austin was named as one of the witnesses to testify in Senate on the withdrawal of the US troops from Afghanistan. A day prior, State Secretary Anthony Blinken delivered his testimony and took questions from committee members.

"I expect the secretary to avail himself to the committee in the near future. And if he does not, I may consider the use of committee subpoena power to compel him and others... to testify," he said.

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## US Backs OECD Proposal to End Export Credit Financing for Coal Power - Treasury

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The United States back the call by countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to stamp out government support for the export of coal power, the Treasury Department said Tuesday.

"Today, the U.S. Department of the Treasury announced that the United States has joined Canada, the European Union, South Korea, Norway, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom to co-sponsor a proposal at a September 15 meeting of the OECD's Participants to the Arrangement on Officially Supported Export Credits that seeks to end official export financing support for unabated coal power," the Treasury said in a statement.

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## UN Calls on States to Reconfigure Agricultural Support to Avert Natural, Health Damage

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - Some 87% of total global annual support for food production worth \$470 billion is potentially dangerous to human health and damaging to nature and repurposing agricultural subsidies could help in eradicating world hunger and avert environmental degradation, a new UN report said on Tuesday.

"Global support to producers in the agricultural sector amounts to \$540 billion per year, making up 15% of total agricultural production value," the UN Environment Programme said in the report. "Yet 87% of this support, approximately \$470 billion, is price distorting and environmentally and socially harmful."

The report, entitled "A Multi-Billion-Dollar Opportunity" recommends transforming global agricultural support to transform food systems in an initiative launched by the Food and Agriculture Organisation, the UN Development Programme and the UN Environment Programme. The recommendations will be reiterated at a Food Systems Summit set to take place later this month.

"The report ... finds that current support to producers mostly consists of price incentives, such as import tariffs and export subsidies, as well as fiscal subsidies which are tied to the production of a specific commodity or input. These are inefficient, distort food prices, hurt people's health, degrade the environment, and are often inequitable," it said.

The report underlined that agriculture is one of the main contributors to climate change and that addressing the outsized meat and dairy industry in high-income countries, which alone contribute to 14.5% of greenhouse gas emissions, and the use of toxic pesticides and fertilizers in lower-income countries would go a long way in curbing downstream harm.

In 2020, up to 811 million people in the world faced chronic hunger and nearly one in three people in the world (2.37 billion) did not have year-round access to adequate food. In 2019, around three billion people, in every region of the world, could not afford a healthy diet, the report said.

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#### **Boeing Predicts Aerospace Markets Recovery With Sales of \$9 Trillion Over Next Decade**

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) – The market for commercial flights, defense and space projects is primed to recover from a pandemic-induced slump and generate opportunities for \$9 trillion in sales over the next decade, Boeing said in a report published Tuesday.

“The 2021 Boeing Market Outlook (BMO) – Boeing’s analysis of long-term market dynamics – states that commercial airplanes and services are showing signs of recovery, while the global defense, space and government services markets have remained stable,” a press release summarizing the report said.

The BMO projects a \$9 trillion market over the next decade for aerospace products and services, from \$8.5 trillion a year ago, and up from \$8.7 trillion in the pre-pandemic 2019 forecast, the release said.

Demand for domestic air travel is leading the recovery, with intra-regional markets expected to follow as health and travel restrictions ease, followed by the return of long-haul travel to pre-pandemic levels by 2023 to 2024, the release added.

Boeing predicted 10-year global demand for 19,000 commercial airplanes valued at \$3.2 trillion. Boeing’s 20-year commercial forecast through 2040 projects demand for more than 43,500 new airplanes valued at \$7.2 trillion, an increase of about 500 planes over last year’s forecast, according to the release.

Boeing also predicted the defense and space market opportunity will remain consistent with last year’s forecast at \$2.6 trillion during the next decade. These large, stable markets have enduring demand driven by geopolitical and security challenges, the release said.

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#### **US Consumer Prices Edge Lower to 5.3% In Year To August - Labor Dept.**

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The US Consumer Price Index (CPI), a measure of inflation, grew by 5.3% over a one-year period in August, the Labor Department announced on Tuesday.

“Over the last 12 months, the all items index increased 5.3 percent before seasonal adjustment,” the Bureau of Labor Statistics, a division of the Labor Department said in a statement. In the year to July, the reading for the CPI was 5.4%.

For August itself, the CPI grew 0.3% for the month, versus 0.5% in July.

Analysts had forecast an annual reading of 5.3% and a monthly target of 0.4% for August on signs that inflationary pressures were cooling amid an easing of labor constraints and other bottlenecks in the economy gradually recovering from the coronavirus pandemic.

"These numbers are broadly lower than anticipated," economist Adam Button said in a post on ForexLive. "The year-over-year chart is starting to look like a COVID case count chart that's beginning to roll over. That's exactly what the Fed is looking for via its 'transitory' narrative." The question of when the Federal Reserve ought to taper its stimulus and raise interest rates has been hotly debated in recent months as economic recovery conflicts with a resurgence of the coronavirus' Delta variant.

The Fed's stimulus program and other monetary accommodations have been blamed for aggravating price pressures in the United States. The central bank has been buying \$120 billion in bonds and other assets since the COVID-19 outbreak of March 2020 to support the economy. It has also been keeping interest rates at virtually zero levels for the past 18 months.

After declining 3.5% in 2020 from business shutdowns owing to COVID-19, the US economy expanded robustly this year, expanding 6.5% in the second quarter, in line with the Federal Reserve's forecast.

The Fed's problem, however, is inflation, which has been outpacing economic growth.

The Fed's preferred gauge for inflation - the core Personal Consumption Expenditures Index, which excludes volatile food and energy prices - rose 3.6% in the year through July, its most since 1991. The PCE Index including energy and food rose 4.2% year-on-year.

The Fed's own target for inflation is 2% per annum.

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#### Facebook Oversight Board Upholds Social Network Decision to Restore Deleted Content

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) – The Oversight Board has affirmed Facebook's decision to restore the content a user from Egypt shared on his page after it was removed by the social network's moderators due to alleged threat of violence found in it, the Board said on Tuesday.

"The Oversight Board agrees that Facebook was correct to reverse its original decision to remove content on Facebook that shared a news post about a threat of violence from the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades," the Board said in a press release. "The Board concludes that removing the content did not reduce offline harm and restricted freedom of expression on an issue of public interest."

The Board found that on May 10, a Facebook user from Egypt shared a post that was initially published by Al Jazeera Arabic page with a photo portraying two men with covered faces and wearing headbands with the Al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of the Palestinian group Hamas. After review, Facebook removed the content for violating its Dangerous Organizations and Individuals Community Standard. The user appealed this case to the Oversight Board. Facebook then changed its original decision to remove the content after the case was selected by the Board as it found that the post didn't contain praise, support or representation of the Al-Qassam Brigades or Hamas, both of which are designated as dangerous by the social network, the release said.

Facebook was unable to explain why the content moderators made the decision to delete it, the release added.