

09/28/21 Tuesday

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Messi Scores His First Goal for PSG in Champions League Game Against Man City
By - Nevin Brown

Lionel Messi combines with Kylian Mbappe against Manchester City to score his first Paris Saint-Germain goal.

The goal was a play of wondrous individual brilliance from the diminutive Argentine. As PSG countered on Manchester City, Messi received the ball wide-right near half-field. Messi broke at pace against the retreating City defense. As he approached the 18-yard box, he cut in on his left foot and played a lovely pass into Kylian Mbappe. The young Frenchman wasted no time and played the ball right back to Messi with a backheel. Messi struck the ball with accuracy, curve, and venom as he left City's keeper, Ederson, to helplessly watch. The goal gave PSG a 2-0 lead and control over the hotly contested tie.

Messi's first PSG goal took him 264 minutes to muster. For a man who has [scored a goal every 93 minutes](#) throughout his professional career, the wait must have felt like an eternity. The goal came at a crucial time for PSG in their heavy-weight clash with Manchester City. PSG was clinging to a 1-0 lead and was a bit too happy to absorb City's pressure. Without the goal, it looked like the game was heading for a tie. Messi's goal made sure that PSG got all three points and gave him a signature goal against his former coach, Pep Guardiola.

The goal also springs optimism that PSG's famed front-three of Neymar, Messi, and Mbappe can find a groove on their way to finding goal. Messi's first goal for PSG, won't be his last, and with the pressure to get number one gone, number two shouldn't take another 264 minutes.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis Takes Aim at Biden Administration's 'Catch-and-Release' Policy
By - Nevin Brown

The state of Florida is suing the Biden administration, claiming the administration's catch-and-release policy at the US southern border is illegal, harms the state's sovereign interests, and that officials are in defiance of the law.

Florida Attorney General, Ashley Moody, [filed the suit in the Pensacola Division of the Northern District of Florida](#) and is not seeking a preliminary injunction. The defendants in the suit are the Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Customs and Border Protection (CBP), and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), as well as top officials and component agencies.

Florida not seeking a preliminary injunction is a pertinent detail. A [preliminary injunction is a court order](#) “to stop the defendant from continuing his or her allegedly harmful actions.” To be granted a preliminary injunction, it has to be shown that the party, Florida in this case, would suffer irreparable harm unless it is granted. A [judge must consider](#) “the extent of the irreparable harm, each party’s likelihood of prevailing at trial, and any other public or private interests implicated by the injunction.”

The suit claims that the government’s immigration policy through its use of parole authority, which allows aliens into the interior immediately on a case by case basis, violates immigration law or is an abuse of its power. It further challenges the administration’s claim that a lack of resources is the reason for their liberal use of parole authority.

The suit states that the Biden administration “has actively sought to eliminate measures that increase its resources and detention capacity,” and that its “misguided policies have encouraged more migrants to make the dangerous journey to the United States.”

The lawsuit also alleges that the administration’s catch and release policy will see illegal immigrants “arrive in Florida, ... forcing it to incur millions of dollars in expenses.” [A study from 2018](#) found that of Florida’s 732,000 illegal immigrants, 46% come from Central America and Mexico, who make up the bulk of entries at the southern border. [Most experts do point to illegal immigrants](#) costing states and the country as a whole money, but the exact cost is difficult, if not impossible to determine.

Along with filing the suit, the state of Florida is suing the United States. The legal actions taken by Florida are in conjunction with executive orders by Governor Ron DeSantis to tackle illegal immigration.

[Executive Order 21-223](#) will “prohibit all Florida agencies under the purview of the Governor from facilitating illegal immigration into Florida, unless otherwise required by federal or state law, and require the collection of information from state officials on the scope and costs of illegal immigration in Florida.”

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Sterling’s Drop Worries Investors Over State of Economy

By - Nevin Brown

The sterling saw its largest one-day drop of the year against the dollar, as investors fear that fuel shortages in the United Kingdom could create a dreaded ‘stagflation’ scenario.

On Tuesday, the [sterling fell to \\$1.353](#), a 1.2% drop, as currency investors reacted to the underlying cause of the United Kingdom’s fuel shortage.

The driving force behind the UK’s fuel shortage has its origins in Brexit. When England decided to leave the European Union many truck drivers [moved back to their home countries](#) as additional border bureaucracy negatively impacted their income. The coronavirus pandemic accelerated the foreign truck driver exodus and left the UK with a labor shortage in a crucial economic sector.

Trucking might not be viewed as a crucial industry, but they're the final step in the supply chain. Without a proper fleet of truckers, goods don't arrive where and when they're needed. The UK's fuel shortage isn't a product of a lack of fuel, but the inability to get fuel, in the necessary quantities, to where it needs to be.

The UK's labor shortage, especially in the trucking industry, could ravage its economy as it tries to recover from the coronavirus pandemic. Due to a constrained supply chain, prices could rise, causing inflation, and the larger economy could stall. The term 'stagflation,' coined by Iain Macleod, could begin to creep back into the lexicon.

[In a 1965 speech to the UK Parliament](#), Macleod coined the economic term: "We now have the worst of both worlds —not just inflation on the one side or stagnation on the other, but both of them together. We have a sort of 'stagflation' situation."

The drop in value of the sterling is a reaction to the dual difficulties the UK economy faces. The UK government is attempting to [attract more truck drivers through temporary visas](#).

"We do have to stand on our own two feet as the United Kingdom," [Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said](#).

The situation may take months to years to fill the nearly 100,000 person shortage of qualified drivers.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Indiana Beaches Forced to Close after Alleged US Steel Plant Spill
By - Adriana Montes

Indiana Dunes National Park said it closed the Portage Lakefront and Riverwalk, including all of its beaches, on Sunday, and they will remain closed until further notice.

An unknown orange substance [reportedly](#) spilled from a U.S. Steel plant in Indiana into a Lake Michigan tributary Sunday night — forcing many of Indiana's beaches to close, including a water utility plant.

The unknown substance that made its way into Lake Michigan was first being discharged into Burns Waterway, according to executive director Natalie Johnson from Save the Dunes.

Porter Mayor Sue Lynch [told local media](#) on Sunday evening that she wasn't sure what the substance could be, but a sample had been collected for analysis from an employee from the Portage Marina.

U.S. Steel spokeswoman Amanda Malkowski said that the "plant operations at the plant will remain down until the condition is stabilized."

"We will continue to work with regulators and the community and will provide additional updates as they become available," Malkowski added.

State agencies are still investigating what the substance is and what caused the release, according to the [Indiana Department of Environmental Management \(IDEM\)](#).

U.S. Steel has [reportedly](#) agreed to pay about \$3 million in recent years for wastewater permit violations dating back to 2013, the Times reported from IDEM and court records.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

NY Gov. Hochul Signs Executive Order to Alleviate Health Care Workforce
By - Adriana Montes

New York Governor Kathy Hochul signed an executive order late Monday to prevent overwhelming staffing shortages in New York hospitals by expanding the eligibility of healthcare workers and their roles.

Hochul's [order](#) declared a statewide emergency in an effort to 'remove barriers' — essentially allowing additional health care workers to administer COVID-19 tests and vaccines, and out-of-state and out-of-country health care workers to practice in New York.

"The only way we can move past this pandemic is to ensure that everyone eligible is vaccinated, and that includes those who are taking care of our vulnerable family members and loved ones," Governor Hochul said in a [statement](#).

The goal is to reduce staffing issues and increase testing capacity, with efficient patient transfers.

The New York State Department of Health issued an order last month mandating that all healthcare workers receive their first COVID-19 shot, without allowing them to opt out with testing. As of September 22, 84 percent of hospital workers have completed the vaccine series, according to the [state-run database](#).

A 24/7 Operations Center, led by the New York State Department of Health, will monitor staffing operations to prevent any shortages.

Additionally, Hochul plans to work with the federal government and other state leaders to facilitate and expedite visa requests for medical professionals and the intervention of medically-trained National Guard members.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Psaki: Generals' Advice to Keep 2,500 Troops in Afghanistan 'Not a Long-Standing Recommendation'
By - Morgan Artyukhina

The White House was on the defensive on Tuesday after several top US generals testified before Congress that they had advised US President Joe Biden not to withdraw all US troops from Afghanistan - advice he seemed to deny getting in an interview last month.

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki's [daily press conference](#) began on Tuesday with a sharply worded question by Associated Press journalist Zeke Miller: "Did the president mislead the American public about the advice of his military advisers?"

The question was in reference to an [August 19 interview](#) with ABC journalist George Stephanopoulos in which Biden seemed to say his generals advised him against pulling all US troops out of Afghanistan, which the administration did on August 31.

"[Y]our top military advisors warned against withdrawing on this timeline. They wanted you to keep about 2,500 troops," Stephanopoulos asked Biden at the time.

"No, they didn't. It was split. Tha- that wasn't true. That wasn't true," Biden replied.

"They didn't tell you that they wanted troops to stay?" Stephanopoulos asked.

"No. Not at - not in terms of whether we were going to get out in a timeframe all troops. They didn't argue against that," Biden answered.

"So no one told - your military advisors did not tell you, 'No, we should just keep 2,500 troops. It's been a stable situation for the last several years. We can do that. We can continue to do that?'" the ABC journalist asked again.

"No. No one said that to me that I can recall," Biden said.

Psaki, after reading from the transcript, told the White House press corps how to interpret the exchange.

"What should everybody take from that? There was a range of viewpoints ... presented by his national security team, as he asked for ... It was also clear - clear to him that that would not be a long-standing recommendation, that there would need to be an escalation, an increase in troop numbers," she said.

"It would also mean war with the Taliban, and it would also mean the potential loss of casualties. The president was just not willing to make that decision, he didn't think it was in the interest of the American people or the interest of our troops," Psaki added.

"Who in his military advisers told him it'd be fine to pull everybody out?" Fox News correspondent Peter Doocy later asked her.

"I'm not going to get into specific details of who recommended what," she replied, accusing Doocy of "dumbing it down."

However, CBS reporter Weijia Jiang then asked a similar question about what Biden meant by his advice being "split," to which Psaki replied that "these conversations don't happen in black and white or like you're in the middle of a movie. These conversations are about a range of options, about what the risk assessments are about every decision, and of course there are individuals whom come forward with a range of recommendations on what the right path forward looks like ... Ultimately regardless of the advice, it's his decision, he's the commander-in-chief, he's the president, he makes decisions about what's in the national interest."

Pentagon Leaders Say 'Input Was Received' by Biden

Nearly a month after the US withdrew its final soldiers and personnel from Afghanistan, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark A. Milley, and US Central Command (CENTCOM) Commander Gen. Kenneth McKenzie defended their decisions during the pullout before US lawmakers on Tuesday.

"[T]he frustration on this committee about the chaotic and deadly withdrawal from Afghanistan is not - and should never be - directed towards our troops," US Sen. Jim Inhofe (R-OK), ranking member of the Senate Armed Services Committee [said, on Tuesday](#). "It was President Biden and his advisers who put them in that situation."

“Even worse: this was avoidable. Everything that happened was foreseeable. My colleagues on this committee and the commanders in charge - we saw it coming. So we’re here today to understand what happened and why that advice was ignored,” he added.

Milley described to the committee how in the fall of 2020, when Donald Trump was still US president and commander-in-chief of the armed forces, his analysis was that an accelerated withdrawal from Afghanistan risked losing the substantial gains they had made and could cause a complete collapse of the US-backed Afghan government.

He recalled that on the [day that Trump fired](#) then-US Defense Secretary Mark Esper from his position - November 9, 2020 - Esper had recommended in a memo that the US keep 2,500 to 4,500 in Afghanistan until the Taliban met further conditions for reduction, such as ending its support for al-Qaeda.* He said that two days later, he received a signed order to [withdraw all US forces](#) by January 15, but after pushback on the risks that was reduced to a withdrawal to 2,500 troops, plus enabling forces.

“When President Biden was inaugurated, there were approximately 3,500 US troops, 5,400 NATO troops, and 6,300 contractors in Afghanistan with a specified task of train, advise and assist, along with a small contingent of counterterrorism forces,” the top ranking US military officer said. “The strategic situation at inauguration was stalemate.”

He said that from January through April, Biden conducted a thorough review of the situation and received advice from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the National Security Council, and others.

McKenzie said that he “recommended that we maintain 2,500 troops in Afghanistan. And I also recommended, earlier in the fall of 2020, that we maintain 4,500 at that time. Those are my personal views. I also have a view that the withdrawal of those forces would lead inevitably to the collapse of the Afghan military forces and eventually the Afghan government.”

Inhofe then commented that it was unclear if Miller’s recommendation actually got to Biden.

“Sir, I was present when that discussion occurred and I’m confident that the president heard all the recommendations and listened to them very thoughtfully,” McKenzie replied.

When Austin was later asked by US Sen. Tom Cotton (R-AK) if what Biden told Stephanopoulos was true, the Pentagon chief replied: “I know the president to be an honest and forthright man ... Their input was received by the president and considered by the president, for sure.”

In February 2020, Trump signed a ceasefire agreement with the Taliban* stipulating a conditions-based withdrawal of all US forces by May 1, 2021. However, just weeks before the deadline, Biden extended it until September 11, 2021 - the 20th anniversary of the terrorist attacks by al-Qaeda that led to the US invasion of Afghanistan.

Amid the withdrawal, the Taliban mounted a stunning offensive that seized much of the country, culminating in the capture of Kabul on August 16 as US troops remained in the city. Over the following two weeks, the US evacuated more than 120,000 Afghan civilians from the airport, many of whom had collaborated with the US during the 20-year occupation.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

DPRK Claims Tuesday's Missile Test Was of a New Hypersonic Weapon Named Hwasong-8

By - Morgan Artyukhina

According to the state-owned Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), the Korean People's Army (KPA) tested a new hypersonic glide vehicle for the first time on Tuesday. The test came just days after the US successfully fired its own hypersonic weapon for the first time.

"The development of the hypersonic missile, one of five top-priority tasks of the five-year plan facing the field of strategic weapon for the development of defense science and weapon system set forth at the 8th Congress of the Party, has been pushed forward according to a sequential, scientific and reliable development process," KCNA wrote on Wednesday.

The weapon has been named Hwasong-8 and was fired from Mupyong-ri in Jagang Province.

"In the first test-launch, national defense scientists confirmed the navigational control and stability of the missile in the active section, and also its technical specifications including the guiding maneuverability and the gliding flight characteristics of the detached hypersonic gliding warhead," the publication said, adding the scientists had also "confirmed the stability of the amplified missile fuel system and the actuators introduced for the first time."

The test was witnessed by Pak Jong Chon, member of the Presidium of the Political Bureau and secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK)

[The Tuesday test](#), which flew eastward into the Sea of Japan, was detected by both Japan and South Korea. However, they estimated the "unidentified projectile" was likely a ballistic missile. It would have been hard for them to tell the difference if they weren't looking for it. Technically, all ballistic missiles are hypersonic, as they must travel faster than Mach 5 to escape the Earth's gravity. However, a hypersonic glide vehicle would not follow a traditional ballistic trajectory, which is somewhat easy to detect and predict. Instead, after achieving tremendous speed thanks to the rocket, the glide vehicle would detach after a few minutes and glide unpowered toward its target. Existing hypersonic glide vehicles, such as those developed by Russia and China, are highly maneuverable and intended to avoid interception.

Hypersonic missiles are extremely hard to detect and shoot down, as existing ballistic missile detection satellites look for rocket engine heat and the glide vehicle has no engine. Russia claims its [S-500 Prometheus](#) air defense system can shoot down a hypersonic missile and the US intends to test whether its Standard Missile-6 ([SM-6 can do so](#)).

The United States condemns North Korea's recent missile launches that destabilize the region, a State Department spokesperson said in a statement obtained by Sputnik.

"We are aware of these reports. We are working to confirm the specific nature of the recent launch event and consulting closely with our allies," the spokesperson said.

"We take reports of any new capability seriously, and as we've said, we condemn any illicit missile launches, which are destabilizing to the region and to the international community," the statement added.

Since 2018, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has tested several short-range ballistic missiles that are both road-mobile and follow depressed trajectories the KPA has boasted are able to [avoid US air defense systems](#) in South Korea, such as the Patriot air defense system and Terminal High Altitude Air Defense (THAAD) system. Last month, they also unveiled a new [long-range cruise missile](#). These weapons are not governed by existing arms treaties or banned by United Nations mandate.

In early August, after South Korea proceeded with its massive joint drills with US forces, which rehearse attacks on the DPRK, [Kim Yo Jong](#), deputy director of the WPK's Publicity and Information Department, said the socialist state would "strengthen our national defense and strong preemptive capabilities to swiftly respond to any military act."

Aside from the DPRK, the only nations to successfully develop hypersonic weapons have been Russia, China, and the United States, meaning the small socialist state will have joined yet another elite club.

While Russia and China both have multiple such weapons in service, the US has so far struggled to perfect a hypersonic missile. [Both attempted test-firings](#) of Lockheed Martin's AGM-183 Air-Launched Rapid Response Weapon (ARRW) have failed; however, on Monday the Pentagon's Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency ([DARPA](#)) [announced](#) it had successfully launched its competitor weapon for the first time, the Hypersonic Air-Breathing Weapon Concept (HAWC). The weapon uses an experimental scramjet engine, and would function like a cruise missile, rather than launching an unpowered glide vehicle.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

'Normal Life' Won't Return Without Pfizer's Annual COVID-19 Vaccine Boosters, CEO Bourla Says

By - Morgan Artyukhina

The Biden administration has bought 500 million Pfizer COVID-19 vaccines to donate to poorer nations. However, it's diplomacy, not charity, that's motivated the White House, which said it intends to show "democracies are the countries that can best deliver solutions for people everywhere." China has promised to export 2 billion shots this year.

Speaking to ABC's George Stephanopoulos earlier this week, Albert Bourla, the CEO of pharmaceutical giant Pfizer, said "normal life" could return in a year's time, but only with COVID-19 vaccines like those his company sells.

"Within a year, I think we will be able to come back to normal life," Bourla said in [a Sunday interview](#).

Noting that new variants of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, are likely to continue emerging, the Pfizer CEO added that "I don't think that this means that we should be able to live our lives without having immune - without having vaccinations, basically. But that's - again, remains to be seen."

"The most likely scenario for me, it is that, because the virus is spread all over the world, that we will continue seeing new variants that are coming out. And, also, we will have vaccines that, they will last at least a year," Bourla said. "And I think the most likely scenario, it is annual re-vaccinations. But we don't know really. We need to wait and see the data."

An endemic COVID-19 requiring regular treatments provided by the for-profit firm has long been seen as the key to Pfizer's future financial success. Bourla described the situation to investors as ["durable demand."](#) noting several governments had already signed multi-year supply contracts.

"It is our hope that the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine will continue to have a global impact by helping to get the devastating pandemic under control and helping economies around the world not only open – but stay open – creating a scenario in which Pfizer can continue to be both a leader and a beneficiary," Bourla said in a first quarter [earnings statement](#) in May.

Further, in February Pfizer CFO [Frank D'Amelio](#) boasted that this shift, which would coincide with individuals becoming the primary vaccine buyers instead of government mass purchase contracts, would allow a price increase of almost 900%, from \$19.50 per dose to \$175 per dose. A second-quarter [earnings report published](#) in late July noted that in the first six months of 2021, COVID-19 vaccines accounted for 42% of Pfizer's revenue.

Boosters and Child Vaccines

The US Food and Drug Administration ([FDA](#)) [recently approved](#) a third booster shot of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine to be given to elderly people and other at-risk groups about six months after their second dose as a way to fortify their immune systems against the powerful Delta variant of the virus, which can "break through" vaccine immunities in some cases. However, just days earlier, the [FDA had rejected](#) Pfizer's bid, saying it lacked sufficient safety data and that the vaccine's efficacy declined significantly after just a few months.

Bourla said "it is a question of days, not weeks" as to when the FDA will approve vaccinations of children between 5 and 11 years of age. Their inability to be vaccinated by the existing shots has helped turn schools into vectors for COVID-19 spread, and the Delta variant has [hospitalized record numbers](#) of children. He noted the dose for children is one-third the dose used for teenagers and adults.

According to [data collected by](#) the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), just over 55% of the US population, or 183.8 million people, have received both vaccine shots. However, the pace of vaccination has slowed from the spring's mass vaccine rollout, with just two days since June seeing more than 1 million shots per day, and the seven-day moving average as of September 22 being 594,000 shots per day. Worldwide, it paradoxically ranks at [42nd most vaccinated](#).

'We Have Done So Much Good to Humanity'

As [Sputnik has reported](#), Pfizer has been among the most vocal opponents of a movement led by the world's poorer nations to convince the World Trade Organization to waive its stiff intellectual property laws, which [prohibit cheaper generic](#) versions of drugs from being made in the Third World. The company has strong-armed nations into putting up significant collateral in order to buy their shots, including even state assets like embassies and military bases.

IP laws have forced most of the world's nations to buy their vaccines from a handful of pharmaceutical corporations or wait for donated vaccines via the World Health Organization's COVAX program to arrive, [helping to contribute](#) to a situation in which 75% of shots have been given in just 10 countries, and the continent of Africa has gotten barely 2% of them.

Recently, Tom Frieden, a former head of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, blasted Pfizer and Moderna, another pharmaceutical company and maker of COVID-19 vaccines, for "doing next to nothing to close the global gap in vaccine supply."

Bourla defended Pfizer's role in the world, telling Stephanopoulos that "there is no other company that can claim that we have done so much good to humanity as we have done."

"I think the intellectual property is what created the thriving life sciences sector that was ready when the pandemic hit. Without that, we wouldn't be here to discuss if we need the boosters or

not, because we wouldn't have vaccines," the Pfizer CEO said on Sunday. "And, also, we are very proud of what we have done. I don't know why he's using these words. We are very proud. We have saved millions of lives with the vaccine."

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

ANALYSIS - Next German Leader Likely to Continue Merkel's 'Wobbly' Policies in Europe

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - The likely Social Democrat (SPD)-led next German coalition government under Otto Scholz will continue the "wobbly" policies of retiring Chancellor Angela Merkel and still be unable take a strong stand on its national and wider European security interests, analysts told Sputnik.

Scholz and his Social Democratic Party (SPD) emerged as the largest party with 206 seats in the Bundestag, the federal parliament. Outgoing Chancellor Merkel's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and its sister Bavarian Party came second with 196 seats.

The Greens led by Annalena Baerbock came in third with 118 seats, enabling the SPD to hold an absolute majority with only them as coalition partners. However, Scholz was expected to seek the participation of the fourth place liberal, free market Free Democrats (FDP) with 92 seats as well, German commentators said.

"The inconclusive outcome of the German political elections on Sunday does not move the needle, former European Union consultant Paolo von Schirach, director of the Global Policy Institute told Sputnik. "Germany was wobbly and unable (in fact unwilling) to define and take a clear stand on its (and Europe's) national security interests under Merkel. Expect no major changes now."

Although the Social Democrats looked likely to form a strong coalition without the Christian Democrats, German foreign policy was unlikely to change significantly, Schirach predicted. The new government would focus on "managing Washington relations with talk on unity followed by no action, ambiguity on Russia, very low profile on China [and] no efforts to boost German defense spending," he suggested.

"This was essentially Merkel's 'pragmatic' foreign policy," he said.

The reason for this continued commitment to indecision and lack of clear actions lay deep in the political consensus of Germany and also of Western Europe, Schirach explained.

"The hard truth is that Germany, because of its widely shared semi-neutral proclivities, is hopelessly unable to lead an equally timid and risk averse Europe. Forget about [French President Emmanuel] Macron's call to arms in the form of an EU [European Union] credible defense effort," he said.

The long deadlock and drift on European defense and wider strategic issues would therefore continue for the foreseeable future, Schirach advised.

"Sure, with Germany's concurrence there will be more talks in Brussels, and ad hoc committees reviewing issues and options on the value of an independent European defense effort. But it will be only talk. Europe is unwilling to seriously discuss, let alone act upon, what to do about any current or future security threats," he said.

Neither Scholz nor his likely coalition partners looked prepared to upset that passive consensus, Schirach observed.

"The new German coalition government will continue to wobble and equivocate, following the fantasy that if Europe just talks peace, stays quiet, and engages in trade with everybody, all will be well," he said.

SEEKING COMPROMISE

Eurasia Center Vice President Earl Rasmussen felt Scholz and the SPD would indeed seek better relations with Russia, but he agreed that the narrow margin between the leading parties in the election had restricted the likely new leader's room to maneuver.

"This is a surprise rebirth for the Social Democrats with Mr. Scholz. However, the margin of victory is very small and the establishment of a new coalition may take some time. Moreover, Mr. Scholz appears to be more centrist and is keenly aware of the economic conditions and needs of Germany," he said.

Therefore far from seeking to separate from Merkel's party and policies, Rasmussen agreed the new government was more likely to defer to them.

"I think he [Scholz] will seek compromise with the conservative CDU in meeting Germany's objectives. I believe that he will also seek to improve ties with Russia as well from the economic/business perspective. Obviously this will be influenced by the coalition partners," he said.

Rasmussen also expressed optimism that Scholz would see the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project through to completion despite possible opposition from his Green allies.

"I see continued support for Nord Stream 2. The project was initially proposed by Germany and is essential to meeting their energy needs in support of economic growth. ... [Therefore] I believe the outcome [of the election] will not have a significant impact on the Nord Stream 2 and its soon to be operational implementation," he explained.

The alternative to Nord Stream 2 for Germany would be importing liquefied natural gas (LNG) from the United States which would be limited and significantly more expensive or increasing coal power usage which would likely not gain support within either the SPD or the Green Party, Rasmussen said.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

RPT - Disinformation 'Sabotaged' Floyd Policing Bill Talks - US Activists

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik), Barrington M. Salmon - US Senate negotiators failed to reach a deal on law enforcement reform legislation partly due to misinformation about the ramifications of limiting police immunity, among other restrictions, activists told Sputnik.

Lawmakers in the US Senate were trying to strike a deal to advance the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, which was passed in the House earlier this year, before talks collapsed last week. Democratic chief negotiator, Senator Corey Booker, blamed the collapse on Republican opposition to limiting qualified police immunity and restrictions on the distribution of military

equipment to local departments. The Republicans, led by Senator Tim Scott, for their part, accused the Democrats of trying to defund the police.

The bill is named after George Floyd, a 46-year old black man who was murdered by a Minnesota officer last May in an incident which sparked nationwide protests and calls for police reforms.

"There's swirling disinformation about qualified immunity," Law Enforcement Advancement Project Executive Director Diane Goldstein said. "Cops don't know what it means. They think it will remove indemnity and hinder their ability to do their jobs."

Goldstein, the first female lieutenant at the Redondo Beach Police Department in California, said law enforcement officers fear they will be judged on day-to-day decisions and that the proposed reforms will impede their ability to do their jobs.

However, Goldstein also indicated that law enforcement will actually benefit from the removal of police immunity, which many experts have said has fueled distrust within communities.

"The reforms would be holding them accountable, increasing transparency and attempt to make victims of police brutality whole," Goldstein said.

Marc Morial, president and CEO of the National Urban League, told Sputnik the collapse in negotiations raises questions about whether Scott had the full support of his caucus. Moreover, there were reports that some anti-reform organizations sought to undermine the bill just when negotiators were on the verge of an agreement.

"Did Republicans ever intend to agree to a compromise or did they send Senator Scott on a fool's errand?" Morial asked. "The Fraternal Order of Police and International Association of Chiefs of Police did engage in good faith, but it appears that other organizations actively worked to sabotage the reform effort."

Democratic lawmakers, Morial added, had worked assiduously to build a strong coalition in support of the bill "only to see it derailed by a handful of obstructionists."

Absent comprehensive reform legislation, Morial warned, the Justice Department lacks the full set of tools it needs.

MOVEMENT TO FIGHT ON

Goldstein said while the failure to get a deal on the Floyd bill was certainly a setback "the movement hasn't lost steam."

"There's still a lot of movement... [and] a tremendous amount of reforms and laws changed at the state level," Goldstein said. "There has been decertification and indemnification measures implemented in California despite massive resistance elsewhere in the country."

Activist groups, however, have to think of approaches and tactics around "strategic policing," Goldstein added.

"All of us need to figure out where we all agree and figure out how to make it work," she added. Morial said the breakdown of talks constitutes a betrayal of the families who have lost loved ones to police violence and the millions of Americans who marched in protest of brutality. But now is not the time to quit, he added.

"We are not prepared to give up the fight," Morial said. "We are determined to enact comprehensive and meaningful reform."

Morial noted that in the 15 months since the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act first was introduced, more than 2,400 Americans have died during interactions with police while dozens

of departments and officers around the country are under investigation or facing lawsuits for civil rights violations and allegations of excessive force.

"Every day that goes by without Congressional action to curb police violence and misconduct is a badge of shame on our nation," Morial said. "It's unacceptable."

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

RPT - United Airlines to Layoff 593 Employees for Not Getting Vaccinated - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - United Airlines is terminating nearly 600 employees for failing to get vaccinated for the novel coronavirus, the company said in a statement to Sputnik.

"I can also confirm that 593 employees chose not to comply with the vaccine requirement and as a result, we've started the process to separate them from the company," the statement said on Tuesday.

These employees account for less than 1 percent of its US workforce, according to a company memo attached to the statement.

The company extended the deadline for those who applied for a medical or religious accommodation, the memo said, which media outlets reported as amounting to around 2,000. The company said they did so "in light of a pending court case."

American Airlines, Delta, and Southwest Airlines do not have a vaccine mandate for their employees.

Since January 2020, about 692,274 Americans have died from COVID-19 and more than 43.2 million infections have been reported nationwide, according to Johns Hopkins University.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

United Airlines to Layoff 593 Employees for Not Getting Vaccinated - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - United Airlines is terminating nearly 600 employees for failing to get vaccinated for the novel coronavirus, the company said in a statement to Sputnik.

"I can also confirm that 593 employees chose not to comply with the vaccine requirement and as a result, we've started the process to separate them from the company," the statement said on Tuesday.

These employees account for less than 1 percent of its US workforce, according to a company memo attached to the statement.

The company extended the deadline for those who applied for a medical or religious accommodation, the memo said, which media outlets reported as amounting to around 2,000. The company said they did so "in light of a pending court case."

American Airlines, Delta, and Southwest Airlines do not have a vaccine mandate for their employees.

Since January 2020, about 692,274 Americans have died from COVID-19 and more than 43.2 million infections have been reported nationwide, according to Johns Hopkins University.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Disinformation 'Sabotaged' Floyd Policing Bill Talks - US Activists

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik), Barrington M. Salmon - US Senate negotiators failed to reach a deal on law enforcement reform legislation partly due to misinformation about the ramifications of limiting police immunity, among other restrictions, activists told Sputnik. Lawmakers in the US Senate were trying to strike a deal to advance the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, which was passed in the House earlier this year, before talks collapsed last week. Democratic chief negotiator, Senator Corey Booker, blamed the collapse on Republican opposition to limiting qualified police immunity and restrictions on the distribution of military equipment to local departments. The Republicans, led by Senator Tim Scott, for their part, accused the Democrats of trying to defund the police.

The bill is named after George Floyd, a 46-year old black man who was murdered by a Minnesota officer last May in an incident which sparked nationwide protests and calls for police reforms.

"There's swirling disinformation about qualified immunity," Law Enforcement Advancement Project Executive Director Diane Goldstein said. "Cops don't know what it means. They think it will remove indemnity and hinder their ability to do their jobs."

Goldstein, the first female lieutenant at the Redondo Beach Police Department in California, said law enforcement officers fear they will be judged on day-to-day decisions and that the proposed reforms will impede their ability to do their jobs.

However, Goldstein also indicated that law enforcement will actually benefit from the removal of police immunity, which many experts have said has fueled distrust within communities.

"The reforms would be holding them accountable, increasing transparency and attempt to make victims of police brutality whole," Goldstein said.

Marc Morial, president and CEO of the National Urban League, told Sputnik the collapse in negotiations raises questions about whether Scott had the full support of his caucus. Moreover, there were reports that some anti-reform organizations sought to undermine the bill just when negotiators were on the verge of an agreement.

"Did Republicans ever intend to agree to a compromise or did they send Senator Scott on a fool's errand?" Morial asked. "The Fraternal Order of Police and International Association of Chiefs of Police did engage in good faith, but it appears that other organizations actively worked to sabotage the reform effort."

Democratic lawmakers, Morial added, had worked assiduously to build a strong coalition in support of the bill "only to see it derailed by a handful of obstructionists."

Absent comprehensive reform legislation, Morial warned, the Justice Department lacks the full set of tools it needs.

MOVEMENT TO FIGHT ON

Goldstein said while the failure to get a deal on the Floyd bill was certainly a setback "the movement hasn't lost steam."

"There's still a lot of movement... [and] a tremendous amount of reforms and laws changed at the state level," Goldstein said. "There has been decertification and indemnification measures implemented in California despite massive resistance elsewhere in the country."

Activist groups, however, have to think of approaches and tactics around "strategic policing," Goldstein added.

"All of us need to figure out where we all agree and figure out how to make it work," she added. Morial said the breakdown of talks constitutes a betrayal of the families who have lost loved ones to police violence and the millions of Americans who marched in protest of brutality. But now is not the time to quit, he added.

"We are not prepared to give up the fight," Morial said. "We are determined to enact comprehensive and meaningful reform."

Morial noted that in the 15 months since the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act first was introduced, more than 2,400 Americans have died during interactions with police while dozens of departments and officers around the country are under investigation or facing lawsuits for civil rights violations and allegations of excessive force.

"Every day that goes by without Congressional action to curb police violence and misconduct is a badge of shame on our nation," Morial said. "It's unacceptable."

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

African Bar Association Demands Release of Venezuelan Diplomat Held in Cape Verde

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - The African Bar Association (AFBA) called on Cape Verde authorities to release Venezuelan diplomat Alex Saab, who was detained in the country and approved for extradition to the US.

Saab was arrested in Cape Verde last year on a US extradition warrant connected to accusations of Iran sanctions violations. Earlier in September, the Constitutional Court of Cape Verde rejected an appeal by Saab's lawyers, thereby supporting his extradition to the United States.

"[AFBA] demands for the immediate and unconditional release of Ambassador Alex Saab, respect for the ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) Court and the Rule of Law in Africa by Cape Verde and all Governments and Institutions in Africa as the African Bar Association will continue to demand for the respect of treaty obligations and the independence of Judiciary in Africa," AFBA said in the statement released Tuesday.

AFBA said that Saab's case constitutes a gross human rights violation and illegal detention in violation of international law.

Saab's legal defense team similarly has called the extradition a violation of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.

Saab was en route to Iran on a humanitarian mission for the Venezuela government when he was arrested during a fuel stop in Cape Verde.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US House Republicans Seek Name of Official Who Approved Drone Strike on Afghan Aid Worker

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - A group of Republican lawmakers on the US House Oversight Committee issued a letter requesting a White House briefing on the August 29 drone strike that killed ten civilians, including an Afghan aid worker and seven children, and questioning whether President Joe Biden personally authorized the attack.

On August 29, two days after an explosion at the Kabul airport took the lives of 13 American soldiers and dozens of Afghan citizens, the US military carried out an airstrike targeting what it said were terrorists in a vehicle that reportedly carried explosives and posed an immediate threat to the airport. Although the US military originally reported no casualties apart from two terrorists in the car, the US media said the airstrike killed ten innocent Kabul residents.

The Defense Department admitted later on the attack was a tragic mistake that killed innocent people while Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin offered condolences to the victims' family members, including the family of Zamarai Ahmadi, who worked for the humanitarian organization Nutrition and Education International. Austin said the investigation into the drone strike has not found any link between Ahmadi and the Islamic State-Khorasan (ISIS-K, banned in Russia).

"Did President Biden personally authorize the drone strike that killed Zemarai Ahmadi? If not, who is the highest-ranking government official who authorized the strike?" the letter said on Tuesday. "When was President Biden informed the drone strike killed children? When was President Biden informed the drone strike killed only innocent civilians and no ISIS-K assets?" The lawmakers named National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan as being the chief architect of the Biden administration's failings in Afghanistan and promised to conduct a thorough review of his actions that resulted in the removal of an US presence in Afghanistan and "the delivery of the country to the Taliban" (banned in Russia).

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Georgia Spa Shootings Suspect Pleads Not Guilty to Killings in Fulton County - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - The gunman involved in the killing of eight people at massage parlors around the Atlanta metropolitan area in the state of Georgia pleaded not guilty to the deaths that took place in Fulton County, the local media outlet FOX 5 reported.

Robert Aaron Long on Tuesday pleaded not guilty in Fulton County Superior Court on charges including murder, aggravated assault and domestic terrorism, the report said.

Long's hearing in Fulton County is set on November 23, the report said.

The 22-year-old Long already pleaded guilty to four counts of murder in Cherokee County in July and received four life sentences without parole plus an additional 35 years. He killed four people in Cherokee County and four others in Fulton County.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Ford, SKI Investing \$11.4Bln to Make New Electric Trucks, Lithium Batteries - Statement

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - The Ford Motor Company is joining with SK Innovation (SKI) to build two new manufacturing complexes costing \$11.4 billion in the US states of Tennessee and Kentucky over the next four years, the corporation announced.

"Ford plans to make the largest ever US investment in electric vehicles at one time by any automotive manufacturer and, together with its partner, SK Innovation, plans to invest \$11.4 billion and create nearly 11,000 new jobs at the Tennessee and Kentucky mega-sites," the company said in a press release on Tuesday.

An all-new \$5.6 billion mega campus in Stanton, Tennessee, called Blue Oval City, will create approximately 6,000 new jobs and reimagine how vehicles and batteries are manufactured, the release said. The complex is designed to be carbon neutral with zero waste to landfill once fully operational, it said.

"In central Kentucky, Ford plans to build a dedicated battery manufacturing complex with SK Innovation - the \$5.8 billion BlueOvalSK Battery Park... Twin battery plants on the site are intended to supply Ford's North American assembly plants with locally assembled batteries for powering next-generation electric Ford and Lincoln vehicles," the release added.

The Blue Oval City complex will be constructed on a nearly 6-square-mile site in west Tennessee and build next-generation electric F-series pickups and advanced batteries. Ford is also investing \$90 million in Texas to train skilled technicians to service connected, electric zero-emission vehicles, according to the release.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

China Strongly Interested in Holding P5 UNSC Summit 'As Early As Possible - Envoy
UNITED NATIONS, September 28 (Sputnik) - China is pushing for a prompt summit of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (Russia, China, US, France, Great Britain) to

discuss a number of pressing global issues, China's permanent representative to the United Nations Zhang Jun said.

"It's our strong wish that this summit, can be held as early as possible, really because of the fact that that we have so many global challenges ahead of us. And we have many peace and security issues," Zhang told reporters on Tuesday.

Zhang noted that other fellow P5 members Russia and France have echoed China's call to convene the summit.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US National Security Adviser to Visit Egypt Wednesday for Security Talks - White House

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan and White House adviser on Middle Eastern affairs Brett McGurk will visit Cairo, Egypt, on Wednesday to discuss regional security matters, including the Libyan elections with their Egyptian counterparts, National Security Council spokesperson Emily Horne said in a statement.

"National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, joined by White House Coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa Brett McGurk, will travel to Cairo, Egypt for official meetings tomorrow," Horne said on Tuesday. "The US and Egyptian delegations will discuss support for Libyan elections and regional security, including in the Horn of Africa."

Horne said Sullivan will also highlight Egypt's role in promoting security and prosperity between the Israelis and Palestinians.

Sullivan is scheduled to meet with his Israeli counterpart Eyal Hulata in Washington on October 5 for bilateral consultations on regional security in the Near East, she said.

Moreover, Sullivan will discuss human rights issues with the Egyptian delegation, Horne added. On Monday, Sullivan became the most senior US official to visit Saudi Arabia, where he met with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to reportedly ask the Saudis to halt their military action in Yemen. Sullivan is expected to visit the United Arab Emirates after his trip to Saudi Arabia.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Court Sets Sentencing of Russian National Grichishkin for October 8 - Filing

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - Russian National Aleksandr Grichishkin will be sentenced on October 8 in a US federal court on charges related to cybercrime, a court filing revealed.

"The following defendant(s) are hereby notified to appear: Aleksandr Grichishkin...

SENTENCING: October 8, 2021," the court filing said on Tuesday.

Grichishkin was convicted for conspiring to engage in racketeering, influence or corrupt organization as well as bank fraud conspiracy. He reached a plea agreement with the US government in March.

In a sentencing memorandum issued in August, the US government described Grichishkin as an everyday leader of organization that helped criminals deploy malware and steal money from others for approximately seven years. He operated under a variety of online aliases and instructed other members of the group on how to change IP-addresses and what to do in order to "clean up" their history.

During a hearing on August 18, Grichishkin expressed remorse for his crimes and asked the court to allow him early deportation in order to reunite with the family as soon as possible. Grichishkin and Andrei Skvortsov from Russia, Aleksandr Skorodumov from Lithuania, and Pavel Stassi from Estonia were members of a hosting organization that allegedly helped a number of cybercriminals to evade detection by US law enforcement after they caused millions of dollars in losses to victims in the United States, the Justice Department said.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Air Force Chief 'Hyper-Focused' on Growing China Challenge in Pacific

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - The head of the US Air Force remains very focused on the growing challenge and assertiveness of China's military air power over the Western Pacific and toward Japan and Taiwan, Gen. Charles Brown told a Defense One conference podcast.

"I am still hyper-focused on the capabilities of the PRC [People's Republic of China] and how they are operating increased capability in some of their platforms [and on] their propensity to fly over the water a bit more and challenge in areas around the region," Brown said on Tuesday. China had significantly stepped up its flights in international waters testing the responsiveness and speeds of reaction not only of the US Air Force, but also the air defenses of Taiwan and Japan, Brown said.

"They challenge [air defenses] around Taiwan in internal air space every day. ... It's not just Taiwan: Japan sees some of the same thing," he said.

US forces on Guam were also observing the "increased tempo" of longer range operations by the PLA Air Force to see how American units responded and reacted, Brown added.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Indicts 6 Foreign Nationals, Swiss Firm Over \$60M In Tax Fraud - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - The United States has indicted six foreign nationals and a Swiss company on charges of a conspiracy to defraud the Internal Revenue Service (IRS)

by concealing assets and evading taxes in the amount greater than \$60 million, the US Justice Department said in a release.

"Audrey Strauss, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, Stuart M. Goldberg, Acting Deputy Assistant Attorney General of the Justice Department's Tax Division, and James C. Lee, Chief of the Internal Revenue Service, Criminal Investigation ('IRS-CI'), announced today the unsealing of an Indictment charging six foreign individuals and a Swiss financial services company with conspiring to defraud the IRS by helping three high-value US taxpayer-clients conceal more than \$60 million in income and assets held in undeclared, offshore bank accounts and to evade US income taxes," the release said on Tuesday. The Justice Department said between 2009 and 2014, Ivo Bechtiger, Bernhard Lampert, Peter Ruegg, Roderic Sage, Rolf Schnellmann, Daniel Walchli and the Allied Finance Trust company conspired to evade paying taxes by concealing income and assets of a number of US clients. The defendants came up with a scheme, dubbed the "Singapore Solution," to conceal income and assets of three US taxpayer-clients in a Swiss bank from IRS, the release said. The main idea behind the scheme was to transfer over \$60 million from undeclared accounts in Switzerland via a series of nominee bank accounts in Hong Kong before the funds were transferred back to newly opened bank accounts at the original Swiss bank in the name of a Singapore-based asset-management firm, the release added. The defendants face a maximum penalty of five years in prison each while the Allied Finance Trust company faces monetary penalties, according to the release.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US National Security Adviser to Visit Egypt Wednesday for Security Talks - White House

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan and White House adviser on Middle Eastern affairs Brett McGurk will visit Cairo, Egypt, on Wednesday to discuss regional security matters, including the Libyan elections with their Egyptian counterparts, National Security Council spokesperson Emily Horne said in a statement.

"National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, joined by White House Coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa Brett McGurk, will travel to Cairo, Egypt for official meetings tomorrow," Horne said on Tuesday. "The US and Egyptian delegations will discuss support for Libyan elections and regional security, including in the Horn of Africa."

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

UPDATE - US, EU Officials Discuss Challenges Posed by China, Non-Market Economies - Trade Rep.

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - US Trade Representative Katherine Tai and European Commission Executive Vice President Valdis Dombrovskis discussed a range of issues on Tuesday, including challenges allegedly posed by China and non-market economies for American and European businesses and workers, the Office of the US Trade Representative said.

"United States Trade Representative Katherine Tai today met with European Commission Executive Vice President Valdis Dombrovskis," the Office of the US Trade Representative said in a release on Tuesday. "Ambassador Tai and Executive Vice President Dombrovskis discussed a wide range of bilateral and multilateral issues, including WTO reform and the upcoming MC12 agenda, as well as the challenges posed by non-market countries and economies, including China, that undermine American and European workers and businesses." Tai expressed optimism about the trade relationship between the European Union and the United States ahead the Trade and Technology Council meetings scheduled for Wednesday in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

"We're putting our backs into finding a solution on Trump-era steel and aluminum tariffs. We continue the work," Dombrovskis said via Twitter later in the day.

The Trade and Technology Council aims to coordinate approaches to global trade, economic and technology issues and addressing unfair competition and the misuse of new technologies. Earlier in September, Dombrovskis' said cooperation on emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and the Internet of Things, information communication technologies security and competitiveness, data governance and secure supply chains will also be the focus of the Trade and Technology Council.

The US and EU agreed to launch the Trade and Technology Council at the bilateral summit in Brussels in mid-June.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Bangladesh Citizen to Serve 46 Months in Prison for Human Smuggling - US Justice Dept.
WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - A US judge sentenced a Bangladesh national to nearly four years in prison for his role in smuggling undocumented immigrants from Mexico to the United States, the US Justice Department said.

"A Bangladeshi national was sentenced today to 46 months in prison for his role in a scheme to smuggle undocumented individuals from Mexico into the United States," the Justice Department said in a press release on Tuesday.

Mohamad Milon Hossain, 41, was involved in a human smuggling ring that operated out of Bangladesh, South and Central America and Mexico to bring undocumented immigrants to the US southern border, the release said.

Hossain specifically maintained a hotel in the Mexican city of Tapachula that housed the immigrants on their way to the United States, the release said.

Hossain also provided immigrants with plane tickets and other assistance as they made their way from Tapachula to Monterrey, the Mexican city near the US border, the release added.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY
WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik)

PENTAGON LEADERS TESTIFY IN CONGRESS

- * The United States' credibility among allies and partners globally can be described as "damaged" after its withdrawal from Afghanistan, Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley told the US Armed Services Committee on Tuesday.
- * A reconstituted al-Qaeda or Islamic State (both terror groups are banned in Russia) with aspirations to attack the United States is a very real possibility, Milley said.
- * Milley said his calls to Chinese counterparts during the 2020 presidential race were prompted by concerning intelligence reports and he never tried to usurp power.
- * The Taliban has never renounced al-Qaeda or broke its affiliation with the terror group, Milley said.
- * The Doha agreement with the Taliban (banned in Russia) had a demoralizing effect on Afghan forces and was one of the reasons they were defeated by the terrorist group, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said.

NORTH KOREA MISSILE TESTS

- * The US and South Korea defense chiefs have agreed to seek ways to expand bilateral cooperation in response to North Korea's recent missile launches, the two sides said after holding their latest Integrated Defense Dialogue in Seoul.
- * The UK government condemned North Korea's decision to launch a short-range ballistic missile, arguing that the test violates the UN Security Council resolution, and urged Pyongyang to resume talks with Seoul.
- * The UN Security Council is concerned by the ballistic missile tests launched by North Korea and wants to see a complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, Irish Ambassador to the United Nations who presides with the Security Council in September, Geraldine Byrne Nason, said on Tuesday.

EU-MACEDONIA MEMBERSHIP TALKS

- * European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen wants to start negotiations on EU membership with Macedonia, not only with Albania, before the end of the year, European Commission spokesperson Dana Spinant said on Tuesday.
- * The European Union is working with Bulgaria and Macedonia to settle the outstanding issues and start the latter's accession talks by the end of 2021, von der Leyen said.

RUSSIA-HUNGARY GAS DEAL

- * Hungary's decision to choose new routes for Russian gas supplies was optimal, no one has the right to impose its will on Budapest, Russian Permanent Representative to the European

Union Vladimir Chizhov said on Tuesday, commenting on the new long-term contract signed by Budapest and Gazprom.

* The Hungarian authorities should assess the impact of the gas contract with Russia on energy supplies safety and present the conclusions to the European Union, a European Commission spokesperson, told Sputnik.

* Hungary's competent authority should assess the gas supplies contract with Russia's Gazprom and notify the European Commission within three months, spokesperson Tim McPhie said.

* Russia does not see any reasons for Ukraine to be hysterical about the Russian-Hungarian gas supplies contract, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

INTERNATIONAL TALKS ON SYRIA

* The Small Drafting Body of the Syrian Constitutional Committee will meet on October 18 in Geneva, Switzerland, UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen said on Tuesday.

* Pedersen said on Tuesday he will be traveling to Washington this week to continue his international consultations on the political process in Syria.

* Presidents Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdogan will discuss Syria, Libya, Afghanistan and Transcaucasia at their meeting in the Russian resort city of Sochi on Wednesday, the Kremlin said.

AFGHANISTAN DEVELOPMENTS

* The constitution of the times of Afghanistan's last king, Mohammed Zahir Shah, is a temporary solution, the government is forming a committee to draft a new constitution that will consider the rights of all the people and that will be voted on, Taliban spokesperson Suhail Shaheen told Sputnik.

* The Taliban called on the United Nations to give Afghanistan's seat as a member state to their new Islamic Emirate.

* The United Nations has informed the Taliban that it intends to improve the humanitarian and socio-economic situation in Afghanistan, UN spokesperson Farhan Haq said.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Trudeau Says Next Government Will Focus on Vaccine Mandates, Ending Pandemic

TORONTO, September 28 (Sputnik) – Canada's Liberal Party leader Justin Trudeau on Tuesday said his new government will dedicate its focus to finishing the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic as well as introducing and promoting vaccine mandates.

Trudeau confirmed he intends to form the next government after his Liberal Party won 159 seats – 11 fewer than the number needed for a majority government but more than any other party – his in last week's national election.

"Of all the different priorities we continue to have, getting through this COVID-19 crisis remains our top priority," Trudeau told reporters in Ottawa. "The way through this pandemic... is to ensure that as many people as possible get vaccinated."

Canada's 23rd prime minister underscored that the new government will achieve this by following through on promised vaccination mandates.

In advance of the election, Trudeau announced plans to mandate vaccination for public sector employees and interprovincial travelers. The Liberal leader added that his government will promote domestic proof of vaccination programs, colloquially known as vaccine passports, and introduce vaccination verification for international travelers.

Additionally, Trudeau noted that his new government will work to deliver on other domestic promises such as funding for childcare, sick leave and affordable housing.

The new cabinet will be sworn in in October and the House of Commons will reconvene before the end of fall, according to Trudeau, although noting that exact dates have yet to be determined.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Republicans' Support for Prosecution of January 6 Rioters Plunges 22% - Poll

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - Republican backing of punishment for rioters who entered the US Capitol on January 6 has declined by 22 percentage points since March, a new PEW Research Center poll revealed on Tuesday.

"Since March, there has been a 22 percentage point drop in the share of Republicans who think it is very or somewhat important that federal law enforcement agencies find and prosecute those who broke into and rioted at the US Capitol on Jan. 6 (from 79% to 57%)," a press release explaining the poll said.

In contrast, the September 13-19 survey of 10,371 adults in the United States showed that 95 percent of Democrats and Democrat-leaning independents want those involved prosecuted, the release said.

In recent months, prominent Republicans including former President Donald Trump and senior lawmakers have charged that the individuals involved in the January 6 event are being prosecuted unfairly.

More than 600 participants in the event at the US Capitol have been charged, with seven

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Tech Stocks Down Most Since March as Inflation, Rate Hike Worry Roil Wall Street

NEW YORK, September 28 (Sputnik) - Wall Street's high-flying tech sector suffered its worst beating in six months on Tuesday while blue chip and industrial-based stocks tumbled too on

fears the Federal Reserve will be pressured to raise interest rates sooner rather than later to arrest galloping inflation.

The Nasdaq Composite Index, led by Big Tech names such as Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix and Google, finished down 423 points, or 2.8%, at 14,547. It was Nasdaq's worst-one day loss since March.

The blue-chip S&P 500, which groups the top 500 stocks on the New York Stock Exchange, settled down 87 points, or 2%, at 4,356.

The broad-based Dow Jones Industrial Average, comprising mostly industrial stocks, lost almost 570 points, or 1.6%, to finish 34,300.

"There is a lot of drama happening on Wall Street and most of it has to do with a reset of inflation expectations," said Ed Moya, an analyst at online trading platform OANDA. "This surge in Treasury yields is kryptonite for the Nasdaq and will ultimately drag down growth forecasts. The Fed was willing to tolerate a little inflation overshoot, but the current energy crunch could force a major pivot before the end of the year."

The yield on the benchmark US 10-year Treasury note was at 1.54% by 4:00 PM Eastern US time (19:00 GMT), rising 2% in just under a week from a reset of inflation expectations. The yield is seen as a measure of real inflation.

At his news conference after the Fed's September policy meeting last week, Chairman Jerome Powell suggested mid-2022 as an appropriate target for concluding the central bank's monthly bond-buying of \$120 billion. The Fed's so-called dot-plot plan also called for interest rates, suppressed at near-zero since the Covid-19 outbreak, to be raised any time next year onwards, he said.

Since then, Fed officials have issued mixed messaging on the timeline for both the taper and rate hike. Powell has admitted that inflation was trending above the Fed's 2% per annum target but said that was transitory and will abate over time. He reiterated that before a Senate banking committee on Tuesday, although he admitted that supply chain issues resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic need to be resolved before inflation can be mitigated.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Kerry to Visit Europe to Discuss Climate Change in Lead Up to COP26 – State Department

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) – US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry will travel to Europe this week in the light of preparations of the upcoming climate conference in Glasgow, the State Department said on Tuesday.

"In Geneva, on September 29, Secretary Kerry will meet with business leaders to discuss the role of the private sector in scaling innovative clean technologies and tackling the climate crisis," the statement said.

Kerry will visit Milan and Paris then to conduct meetings with different officials to mobilize financial and other means to combat the climate crisis, it added.

In Paris, Kerry will also attend the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Ministerial, the statement noted.

The Scottish city of Glasgow is set to host the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP26) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) from October 31 to November 12, gathering representatives from some 200 countries. The UN climate conference, which was canceled last year because of the COVID-19 pandemic, will seek to speed up the implementation of the groundbreaking Paris Agreement that aims to bring annual global temperature increase to under 1.5 degrees Celsius.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US, EU Officials Discuss Challenges Posed by China, Non-Market Economies - Trade Rep.

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - US Trade Representative Katherine Tai and European Commission Executive Vice President Valdis Dombrovskis discussed a range of issues on Tuesday, including challenges allegedly posed by China and non-market economies for American and European businesses and workers, the Office of the US Trade Representative said.

"United States Trade Representative Katherine Tai today met with European Commission Executive Vice President Valdis Dombrovskis," the Office of the US Trade Representative said in a release. "Ambassador Tai and Executive Vice President Dombrovskis discussed a wide range of bilateral and multilateral issues, including WTO reform and the upcoming MC12 agenda, as well as the challenges posed by non-market countries and economies, including China, that undermine American and European workers and businesses."

Tai expressed optimism about the trade relationship between the European Union and the United States ahead the Trade and Technology Council meetings scheduled for Wednesday in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

The Trade and Technology Council aims to coordinate approaches to global trade, economic and technology issues and addressing unfair competition and the misuse of new technologies. Earlier in September, Dombrovskis' said cooperation on emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and the Internet of Things, information communication technologies security and competitiveness, data governance and secure supply chains will also be the focus of the Trade and Technology Council.

The US and EU agreed to launch the Trade and Technology Council at the bilateral summit in Brussels in mid-June.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Obama Breaks Ground on Namesake Presidential Library in Chicago

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - Former US President Barack Obama broke ground on his namesake presidential library in Chicago on Tuesday.

"Michelle and I couldn't be more excited to officially break ground on the Obama Presidential Center on the South Side of Chicago," Obama said in a tweet.

Presidential libraries have been constructed in the home state of every president since Herbert Hoover, and are meant to contain documents and records related to the presidency of their respective namesakes.

The Obama Presidential Center will additionally include a museum, athletic center and play area.

Obama noted in a speech at the groundbreaking ceremony that the location of the center in South Side Chicago was chosen because it is close to where former First Lady Michelle Obama grew up and where Barack began his political career.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Officials to Meet With Haitian Leadership to Discuss Elections, Migration – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) – US officials will travel to Haiti to meet with Prime Minister Ariel Henry and Foreign Minister Claude Joseph to discuss the country's election system, migration and recovery efforts amid the ongoing pandemic and following the August 14 earthquake, US Deputy Spokesperson Jalina Porter said on Tuesday.

"Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs Brian Nichols and National Security Council, Senior Director for the Western Hemisphere Juan Gonzalez will travel to Miami, Florida and Port-au-Prince, Haiti from September 29 through October 1," Porter said at a press briefing. "While in Haiti from September 30 through October 1, they will meet with civil society groups, political stakeholders and Prime Minister Ariel Henri and Foreign Minister Claude Joseph to discuss a Haitian-led process, charting a path to democratic election in Haiti, the Haitian migration response, security, and support for and recovery from the August 14 earthquake and the COVID 19 pandemic."

The US officials will also meet with Cuban American and Haitian American stakeholders while in Miami on September 29, Porter said.

Earlier on Tuesday, Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry said that Haiti will hold a general election shortly after revising the national constitution in the early months of next year following the Haitian government announced it had suspended members of the heavily criticized Provisional Electoral Council (CEP), appointed in late 2020 by assassinated President Jovenel Moise. Before the CEP dismissal, the elections and the constitutional referendum were scheduled for November 7.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Senate Republican Leader McConnell Blocks Attempt to Suspend Federal Debt Ceiling

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - US Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell on Tuesday shut down Majority Leader Chuck Schumer's proposal to hold a vote on raising the debt ceiling with a lower 51-vote threshold.

Schumer asked for unanimous consent of the Senate, which allows a proposal to proceed should no member object, meaning that McConnell was able to single-handedly object to Schumer's attempt.

Senate Republicans on Monday blocked a piece of legislation that required 60 votes to fund the government, raise the debt ceiling, and prevent a shutdown. The final vote tally was 50-48. US Treasury Secretary Janey Yellen said during congressional testimony on Tuesday that failure to raise the debt ceiling could lead to a crisis of "enormous proportions," and warned lawmakers that acting at the last minute on the debt limit could seriously harm business and consumer confidence due to the risk of a negative US credit rating.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US in Contact with OPEC, Global Partners on Setting Oil Prices - White House

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - The United States continues to speak with international partners including the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to set oil prices in the market and support recovery efforts amid rising energy prices, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Tuesday.

"We continue to speak to international partners including OPEC on the importance of competitive markets and setting prices and doing more to support the recovery," Psaki said during a press briefing when asked about the US response to oil prices rising to \$80 per barrel. "We are closely monitoring."

Psaki added that the Biden administration is looking at every means possible to help lower gas prices.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

NASA Traffic Software Deployed at 27 Airports to Cut Carbon Emissions - Regulator

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - The US government plans to deploy NASA traffic management software at 27 major airports in the United States in a bid to cut carbon emissions by reducing taxi times and takeoff congestion, Federal Aviation Administrator (FAA) chief Steve Dixon said on Tuesday.

"If you do the math the numbers get very big very fast and in a good way," Dickson said at a televised press conference. "Across these 27 airports we estimate a savings of more than 7 million gallons of fuel and the elimination of more than 75,000 tons of CO2 emissions every year."

During testing at one US airport, the program reduced taxi times, helping save more than 275,000 gallons of fuel annually - enough to fly 185 Boeing 737 aircraft between New York and Chicago, Dickson said.

The test also reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 8 tons of carbon dioxide daily and reduced delays by 916 hours over four years, equivalent to an average of 15 minutes of wait time on a taxiway for more than 3,600 departing flights, Dickson added.

The US government plans to eventually deploy such capabilities at 89 airports with advanced versions of the software used at 27 of the nation's busiest airports, a joint NASA-FAA press release said.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

UN Informed Taliban of Intent to Help Improve Conditions in Afghanistan - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, September 28 (Sputnik) - The United Nations has informed the Taliban (banned in Russia) that it intends to improve the humanitarian and socio-economic situation in Afghanistan, UN spokesperson Farhan Haq said on Tuesday.

"We have made it clear to the Taliban that we're willing to work to see what can be done to improve the conditions in the country, including the socio-economic conditions and the humanitarian situation," Haq said during a press briefing.

The United Nations support will depend on the authorities on the ground ensuring an inclusive society in Afghanistan and one that protects human rights, Haq added.

The Taliban terror group seized control of Afghanistan after entering the capital Kabul on August 15 amid the collapse of the US-backed government there. The Taliban declared that foreign evacuation operations and the exit of foreign troops from Afghanistan must be completed by August 31, after which the Kabul airport - the sole point of departure for evacuation flights - came under its control.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Approaching 200M In Adults With at Least 1 Dose of COVID-19 Vaccine – White House

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) – The United States is approaching the 200 million mark of citizens who have received at least one shot of vaccines against coronavirus, White House COVID-19 Response Coordinator Jeffrey Zients said on Tuesday.

"Tomorrow we will hit an important milestone – 200 million adults with at least one shot," Zients told reporters in a press briefing.

Overall, more than 75% of eligible Americans older than 12 years got at least one shot, including 94% of seniors, he added.

The rolling 7-day average of new cases is about 95,000 per day, down from 121,533 logged just four days earlier, marking a steady decrease in overall new COVID-19 cases nationwide, Director of Centers of Disease Control and Prevention Rochelle Walensky noted.

At the same time, the 7-day average hospital admissions is approximately 8500 per day and 1,300 deaths per day.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Pedersen Says Situation in Syria's Idlib 'Important Issue' in Putin-Erdogan Meeting

UNITED NATIONS, September 28 (Sputnik) - UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen said on Tuesday that the upcoming meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan will address the situation in Syria's Idlib province. Putin and Erdogan will meet in the Russian city of Sochi on September 29.

"I am sure that the situation on the ground in Idlib and elsewhere will be an important issue when Presidents Putin and Erdogan meet tomorrow, and I continue to appeal for those with influence to promote calm. So much depends on that," Pedersen said during a UN Security Council meeting.

Pedersen expressed hope that the meeting between the two leaders will contribute toward reaching a nationwide ceasefire in Syria and will help to accelerate the political process there. The war in Syria has been ongoing since 2011, with various insurgent groups, including terrorist organizations, fighting the Syrian military in order to topple the government of President Bashar Assad. Turkey has played a considerable role in the conflict by supporting various opposition groups fighting the Syrian government while also attacking the Kurdish forces located in Syria.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Adriatic Charter Conference Promotes Further Expansion of NATO – US European Command

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) – Military leaders from the US-led Adriatic Charter pledged to back NATO's so-called open-door policy by helping other nations in Southeastern Europe join the alliance during a conference of military chiefs in Croatia on Tuesday, US European Command (EUCOM) said.

"During the conference, military leaders from the A-5 Charter nations and observer states discussed common approaches to address collective security threats and challenges related to regional security and defense issues," An EUCOM statement said. "They also reaffirmed commitment to strengthening relations and deepening areas of military cooperation amongst the A-5 Charter nations."

Since its creation in 2003, four Adriatic Charter nations have ascended into NATO – North Macedonia, Albania, Croatia and Montenegro, the release underscored.

"Today's conference, its conclusions and our joint statement once again prove our firm commitment to partnership in the interest of integration of South-Eastern European countries to NATO and EU," Croatian Armed Forces Chief of Staff, Admiral Robert Hranj said in a EUCOM press release.

The conference, held in Split, Croatia, comes on the same day that the US Department of Homeland Security announced that Croatia was a new participant of the Visa Waiver Program, giving nationals of the country access to US soil for up to 90 days starting December 1. The group was formed by the US, Albania, Croatia and North Macedonia in 2003 with the goal of promoting NATO membership for nations in Southeastern Europe.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Pakistan Relations With Taliban to Become More Complicated After US Withdrawal - CENTCOM

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - Pakistan's relationship with the Taliban (banned in Russia) will become more complicated after the United States withdrawal from Afghanistan, US Central Command (CENTCOM) chief Gen. Kenneth McKenzie said in a congressional testimony on Tuesday.

"I believe Pakistan's relationship with the Taliban is going to become significantly more complicated as a result of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan," McKenzie told an US Senate Armed Services Committee hearing.

The CENTCOM chief said Pakistan will see pressure moving into the country from Afghanistan in ways that were more easily deflected before due to the US presence there.

McKenzie also said the United States has to fly over Pakistan in order to get to Afghanistan and the continuous capability to do so has been a topic of continuing deliberation between Washington and Islamabad.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Over 400,000 Americans Received COVID-19 Booster Shot During Weekend – White House

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) – More than 400,000 US Adults were inoculated with the Pfizer booster vaccine against the novel coronavirus over the past weekend while nearly one million more had scheduled appointments in the coming weeks, White House COVID-19 Response Coordinator Jeffrey Zients said on Tuesday.

"Just over this past weekend at pharmacies alone, over 400,000 Americans received the additional protection of a booster, and almost 1 million people have already scheduled their booster shots through pharmacies over the coming weeks," Zients said at a press briefing.

On Monday, US President Joe Biden received his COVID-19 booster shot in a live broadcast from the White House and said the relevant US health agencies have determined that the injection was "safe and effective."

As of today, only the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine has been cleared by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to be used as a booster vaccine against COVID-19. The other two manufacturers, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson, have submitted their data to FDA for evaluation.

On Thursday, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued its recommendation with regard to booster shots against the novel coronavirus. The Committee recommended the boosters for millions of Americans who are at risk for getting a serious disease due to underlying health conditions but excluded frontline workers from it. The CDC's director, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, overruled the decision and made the workers at risk, including healthcare workers and teachers, eligible for getting a booster shot.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Budgets \$36Mln for 'Next Generation' Coronavirus Vaccine Research - Health Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - Three US academic institutions will receive grants totaling \$36.3 million to develop vaccines against multiple coronaviruses that threaten to cause future pandemics, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) said on Tuesday.

"These new awards are designed to look ahead and prepare for the next generation of coronaviruses with pandemic potential," National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) Director Anthony Fauci said in a press release. NIAID is part of the NIH.

The awards will fund vaccine research for a diverse family of coronaviruses, with a primary focus on potential pandemic-causing pathogens such as the virus responsible for COVID-19, the release said.

The new awards build on the \$1.2 billion investment NIAID has made in coronavirus vaccine research since the COVID-19 pandemic began, including multiple projects in pan-coronavirus vaccine research, the release added.

The grants will fund research at the University of Wisconsin, Duke University and the Brigham and Women's Hospital, according to the release.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Senate Confirms Donfried as Assistant Secretary of State for European, Eurasian Affairs

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - The US Senate on Tuesday confirmed Karen Donfried as Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, the Senate Press Gallery said in a tweet.

"By a vote of 73-26, the [US Senate] confirmed the nomination of Karen Donfried to be an Assistant Secretary of State (European Affairs and Eurasian Affairs)," the Senate Press Gallery said.

Donfried, presently President of the German Marshall Fund think tank, said during her confirmation hearings in July that she would continue to work on fully implementing sanctions against Russia to purported counter malign activities, and would work to further US relations with Ukraine.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Yellen Warns Default on US Debt to Be Self-Made Crisis of 'Enormous Proportions'

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - A historic debt default by the United States stemming from its lawmakers' inability to raise the country's debt ceiling will be a self-made crisis of "enormous proportions," Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said in a congressional testimony on Tuesday.

"This would be a manufactured crisis we would impose on this country, which has been going through a very difficult period on the road to recovery," Yellen told the US Senate Banking Committee. "It would be a self-inflicted wound of enormous proportions."

Negotiations on the debt ceiling between Democrat lawmakers and their Republican rivals have dragged on for months with no immediate solution in sight. The two sides have squared off regarding the debt limit several times over the past decade and even briefly allowed the United States to surpass it during the Trump administration, although the country itself has never defaulted on its debt.

Yellen's testimony came a day after she warned that the financial resources of the US Treasury Department may end on October 18 if Congress did not act quickly to raise or suspend the national debt limit.

While October 18 was the department's best estimate, the date can shift back and forth depending on unpredictable federal government expenditures that average some \$50 billion a day, Yellen said.

Republicans have accused Democrats of wasteful spending and say extending the debt ceiling will put the United States further down a debt path of no return. They have tied the raising of the debt limit, which is to pay everyday bills like social welfare, to President Joe Biden's more ambitious \$4 trillion infrastructure rebuilding plan that his administration says will be funded partly by higher taxes on wealthy Americans.

"We won't address the real problems in this country that led us to be \$28 trillion plus in debt, and now you're asking us to get further in debt. I'm horrified. My constituents are horrified," Cynthia Lummis, a Republican Senator from Wyoming, told Yellen.

Yellen disagreed with that assertion, saying, "We are in a very low interest rate environment and the burden of any borrowing is projected to be low."

The Treasury Secretary also dismissed a suggestion from Republican Senator John Neely Kennedy that the Democrats could amend the budget on their own but just wanted "Republican fingerprints on the document" for "political reasons."

"Both parties share a responsibility for lifting the debt ceiling," she said.

Yellen has warned lawmakers against acting at the last minute on the debt limit to prevent serious harm to business and consumer confidence from the risk of a negative credit rating for the United States.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Austin Says Does Not Know About Any Amount of Money Ghani Had When Fleeing Afghanistan

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said in a Congressional testimony on Tuesday that he did not know about the amount of money former Afghan President Ashraf Ghani had when he was fleeing Afghanistan.

Former Afghan President Ashraf Ghani fled abroad as Taliban (banned in Russia) pushed deeper into Kabul, and the government collapsed. Media reports said the exiled leader fled the country for the United Arab Emirates with \$169 million in US \$100 bills stuffed in duffel bags. Ghani subsequently denied the reports, claiming he arrived in the UAE penniless.

"I think that he [Ghani] may be in UAE, not certain of that, this is the last report that I have, in terms of any money that he may have taken with him I have no knowledge on any amounts of money," Austin told the US Senate Armed Forces Committee when discussing the US withdrawal from Afghanistan.

The Taliban began ramping up their offensive in the spring when foreign troops started their withdrawal from Afghanistan. On August 15, as foreign forces were still in the process of departing, the Taliban entered Kabul. By August 31, the US troops left the country, ending the nearly 20-year mission. Several days later, the Taliban announced the composition of its interim government.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

RPT - Biden Administration Gives \$1Bn Boost to 1,300 Health Clinics Across US - Health Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration has budgeted close to \$1 billion to upgrade nearly 1,300 health clinics in underserved communities across the United States, the Department of Health and Human Services said on Tuesday.

"Today, the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) awarded nearly \$1 billion in American Rescue Plan funding to nearly 1,300 Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Health Center Program-funded health centers in all 50 states ... to support major healthcare construction and renovation projects," the HHS said in a press release.

The new funding is planned to strengthen national primary health care infrastructure and advance health equity and health outcomes in medically underserved communities, including through projects that support COVID-19 testing, treatment and vaccination, the release said.

"Health centers are lifelines for many of our most vulnerable families across the country, especially amidst the pandemic. Thanks to American Rescue Plan funds, we're modernizing facilities across the country to better meet the most pressing public health challenges associated with COVID-19," HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra said in the release.

Health centers will use this funding for COVID-19-related capital needs, constructing new facilities, renovating and expanding existing facilities to enhance response to pandemics and purchasing new state-of-the-art equipment, including tele-health technology, mobile medical vans and freezers to store vaccines, the release said.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Biden Admin Gives 1Bln Boost to 1,300 Health Clinics Across US - Health Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration has budgeted close to \$1 billion to upgrade nearly 1,300 health clinics in underserved communities across the United States, the Department of Health and Human Services said on Tuesday.

"Today, the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) awarded nearly \$1 billion in American Rescue Plan funding to nearly 1,300 Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Health Center Program-funded health centers in all 50 states ... to support major healthcare construction and renovation projects," the HHS said in a press release.

The new funding is planned to strengthen national primary health care infrastructure and advance health equity and health outcomes in medically underserved communities, including through projects that support COVID-19 testing, treatment and vaccination, the release said.

"Health centers are lifelines for many of our most vulnerable families across the country, especially amidst the pandemic. Thanks to American Rescue Plan funds, we're modernizing facilities across the country to better meet the most pressing public health challenges associated with COVID-19," HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra said in the release.

Health centers will use this funding for COVID-19-related capital needs, constructing new facilities, renovating and expanding existing facilities to enhance response to pandemics and purchasing new state-of-the-art equipment, including tele-health technology, mobile medical vans and freezers to store vaccines, the release said.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Annapolis Newspaper Shooter Ramos Sentenced to More Than 5 Life Sentences Without Parole

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - A court in the US state of Maryland has sentenced Jarrod Warren Ramos, the shooter charged with killing five people in the Capital Gazette newspaper in Annapolis, to more than five life sentences without parole, the Maryland State Attorney's Office spokesperson told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"The defendant was sentenced to five life sentences without parole plus one life sentence plus 345 years," the spokesperson said after the sentencing.

According to the Annapolis police, Ramos used a shotgun to blast his way into the newsroom of the Capital Gazette on June 28, 2018, and killed five reporters - Gerald Fischman, Rob Hiaasen, John McNamara, Rebecca Smith, and Wendi Winters.

Ramos had pleaded guilty and argued was not criminally responsible to all 23 counts against him by using Maryland's version of an insanity defense.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Would Have Gone to War With Taliban if Staying in Afghanistan Past September 1 - Miley

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - The United States would have once again gone to war with the Taliban (banned in Russia) had US forces stayed in Afghanistan past September 1, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley said in a congressional testimony on Tuesday.

"On the first of September we were going to go to war again with the Taliban, of that there was no doubt," Milley told a US Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on the United States withdrawal from Afghanistan.

The United States faced an August 31 deadline for withdrawing its forces from Afghanistan per a deal struck with the Taliban, Milley said.

Although it would have been militarily feasible to stay, it would have required an additional and significant commitment of forces to Afghanistan in order to clear Kabul of Taliban fighters, likely resulting in significant US casualties, he added.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US, South Korea Agree to Boost Defenses After Pyongyang Missile Tests - Joint Statement

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - The US and South Korea defense chiefs have agreed to seek ways to expand bilateral cooperation in response to North Korea's recent missile

launches, the two sides said after holding their latest Integrated Defense Dialogue in Seoul on Tuesday.

"The leaders discussed DPRK's [North Korea's] recent missiles launches and agreed to explore enhancements to the Alliance's defense posture to account for omni-directional threats," the US Defense Department and South Korea's Ministry of National Defense said in a joint statement after their 20th Integrated Defense Dialogue.

South Korean Deputy Minister for National Defense Policy Kim Man-gi and US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for East Asia Siddharth Mohandas led their respective delegations, the statement said.

"The leaders discussed DPRK's recent missile launches and agreed to explore enhancements to the Alliance's defense posture to account for omnidirectional threats. Both leaders underscored the importance of diplomacy and the resumption of dialogue to address these changes," the statement added.

The two delegations reaffirmed the shared goal of achieving the complete denuclearization of, and permanent peace on, the Korean Peninsula and pledged that US and South Korean combined forces would remain ready and postured to defend the South, according to the statement.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Wells Fargo Bank Pays \$72.6Mln for Cheating Foreign Exchange Customers - US Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 9 (Sputnik) - US banking giant Wells Fargo accepted a \$72.6 million penalty for fraudulently overcharging hundreds of commercial customers on foreign currency transactions from 2000 to 2007, the Justice Department said on Tuesday.

"For the better part of a decade, Wells Fargo abused this trust, using tricks, false information, and other deceptive practices to fraudulently overcharge customers who used the Bank's foreign exchange service," the Justice Department said in a press release.

Wells Fargo, which has suffered numerous scandals in recent years, is among the top four US banks with assets exceeding \$1.7 trillion, according to the Federal Reserve.

As part of the settlement, approved today by US District Judge John Koeltl, Wells Fargo will pay \$72.6 million, of which \$35.3 will be refunded to 771 overcharged customers.

The customers were largely commercial businesses. Many were small- and mid-size firms including other federally insured banks and financial institutions.

In recent years, Wells Fargo has faced multiple fraud-related charges.

In 2020, the US government fined Wells Fargo Bank \$500 million for misleading investors as part of an overall \$3 billion settlement over a scandal in which employees secretly opened multiple accounts without customers' knowledge to meet aggressive sales goals.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Milley Says Not Going to Resign Over Biden Rejection of His Afghanistan Withdrawal Advice

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley said during a congressional hearing on Tuesday that he is not going to resign because the President Joe Biden rejected his advice on the withdrawal from Afghanistan.

"Just because we are generals, and it would be an incredible act of political defiance for a commissioned officer to just resign because my advice is not taken. This country doesn't want generals figuring out what orders we're going to accept and do or not," Milley said during a US Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on the withdrawal from Afghanistan. "I'm not going to resign. There's no way."

Milley also said he would resign if the orders he received were illegal, but noted he believes all orders from the civilian authorities regarding the US withdrawal from Afghanistan were legal. Milley pointed out that it was his opinion in the fall of 2020 to leave at least 2,500 troops in Afghanistan after the US withdrawal from that country.

The Taliban terror group (banned in Russia) seized control of Afghanistan after entering the capital Kabul on August 15 that led to the collapse of the US-backed government there. The Taliban declared foreign evacuation operations and the exit of foreign troops from Afghanistan were to be completed by August 31, after which the Kabul Airport - the sole point of departure for evacuation flights - came under its control.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Designates Croatia as New Participant in Visa Waiver Program - Homeland Security

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - Croatians traveling to the United States for business or recreational purposes will not be required to obtain a visa after the US government designated Croatia as a new participant in its Visa Waiver Program, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) said on Tuesday.

"Today's designation of Croatia as a new participant in the Visa Waiver Program is an important recognition of our countries' shared economic and security interests," Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said in a statement.

The new measure will come into effect no later than December 1, the statement said.

Croatians will be able to spend up to 90 days in the United States without the requirement to obtain a visa, once the new rules are implemented, the statement added.

Croatia is the 40th country whose citizens can enter the United States visa-free, according to the statement.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Russian Bases in Central Asia Came Up During Putin-Biden Talks - Austin

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - The issue of Russian bases in Central Asia came up during the conversation between presidents Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said in a congressional testimony on Tuesday.

The Wall Street Journal reported on Monday that US Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Mark Milley and Russian General Staff Chief Valery Gerasimov discussed the apparent offer by Putin for the US military to use Russian bases in Central Asia.

"This is an issue that I believe came up during a conversation that the president [Biden] had with president Putin when President Putin offered to provide assistance," Austin told the US Senate Armed Forces Committee when discussing the US withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Austin also said "we are not seeking Russia's permission to do anything."

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Credibility Among Allies Has Been 'Damaged' After Afghanistan Withdrawal - Milley

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - The United States' credibility among allies and partners globally can be described as "damaged" after its withdrawal from Afghanistan, Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley said in congressional testimony on Tuesday, "I think that our credibility with our allies and partners around the world and with advisories is being intensely reviewed by them to see which way this is going to go. And I think that 'damaged' is one word that could be used," Milley told the US Senate Armed Forces Committee during a hearing in US troop withdrawal from Afghanistan when asked about the credibility of the United States worldwide.

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, meanwhile, replying to the same question said that US credibility among its allies remains solid.

"I think our credibility remains solid... I would say US military, and United States of America - people place great trust and confidence [in it]," he said.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Designates Croatia as New Participant in Visa Waiver Program - Homeland Security

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - Croatians traveling to the United States for business or recreational purposes will not be required to obtain a visa after the US government designated Croatia as a new participant in its Visa Waiver Program, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) said on Tuesday.

"Today's designation of Croatia as a new participant in the Visa Waiver Program is an important recognition of our countries' shared economic and security interests," Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said in a statement.

The new measure will come into effect no later than December 1, the statement said.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Syrian Constitutional Committee Will Hold New Session October 18 in Geneva - Pedersen

UNITED NATIONS, September 28 (Sputnik) - The Small Drafting Body of the Syrian Constitutional Committee will meet on October 18 in Geneva, Switzerland, UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen said on Tuesday.

"Following eight months of intensive facilitation with the Co-Chairs, I am pleased to announce that agreement is in place on methodology, and invitations have been issued for a 6th Session of the Committee," Pedersen said in a UN Security Council meeting. "While we are still in the process of confirming logistics, the Small Drafting Body will convene in Geneva as of 18 October, and the Co-Chairs will for the first time meet the day before together with me to prepare the session."

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Reconstituted Al Qaeda, ISIS With Aspirations to Attack US Real Possibility - Milley
WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - A reconstituted Al Qaeda (terrorist group, banned in Russia) or Islamic State (ISIS, terrorist group, banned in Russia) with aspirations to attack the US is a very real possibility, Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley said in congressional testimony on Tuesday, adding that such an attack can take in 12 months.

"Reconstituted Al Qaeda or ISIS with aspirations to attack the United States is a very real possibility. And those conditions to include activity in ungoverned spaces could present themselves in the next 12 to 36 months," Milley told the US Senate Armed Forces Committee during a hearing in US troop withdrawal from Afghanistan.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Milley Says His Calls to China Caused By Concerning Intelligence, Did Not Usurp Authority

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff General Gen. Mark Milley said in congressional testimony on Tuesday that his calls to Chinese counterparts during

the 2020 presidential race were prompted by concerning intelligence reports and he never tried to usurp power.

"The specific purpose of the October and January calls were generated by concerning intelligence, which caused us to believe that the Chinese were worried about an attack on them by the United States... At no time was I attempting to change or influence the process, usurp authority or insert myself in the chain of command," Milley said.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

UN Special Envoy for Syria Says Will Travel to Washington This Week

UNITED NATIONS, September 28 (Sputnik) - UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen said on Tuesday he will be traveling to Washington this week to continue his international consultations on the political process in Syria.

"I will be traveling from here to Washington as my consultations continue," Pedersen said in a UN Security Council meeting on Syria held in New York.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Yellen, EU Trade Chief Talk Tax Reform, Bid to Stop 'Race to Bottom' — Treasury Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen held a call with European Trade Commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis to discuss international tax reforms and to halt the practice of governments undercutting each other on tax rates, the Treasury Department said Tuesday.

"Secretary Yellen emphasized the importance of advancing global tax reform efforts in the OECD/G20 discussions on international taxation and expressed that the Biden-Harris Administration is pleased with the progress the U.S. Congress is making to strengthen the US international tax rules," a Treasury readout of the call said.

It added that Yellen also expressed her appreciation to Dombrovskis and the European Commission for their dedication "to leveling the playing field to end the race to the bottom in global corporate taxation".

The talks came as Yellen continued to lobby international authorities to revamp the global tax system and create a more equitable structure to prevent countries from shrinking tax rates and deregulating the business environment to attract large multinational businesses to concentrate operations on their soil.

The Group of Seven countries agreed in June to impose a global minimum tax on corporate foreign earnings. The pact was later supported by 134 countries representing more than 90% of the world's gross domestic product.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Taliban Has Never Renounced or Broke Affiliation With Al-Qaeda - Milley

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - The Taliban has never renounced al-Qaeda (both terror groups are banned in Russia) or broke its affiliation with them, Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley said in a congressional testimony on Tuesday.

"The Taliban has never renounced al-Qaeda or broke its affiliation with them," Milley told the US Senate Armed Forces Committee during a hearing in US troop withdrawal from Afghanistan.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Austin Says Doha Agreement With Taliban Had 'Demoralizing' Effect on Afghan Forces

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) – The Doha agreement with the Taliban (banned in Russia) had a demoralizing effect on Afghan forces and was one of the reasons they were defeated by the terrorist group, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said on Tuesday.

"We did not anticipate the snowballing effect caused by the deals that the Taliban commander struck with local leaders in the wake of the Doha agreement, and that the Doha agreement itself had a demoralizing effect on Afghan soldiers," Austin said in a testimony to the US Senate Committee on Armed Services.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

UNSC President Says 'Very Concerned' About North Korea's Ongoing Ballistic Missile Tests

UNITED NATIONS, September 28 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council is concerned by the ballistic missile tests launched by North Korea and wants to see a complete denuclearization of the Peninsula, the President of the Security Council, Irish Ambassador to the United Nations Geraldine Byrne Nason, said on Tuesday.

"We remain very concerned about ongoing ballistic missile tests," Byrne Nason said. "One thing that we want to see above all is a denuclearized Korean Peninsula. We want to see the DPRK [North Korea] stop its nuclear activities, to see a complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization."

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Poll Finds Over Half of US Parents Would Vaccinate Under 12 Kids if COVID Jabs Available

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) – A 55% majority of American parents of children under age 12 say they would get their child vaccinated against COVID 19 if the inoculations are approved, a Gallup poll said on Tuesday.

"A steady 55% of parents in the U.S. with children under 12 say they would get their child vaccinated against the coronavirus if such a vaccine were available," the pollster said in a statement accompanying the data.

Gallup's September 13-19 survey of 4,034 adults preceded announcements by US vaccination makers Pfizer and Moderna of plans to seek approval to vaccinate young children, the release said.

"Parents' readiness to have their child vaccinated varies based on their degree of worry about contracting the disease, their own vaccination status and their party identification," Gallup also said, explaining the poll.

Despite the overall 55% willingness to vaccinate young children, the poll revealed vast partisan gaps, with 83% of Democrats willing to inoculate their kids compared with just 21% of Republicans. Among independent voters, 50% indicated they would vaccinate their children, the release added.

The poll also revealed that parents who are "very worried" about their child getting COVID-19 are nearly unanimous in their willingness to have their child vaccinated, while just 7% of parents who say they are "not worried at all" saying the same.

Another predictor of parents' openness to immunizing children under 12 is their own vaccination status. Some 82% of parents who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 say they would vaccinate their child, but just 1% of parents who do not plan to get vaccinated themselves say the same, the release said.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Home Prices Jump Almost 20% in July for Record Yearly Growth - S&P-Dow Jones Indices

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - US home prices jumped almost 20% in July to another record high, the S&P Dow Jones Indices' housing price index showed on Tuesday, as concerns that the Federal Reserve might raise interest rates in the not too distant future spurred more buyers into an already overcrowded market.

"July 2021 is the fourth consecutive month in which the growth rate of housing prices set a record," Craig Lazzara, Managing Director and Global Head of Index Investment Strategy at S&P DJI, said in a statement accompanying the data.

The S&P DJI data, however, lagged behind numbers from the National Association of Realtors which suggested that sales of existing homes in the United States fell 2% in August as buyers retreated from an overpriced market.

Regardless of the difference between the two sets of numbers, dire housing shortages in the United States since the financial crisis of 2008 and last year's coronavirus outbreak have pushed up existing home prices beyond the means of many Americans.

"We have previously suggested that the strength in the U.S. housing market is being driven in part by a reaction to the COVID pandemic, as potential buyers move from urban apartments to suburban homes," Lazzara of S&P DJI said. "July's data are consistent with this hypothesis. This demand surge may simply represent an acceleration of purchases that would have occurred anyway over the next several years. Alternatively, there may have been a secular change in locational preferences, leading to a permanent shift in the demand curve for housing." The Commerce Department said on Tuesday that US housing starts grew more than 17% in the year to August while permits issued for new construction also rose double-digits, signaling efforts by builders to put up more homes in a supply-starved market.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Treasury Funds to End October 18 if Congress Does Not Raise Debt Limit – Letter

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) – The financial resources of the US Treasury may end on October 18 if Congress does not act quickly to raise or suspend the national debt limit, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said on Tuesday.

"We now estimate that Treasury is likely to exhaust its extraordinary measures if Congress has not acted to raise or suspend the debt limit by October 18. At that point, we expect Treasury would be left with very limited resources that would be depleted quickly. It is uncertain whether we could continue to meet all the nation's commitments after that date," Yellen said in a letter to the US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

Yellen noted that October 18 is the department's best estimate and can easily shift backward or forward since the federal government expenditures are unpredictable and amount on average to \$50 billion per day.

Yellen warned the US lawmakers against acting at the last minute on the debt limit to prevent serious harm to business and consumer confidence as well as negatively impact the credit rating of the United States for the coming years.

Last week, US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi vowed to overcome political opposition and pass a temporary funding bill to raise the country's debt limit in order to keep the government running. Negotiations on the debt ceiling between Democrat lawmakers and their Republican rivals have dragged on for months, with no immediate solution in sight. Democrats and Republicans have squared off over the debt ceiling several times over the past decade and briefly allowed the United States to surpass it during the Trump administration.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Vaccine Production Facilities Should Be 'Kept Warm' in Case Future Pandemic - BioNTech COO

WASHINGTON, September 28 (Sputnik) - Vaccine production facilities should be kept in a ready state in case of a future possible pandemic and need for immediate capacity for vaccination output, BioNTech Chief Financial Officer Sierk Poetting said on Tuesday speaking at the public forum hosted by the World Trade Organization.

"I think the world learned this time. I think we have to be prepared for next time that you have a broad production that probably potentially even kept warm for the pandemic case. You never need several billion doses of other vaccines but in the pandemic, you need a capacity, you need to keep this warm. That is why [we should have] a global network of vaccine facilities that have to be kept warm," he said.

Speaking on the vaccine distribution during this current COVID-19 pandemic, Poetting said that the Pfizer–BioNTech alliance should ensure that the dedicated regions have everything in place to manufacture their own vaccines.

"We do feel the duty to produce as much as possible [vaccines] right now. At BioNTech we also feel the duty to bring local manufacturing to, for example, Africa," he said.

He said that it is important to set a transfer at a local level that works.

He added that Pfizer and BioNTech alliances from the start were trying to get more partners in the sphere of vaccine-making and they are "still increasing these partnerships right now."

As of September 2021, Pfizer–BioNTech shipped some 1.5 billion COVID-19 vaccine doses worldwide, according to the firms' own statistics.