10/22/21 Friday

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US Claims 'Right to Respond' to 'Deliberate and Coordinated Attack' on at-Tanf Base in Syria
By - Morgan Artyukhina

The White House said on Friday that it reserved the right to respond after militants struck the US garrison at at-Tanf with rockets and suicide drones earlier this week.
The attack on late Wednesday night involved both kamikaze drones and rockets, US Central Command (CENTCOM) said, attributing the attack to "Iran-backed militias," as it has other similar attacks on its garrisons in Syria and Iraq in recent years.
An eyewitness to the attack told the BBC there were “some coming from [the] Iraq-Syria border," which is just a few miles to the southeast of at-Tanf.
"The al-Tanf garrison area was subjected to a deliberate and coordinated attack," White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki told reporters on Friday, noting she had no reports of deaths or injuries by any US personnel at the base.
"Of course, we always reserve the right to respond," she added.
Photos of the damage emerged on social media on Thursday that were subsequently confirmed by CENTCOM to be of the base. They show several structures crumpled, scorched and otherwise damaged by the attack, including one photo showing the inside of a gym.
The remote desert base, located along the M2 Baghdad-Damascus highway near Syria's border with Iraq and Jordan, has been held by American troops since early 2016, when the base was used to train so-called "moderate rebels" fighting against the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad.
The attack on at-Tanf, which hasn't been claimed by any group, came in the wake of Israeli airstrikes against several locations near Palmyra, which the Russian Ministry of Defense said had been launched from the at-Tanf area.
However, the command of the Allied Operations Room of Syria, the pro-Syrian, anti-Daesh* alliance of forces that includes advisers from Hezbollah and Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), pledged after that attack that it would respond in kind.
The Biden administration has launched several other responsive airstrikes against Shiite militias in Syria since taking office in January, claiming the right of self-defense after rocket attacks were launched against US forces or bases housing US forces. However, the American response didn't always land on militias responsible for the attacks.
Neither the presence of American troops on Syrian soil, nor attacks on forces or installations on Syrian soil, have the permission of the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad.

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Supreme Court Leaves Texas Anti-Abortion Law in Place, But Will Hear Arguments on Right to Challenge
By - Morgan Artyukhina

The US Supreme Court has declined an appeal by the US Department of Justice that would have suspended Texas SB 8, the nation's most restrictive abortion law, pending litigation. However, it has decided to hear oral arguments about the issue early next month, meaning a decision could be handed down in early 2022.
The court said in a Friday decision that the Texas law would remain in place for now, but the DOJ's filing from earlier this week would be "treated as a petition for a writ of certiorari before judgment, and the petition is granted limited to the following question: May the United States bring suit in federal court and obtain injunctive or declaratory relief against the State, state court judges, state court clerks, other state officials, or all private parties to prohibit SB 8 from being enforced."
The date set for oral arguments is November 1, 2021.
Associate Justice Sonia Sotomayor, one of the court's three liberal judges, approved of the decision to hear oral arguments because "Texas' scheme raises concerns of imperative public importance," but ultimately dissented from the high court's overall decision because she thought such a "patently unconstitutional" law should be suspended, given the harm it will cause by remaining in effect during litigation.
"The Court's failure to issue an administrative stay of the Fifth Circuit's order pending its decision on this application will have profound and immediate consequences. By delaying any remedy, the Court enables continued and irreparable harm to women seeking abortion care and providers of such care in Texas - exactly as SB 8's architects intended," Sotomayor wrote. "Whatever equities favor caution in staying a state law under normal circumstances cannot outweigh the total and intentional denial of a constitutional right to women while this Court considers the serious questions presented."
The law, which bans abortions at roughly six weeks after conception - the time a series of electrical pulses incorrectly termed a "heartbeat" can be detected - is enforced by the novel method of authorizing third-party lawsuits against abortion providers and those who "aid and abet" such an abortion. It is deliberately designed to evade federal challenges.
It would also seem to be in violation of the high court's 1973 ruling in the Roe v. Wade case, which established the legal right to an abortion and laid out a framework for the legal regulation of abortions. The court said lawmakers couldn't restrict abortions during the first trimester, which lasts until the 13th week of pregnancy, and couldn't ban abortions before viability outside the womb, which is possible at roughly 22 to 24 weeks into the pregnancy.
The Supreme Court is due to hear another abortion case, Whole Woman's Health vs. Jackson, a month after the challenge to the Texas law, which is called United States vs. Texas. In the Jackson case, which concerns a similar law in Mississippi that bans abortions after 15 weeks, the state has directly asked the high court to reconsider the Roe decision.
Twelve US states dominated by Republican politics have already passed so-called "trigger laws" that would automatically take effect if Roe v. Wade is overturned, banning abortion in those states the moment it becomes legal for them to do so.

On the other side, Democrats in the US House of Representatives passed a bill last month that would create a federal right to an abortion, codifying the Roe decision into US law. However, it is unlikely to pass the Senate, where Republicans can block it from ever coming to a vote by using the filibuster rule. Abortion rights advocates also held a large rallyin Washington, DC, earlier this month, calling for passage of the bill and a general defense of abortion rights.

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Embattled Eilat-Ashkelon Gas Deal Has No Bearing on UAE-Israel Relations, Official Says
By - Morgan Artyukhina

With a proposed plan to send petroleum through Israel being challenged by environmental groups, the United Arab Emirates is reasserting that while it helped ease the deal along, the government isn't directly involved, so the pipeline's fate will have no bearing on Israeli-Emirati relations.

"We have clarified to the Israeli government that this is not a government project. There's very close communication at the highest level," an anonymous senior official at the Emirati embassy in Israel told the Times of Israel on Thursday. "Israel is aware that this is not a UAE government project, but rather a private commercial deal."

"The UAE is looking to invest heavily in renewable energy and to move quickly and intelligently to a world after oil," the official added. "And in energy, renewables and developing next-generation clean fuels, are items of interest in the state's relationship with Israel."

By contrast, one of the companies involved in the deal, the Israeli state-owned Europe Asia Pipeline Company (EAPC), told the Israeli Supreme Court in July that "significant damage to the foreign relations of the State of Israel."

The proposed deal would see crude oil shipped from the Persian Gulf to the Israeli port city of Eilat, on the Red Sea, and pumped via an existing pipeline to the Mediterranean port of Ashkelon, by way of Beersheba. From there, it would continue on to European buyers. However, the gas wouldn't be from the UAE, which sells its gas to East Asian buyers.

The gas deal was challenged at the high court by the Israel Nature and Parks Authority, which has been highly critical of the pipeline and warns that a leak could be catastrophic for the environment and economy. The pipeline was responsible for a massive spill in 2014, the largest environmental disaster in Israeli history. Some 5 million liters of crude oil were spilled into the Arava desert and Evrona Nature Reserve, causing $87.6 million in damage and medical problems for more than 80 people.

Partners include several private firms, as well as firms with a direct or indirect connection to the Israeli or Emirati government. One is the EAPC, a nationalized Israeli firm originally intended as part of a secret partnership with the Imperial State of Iran prior to the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The other partner is Med-Red Land Bridge, a firm jointly owned by the Abu Dhabi-based conglomerate National Holding and two Israeli companies - AF Entrepreneurship and Lubber Line.

Reuters reported in October 2020, when the deal was announced, that according to a source familiar with the deal it could be worth $700 to $800 million over several years. However, no specific details about the deal were released at the time and few have gotten out in the year since.
Just weeks earlier, the UAE and Israel formalized their diplomatic ties in the first of the Abraham Accords coordinated by the United States. According to the official who spoke with ToI, although the two states signed a commercial memorandum of understanding early on, the gas deal was unconnected to those developments.
However, the Israeli financial paper Globes reported on Thursday that if the deal to send gas through the EAPC's pipeline were cancelled, the project could be shifted to the neighboring Egyptian port of Taba, just a few miles away. From there, an overland pipeline crosses the Sinai desert to the Mediterranean port of Arish.

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US Airstrike Kills Senior Al-Qaeda Leader in Northwest Syria - CENTCOM
By - Morgan Artyukhina

US operations against al-Qaeda* in Syria have increased since the collapse of the US-backed Afghan government in August, when US President Joe Biden reframed the US war on terror as having "metastasized" beyond Afghanistan's borders.
US Central Command (CENTCOM) said on Friday that another US airstrike had killed a senior al-Qaeda commander in Suluk, in Syria's northern Raqqa Governorate.
"A US airstrike today in northwest Syria killed senior al-Qaeda leader Abdul Hamid al-Matar. We have no indications of civilian casualties as a result of the strike, which was conducted using an MQ-9 aircraft," CENTCOM spokesperson Maj. John Rigsbee said in a Friday release, referring to the MQ-9 Reaper combat drone.
Earlier on Friday, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki asserted the US' "right to respond" to an attack against the US garrison at at-Tanf in southeastern Syria on Wednesday. However, CENTCOM said that attack, which involved rockets and kamikaze drones, was believed to have been carried out by "Iran-backed militias," an American term for Shiite militant groups that oppose the US presence in Iraq and Syria. That makes it unlikely the strike was the response to which Psaki referred.
However, the US has carried out several other strikes against al-Qaeda-aligned groups in Syria in recent weeks, following statements by Biden in August that outlined the next phase of the US war on terror, a conflict that has increasingly taken a back seat as the US's grand strategy shifts to a great power competition with Russia and China.
"Today a terrorist threat has metastasized well beyond Afghanistan: al-Shabaab in Somalia, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQQP), al-Nusra* in Syria, ISIS [Daesh] attempting to create a caliphate in Syria and Iraq and establishing affiliates in multiple countries in Africa and Asia," Biden said in a televised speech two days after the US-backed Afghan government collapsed before a Taliban* blitzkrieg.

“These threats warrant our attention and our resources. We conduct effective counterterrorism missions against terrorist groups in multiple countries where we don’t have permanent military presence. If necessary, we’ll do the same in Afghanistan,” he added. “We’ve developed counterterrorism over-the-horizon capability that will allow us to keep our eyes firmly fixed on the direct threats to the United States in the region, and act quickly and decisively if needed.”

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Late Actor Brandon Lee's Family Reacts to Alec Baldwin's Fatal Prop Gun Incident
By - Evan Craighead

A federal investigation is underway after Alec Baldwin fired a prop gun on the set of "Rust," killing cinematographer Halyna Hutchins and injuring director Joel Souza. The on-set tragedy echoes the 1993 death of Bruce Lee's son, Brandon Lee, a rising action star and martial artist who was fatally shot with a prop gun while filming "The Crow."

The family of Brandon Lee took to social media on Friday to extend support to the family of Halyna Hutchins, the 42-year old cinematographer killed during filming at Bonanza Creek Ranch in Santa Fe County, New Mexico.

"Our hearts go out to the family of Halyna Hutchins and to Joel Souza and all involved in the incident on 'Rust,'" the family tweeted from Lee's official Twitter account. "No one should ever be killed by a gun on a film set. Period."

Brandon Lee, the son of iconic martial artist and film star Bruce Lee and his wife, Linda Lee Cadwell, was 28 when he was killed by a .44-bullet fired around 12:30 a.m. on March 31, 1993. Eric, Lee's character in the film, had been directed to walk into his on-set apartment and sustain gunfire that used a "squib" to simulate the effects of an actual bullet. However, when it came time for the scene to be filmed, Lee did not get up after being shot at by Michael Masse, the actor who portrayed Funboy.

According to the LA Times, Lee's mother settled out of court after filing a civil suit against thestudio in 1993. No criminal charges were filed in relation to the case after an investigative report found that although there was negligence, no one was intentionally trying to hurt Lee.

Baldwin, 68, in a brief statement on Friday, noted that he is fully cooperating with the investigation into the on-set shooting. Baldwin also stated that he is in contact with Hutchins' husband.

Some netizens dug into Baldwin, highlighting his commentary on a 2017 incident in which a California officer fatally shot a man.

"I wonder how it must feel to wrongfully kill someone..." the Emmy award-winning actor tweeted. Baldwin's 2017 tweet has amassed thousands of responses in recent hours.

The New York Times reported that Joel Souza, the 48-year-old director of "Rust," was discharged from a New Mexico medical facility on Friday, several hours after he was hospitalized for injuries from the incident.

Frances Fisher, another actor in the 1880s Western-style film, also tweeted confirmation that Souza had left the hospital.

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'Bully': Trump Slams Meghan McCain for Labeling Ivanka, Jared 'Funeral Crashers' at Dad's Service
By - Evan Craighead

Meghan McCain, political analyst and daughter of late US Senator John McCain (R-AZ), appeared on Bravo's "Watch What Happens Live" (WWHL) earlier this week and told host Andy Cohen that then-Trump advisers Ivanka Trump and Jared Kushner were "funeral crashers" who had "no g***amn business" attending her father's 2018 memorial service.
Former US President Donald Trump made a lengthy statement against McCain and her family, suggesting that the former co-host of "The View" was "basically a lowlife" following her departure from the ABC talk show ahead of its 25th anniversary.
"Isn't it funny that Meghan McCain, who has always been a bully and basically a lowlife, is now complaining that it was she who was bullied by the Slobs and Radical Left maniacs of "The View," Trump said in an October 22 statement, panning the political analyst's father as a 'Republican In Name Only' (RINO).
McCain, 36, despite her brief time on "The View," repeatedly got into heated and viral debates with co-hosts regarding their political and moral stances on a variety of topics. When questioned about the possibility of her contribution to a toxic work environment referenced in her upcoming book, the Republican stated that "only one person was bullied out of their job and doesn't work there anymore."
The statement issued by the 45th president of the US also took aim at McCain's comments regarding the 2020 presidential election results in Arizona, a traditionally deep-red state, which was seen to have turned to the Dems after Electoral College votes were certified in the 2020 election.
Trump asserted that McCain's comments were an attempt to stop the "Trump Train" in her home state.
Despite the transition of power in the US government, Trump has maintained without evidence that the 2020 general election was riddled with fraud, and continues to claim that there should have been a complete review prior to the certification of the Electoral College votes.
"Glad to know the Trumps are watching [WWHL]. Wowza," Andy Cohen tweeted on Friday afternoon, referring to the late-night talk show he both hosts and produces for Bravo.
McCain revealed during the Wednesday night interview that Trump - who feuded with her father and made derogatory comments about the war veteran prior to his death in 2018 - phoned her in the late senator's final days to dismiss reports that he was poking fun at her father's physical appearance and movements.
"It was a very weird conversation," McCain noted.
McCain claimed that she initially did not want to take the call from the Trump White House, and only agreed because her father had urged her to respect the office, despite its current occupant.

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Biden's Reality - Cartoon

Some viewers of US President Joe Biden's Thursday town hall were left puzzled after the commander-in-chief claimed that the US would defend Taiwan in the event of a Chinese military attack. Per the 'One China policy,' Beijing has maintained that there is only one sovereign China, encompassing mainland China and Taiwan, the Republic of China (RoC).
White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki, speaking to reporters on Friday, clarified that Biden's remarks from the night prior did not reflect a change in US policy, or its commitments outlined in the Taiwan Relations Act. Biden previously told CNN's Anderson Cooper that the US had a "commitment" to defend Taiwan against a military attack by mainland China.
"He was not intending to convey a change in policy nor has he made a decision to change our policy," Psaki told a reporter who had questioned the US policy of "strategic ambiguity" regarding Taiwan.
Psaki added that "nobody wants to see cross-strait issues come to blows, certainly not President Biden, and there's no reason that it should."
While the policy of ambiguity allows the US to sell weapons to the RoC, it does not stipulate that American forces would be activated to defend Taiwan from Chinese forces. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin reiterated the long-standing Beijing assertion that the island nation is "an inalienable part of China's territory," and any issue involving the RoC is "purely an internal affair of China that allows no foreign intervention."

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White House Says Biden is 'Familiar' With US-Mexico Border, Cites 2008 Trip
By - Evan Craighead

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki was asked last month whether US President Joe Biden - a former US senator and vice president - has ever taken an official trip to the southern border. New government data has shown that some 1.7 million migrants have been detained at the US-Mexico border within the past year, the most arrests since 2000.
On Friday, the White House press secretary pushed back on questions about a need for Biden to make an urgent "photo op" trip to the US-Mexico border amid ongoing immigration issues with Venezuelan and Central American migrants.
"There has been reporting that he did drive through the border when he was on the campaign trail in 2008 and he is certainly familiar with the, and it stuck with him – with the fact that in El Paso [Texas] the border goes right through the center of town," Psaki told Fox News' Peter Doocy.

She also highlighted that Biden has made several trips over the years to areas in Central America, where a significant number of migrants are said to be fleeing from.
Netizens were noticeably unsatisfied with the date of Biden's last reported visit to the US-Mexico border.
Psaki's comments came alongside the publication of US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) data showing that a record number of 1.7 million migrants were arrested at the country's southern border. The fiscal 2021 data is the highest since fiscal year 2000, when more than 1.64 million migrants were detained by US agents.
Single adults accounted for around 1.1 million detentions during the period. The group made up about 60% of southern border arrests in September, according to the CBP.
Texas Governor Greg Abbott (R) proclaimed that the Biden administration "completely abandoned" Texas residents along the US-Mexico border, forcing the state and its National Guard on the defensive. Some GOPlawmakers in Congress have branded the movement as 'Biden's Border Crisis.'
In a Thursday social media post, the Texas governor highlighted that members of the Texas National Guard and Texas Department of Public Safety were working in support of Operation Lone Star - the state's effort to combat border-area cartels smuggling drugs and people into the US.
According to Abbott, cartels are "getting even more aggressive" and "are beginning to open fire on the National Guard that Texas has down on the border to secure the border."
Biden also referenced a trip to the southern border during a CNN town hall, acknowledging that he should revisit the area, but noting that he has been preoccupied with addressing some "$900 billion worth of damage done by hurricanes and floods."
"I've been there before and I haven't— I mean, I know it well. I guess I should go down. But the whole point of it is I haven't had a whole hell of a lot of time to get down," Biden said to CNN's Anderson Cooper.
The US president added that images from the border are not "pictures of kids lying on top of one another with" what appears to be "tarps on them." It is presumed Biden was referring to solar blankets provided by the US to migrant children in federal detention facilities.

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Manchester United Have the Talent on the Pitch, but Not on the Sideline
By - Nevin Brown

Manchester United boss Ole Gunnar Solksjaer has come under fire for a string of poor performances. With a showdown against Liverpool looming and a string of marquee contests, can Solksjaer right the ship in time to make a title charge?
It is often forgotten, but Ole Gunnar Solskjaer was never supposed to be the Manchester United manager. At the beginning of the 2018-19 season, the club was helmed by Jose Mourinho and coming off a second-place finish in the Premier League. Meanwhile, Solskjaer was in charge at Molde after a disastrous stint at Cardiff City in 2014.

United got off to a poor start to the season which saw Jose Mourinho sacked in December. The club brought in Solskjaer as a caretaker to see out the 2018-19 season in hopes that an elite manager would become available. However, the team instantly responded to their new manager, winning 14 of his first 19 matches, and United decided that Solskjaer was worthy of a three-year contract.

Manchester United has not been poor under Solskjaer, but they have never looked like a true title contender. For a club that set a new standard for domestic dominance in the 90s and early 2000s, simply being good is not enough.

Since Solskjaer took the helm, United has spent heavily to build a team that should be challenging for domestic and European titles. The club has spent €541.3 million since 2018, the second-most in the Premier League over the span, and that their squad is valued as the third-most valuable squad in the world by Transfermarkt. The investments on the pitch have been title-worthy. Which raises the question, why hasn't Solskjaer been able to mount any serious title charge?

Even when things were going well at United, Ole Gunnar Solskjaer never showed the tactical inventiveness to truly get the best out of his teams. His sides have routinely been bailed out by individual brilliance. Solskjaer deserves credit for keeping spirits high, pushing the right buttons, and trying to cram the most talent on the pitch as possible, but all the elite teams in Europe have managers who have installed cohesive attacking systems that can break down any defense.

This season has shown the limitations that a Solskjaer-led team has. In the Premier League, United has scored 16 goals against 10 allowed from eight matches. However, nine of their goals came from two matches against Leeds and Newcastle who have allowed the most and third-most goals in the league. Outside of their matches against bottom feeders, United have scored seven goals and allowed eight over six matches.

No side with Cristiano Ronaldo, Mason Greenwood, Bruno Fernandes, Paul Pogba, Anthony Martial and Edison Cavani should struggle to unlock defenses. Solskjaer's failure to install an effective attacking identity has cost his side points against sides that title challengers routinely beat.

United remains deadly on the break, and the passing creativity and range of Bruno Fernandes and Paul Pogba have been there to bail out United time and time again, but relying on individual brilliance can only raise a side so far.

Their counter-attacking has served them well against stronger sides, but because they routinely have a massive talent advantage, they are rarely in a position to utilize it. Dropping back and forming a disciplined wall around the box is enough to give United's attack fits. Winning a Premier League title is as much about picking up three points against the bottom half of the table as it is about taking three off the top.

The surest way to see if a team has an attacking identity is to watch how their midfielders and attackers link up. Whenever one of United's players receives the ball there is a moment where they have to look up, scan the field, and then pick a pass. In the half-second this takes, gaps in defenses disappear and advantages are lost. The best teams in the world can practically close their eyes and find an open man. After all this time, if Solskjaer hasn't been able to install this type of prescient understanding amongst his squad, it remains unlikely he ever will.

United's paltry +6 goal differential in the Premier League further obscures a side that is not living up to expectations. Their expected goal differential of +1.1 is eighth in the league and is a harbinger of poor results to come. Expected goals is not a descriptive stat, it is a predictive stat. United's results have outstripped their performances, something that usually catches up to a side, even one as talented as Untied. Cristiano Ronaldo might be able to secure United a few goals they don't deserve, but those goals should be leading to a title charge, not a fight to make the top-four.

The reality is, United's results this season have outstripped their performances and their results haven't been much to write home about. Faced with a brutal slate of games, Solskjaer's inadequacies as a manager could doom United's season before Boxing Day.

Their next six Premier League matches are against Liverpool (2nd), Tottenham (5th), Manchester City (3rd), Watford (16th), Chelsea (1st), and Arsenal (9th). Outside of Watford, there are no easy points to pick up. With the way that United has played this season, expecting them to pick up nine points from a possible of 18, would represent a best-case scenario. Liverpool, Chelsea, and City won't relent, and if United are on 23 points after 14 matches, their title chances are all but over.

In the Champions League, his side still has to travel to Atalanta and Villarreal. While United won both of their home fixtures, they required comebacks and late goals to secure three points. Atalanta and Villarreal are both strong sides, but their collection of talent pales in comparison to United's. United's group should have been a cakewalk, but after three matches, it's anyone's guess who will come out on top.

Every time Solskjaer's job has been in question, he has been able to string together a run of results to save his job. However, the expectations this season are different. United has ambitions and the squad to challenge for the Premier League title and make a deep Champions League run.

Solskjaer isn't the manager to lead United back atop English and World football. He lacks the tactical astuteness to elevate his players and instead they elevate him. The best clubs in the world are helmed by managers that can raise the abilities of their preposterously talented squads. United built a title worthy squad, it's about time they get a title-worthy manager to unlock it.

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Congress Votes to Hold Steve Bannon in Contempt of Congress Furthering Partisan Divides
By - Nevin Brown

The House of Representatives has voted to hold Steve Bannon in contempt of Congress and has asked the Justice Department to criminally prosecute him over his refusal to cooperate with the investigation over the January 6th US Capitol attack.

The vote broke down largely along party lines, 229-202, with nine Republicans voting in favor of the resolution. Steve Bannon is viewed as a key witness in the lead-up to the January 6th US Capitol attack.

The legal recourse for Bannon remains dubious. He could be threatened with jail time and fines over his contempt, but coming to a legal verdict could take years, even if successful.
Dr. Nicholas Waddy, associate professor of history at State University of New York at Alfred, believes that Bannon will avoid jail time and fines, saying "It is far more likely that the Department of Justice will decline to prosecute, or that a compromise will be negotiated between the committee and Steve Bannon's lawyers."
Democrats insist the investigation is not political, a stance Republicans in Congress refute, but the fact remains there is an expiration date on getting Bannon to cooperate. Democrats know they need the January 6th Capitol attack investigation to have a resolution before the 2022 midterm elections.
"The political fact is that Steve Bannon is the only thing the Democrats have that most Americans can support. They will do anything to keep this issue alive before the 2022 midterm elections. Remember, the party in power in the White House usually loses 15-20 seats in the House in the first midterm election," Professor David Woodard, Clemson University political scientist, put it.
The political calculus for Democrats, in regards to Bannon, is twofold. First, he could very well be guilty of a crime, and information he possesses could aid their case that President Trump played a role in the January 6th Capitol attack. Second, they believe that keeping Bannon in the news and the January 6th attack at the forefront of voters' minds will aid them in midterm elections.
Dr. Harvey Schantz, professor of political science at the State University of New York at Plattsburgh, summarized a recent Quinnipiac Poll: "[The poll] found that 40 percent of the American public "want to hear more information about what led up to the events" of January 6. But only 22 percent of Republicans were interested in hearing more, as compared to 59 percent of Democrats. Three-quarters of Republicans, 74 percent, felt that there was "enough already known" about the events leading up to "the storming of the U.S. Capitol on January 6."
Americans' views on January 6th, and by extension Steve Bannon, break down along party lines. However, the committee investigating the January 6th Capitol attack have reason to believe that Steve Bannon has information that will allow them to have a complete record of the event.
Bannon was President Trump's chief strategist and Senior Counselor before leaving the post just eight months into Trump's presidency. In 2018, following the release of the book "Fire and Fury," Trump disavowed Bannon over disparaging remarks he made about the President's eldest daughter, Ivanka Trump.
"Steve Bannon has nothing to do with me or my Presidency," Trump said in response to Bannon's comments.
"When [Bannon] was fired, he not only lost his job, he lost his mind," Trump later added.
Even though Trump disavowed him, Bannon remained an ally to the Trump Presidency through his news platform Breitbart News. In Bob Woodward's book "Peril," he reported that following Trump's loss to Joe Biden in the 2020 US presidential election, Bannon once again entered Trump's orbit.
He is quoted as saying "We're going to bury Biden on January 6th," and "to plan for and focus his efforts on January 6."

On January 5th, 2021, the day before the Capitol attack, he said on his podcast, "All hell is going to break loose tomorrow. ... So many people said, 'Man, if I was in a revolution, I would be in Washington.' Well, this is your time in history."
Congress holding Steve Bannon in contempt is just the first step in what could be a long and ugly legal fight. Even if Bannon is forced to testify, he cannot be forced to answer Congress' questions. Steve Bannon is caught between two parties trying to control the narrative of the January 6th Capitol attack.

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US intelligence Agencies Issue Dire Warning Over Climate Change
By - Nevin Brown

In a 27-page report, all 18 US intelligence agencies issued their first-ever collaborative warning over the threat posed by climate change, to the US and to global security.
The report's key takeaways are that climate change will "exacerbate risks to US national security interests as the physical impacts increase and geopolitical tensions mount about how to respond to the challenge." US intelligence agencies also believe that developing countries will face the most severe ramifications of climate change due to their inability to finance necessary safeguards, which could create "additional demands on US diplomatic, economic, humanitarian, and military resources."
The report incorporates climate forecasting to determine when and where security, economic, and military risks could occur. As the Arctic ice cap recedes, shipping routes in the Arctic sea and resources in the region are thought to now be at risk of becoming a hotbed of international contention.
Countries in the Middle East, South Asia, Central Africa, Central America, as well as island nations in the Pacific Ocean are viewed as regions that are highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. For example, the report cites how Pakistan's water supply is highly dependent on glacial melt from regions within India, which could increase tensions between the two nations.
Population migration is another major concern. Large swaths of highly-populated areas across the globe could become uninhabitable, forcing migrations. The effects of climate change have already affected crop yields in central America and are thought to now be playing a significant role in the mass migration of populations to the southern border of the US.
While the report indicates climate change will cause global instability, it also indicates that it could shift the planet's balance of power. The US and the European Union are geographically and financially capable of mitigating the impacts, but China and Russia are in a better position to reap certain benefits from climate change.
Russia will see its arable land and growing season increase and China's large store of important rare-earth metals and production ability of necessary green technologies are thought to potentially aid its economic growth.

While the result of climate inaction is dire on a global scale, the report details how governments, militaries and large multinational corporations could avert the worst of the coming climate-related disasters. The report references the need to accelerate the development of clean energy technology and increase the capture of CO2.
Climate change poses the greatest security risk to humanity, acknowledges the report. Left unchecked, populations will be displaced or die out, economies will be ruined, and tensions escalated. Some developed nations with vast resources at their disposal are in a better position to weather the oncoming disasters, but all will be affected in some way.

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New Facebook Whistleblower Says Company Undermined Efforts to Combat Hate Speech
By - Nevin Brown

Bad news keeps coming for Facebook as a new whistleblower is alleging that the company repeatedly ignored hate speech, misinformation and illicit behavior on the platform in an effort to maximize profit.
In an affidavit submitted on Friday under sworn testimony, a former member of Facebook's Integrity team has shed light on a culture that prioritizes profit over widespread concern regarding the harm the platform is causing.
According to the affidavit, amid controversy surrounding Facebook's impact on the 2016 US presidential election, a social media platform communications official, Tucker Bounds, allegedly said that "it will be a flash in the pan. Some legislators will get pissy. And then in a few weeks, they will move onto something else. Meanwhile we are printing money in the basement, and we are fine."
The whistleblower alleges that Facebook routinely undermined efforts to combat misinformation, hate speech, and problematic content over fear of angering the then-US president, Donald Trump, and the potential financial impact that could ensue.
They were also highly critical of Facebook's avoidance of policing online groups. Some groups which require an invitation to join are essentially hidden from the public eye. These groups, according to reports, have been used to facilitate illicit behavior and foster hate.
Gretchen Peters, a former journalist and leader of the Alliance to Counter Crime Online, said of Facebook that "Zuckerberg and other Facebook executives repeatedly claimed high rates of success in restricting illicit and toxic content — to lawmakers, regulators and investors — when in fact they knew the firm could not remove this content and remain profitable."
The inner workings of Facebook, as expressed by Frances Haugen in her testimony to Congress at the beginning of October, are largely supported by the testimony of the new whistleblower. The new allegations have reportedly been brought to the Securities and Exchange Commission.
Facebook has denied the allegations.

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Arizona Requests Restraining Order to Stop Biden from Enforcing COVID-19 Mandates
By - Adriana Montes

Arizona Attorney General Mark Brnovich filed an amended complaint on Friday in an effort to stop the Biden administration from enforcing a COVID-19 vaccine requirement as a lawsuit filed last month moves forward.
In a statement released Friday, the office claims they are asking the US District Court in Arizona to grant a temporary restraining order, as a critical step to protecting the millions of public university employees, federal employees, and contractors who are being forced to get their first round of the COVID-19 vaccine or be fired.
"Once a vaccine has been administered, it can never be undone," Attorney General Mark Brnovich said in a statement announcing the move. "The COVID-19 vaccine mandate is one of the greatest infringements upon individual liberty, federalism, and the separation of powers by any administration in our country's history."
Brnovich called the vaccine mandates unconstitutional and illegal, adding claims against the federal contractor and federal employee requirements.
On September 9, US President Joe Biden announced several initiatives regarding COVID-19 vaccine mandates targeting private businesses with more than 100 employees, federal employees, and all healthcare providers as a condition of employment — resulting in many unvaccinated federal and contractor employees resigning.
General Brnovich was reportedly the first attorney general to file a lawsuit against this policy in September 2021.
In the amended complaint, Brnovich argues that Biden does not have the legal authority to inflict such COVID-19 vaccine mandates that violate the constitutional rights of federal employees, contractors, and subcontractors. It also alleges that the mandates violate individuals' statutory right to refuse vaccines available under Emergency Use Authorizations (EUA) from the FDA.
Brnovich also made clear in the original complaint that the mandates violate the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the US Constitution by favoring migrants who are not required to get the vaccine after crossing into the US illegally.
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) reported that they only offered COVID-19 vaccines to all individuals detained in its detention centers, but according to ICE's policy, it "cannot force individuals in detentions to be vaccinated."
Today's complaint expands immigration-related claims, including issues of violating federal statutes regarding asylum claims and parole status.

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Dave Chapelle Says He's Open to Meet with Netflix Employees for Dialogue

By - Adriana Montes

Dave Chapelle said he's willing to sit down with Netflix employees who organized a company walkout earlier this week to protest the LGBTQ+ jokes that Chapelle made in his comedy special, "The Closer," and is waiting for members of the trans community to reach out for talks.
The comedian's representative told TMZ Thursday that "Dave would be open to dialogue if folks from Netflix actually reach out to him for a discussion," but that no one from Netflix has approached Chapelle or his team about setting up a meeting.
Chapelle's team allegedly disputed allegations made by transgender woman Ashlee Marie Preston who said Wednesday she invited Chapelle to join protesters at Netflix's Los Angeles headquarters.
Preston, who organized the walkout, made a statement on Twitter last week saying that Chapelle was invited to the table for "transformative dialogue" but did not show up.
Chapelle's team said they're not sure what invoked Preston to make those claims.
Over the course of The Closer, which was released earlier this month, the comic weighs in on issues of racism, discrimination and gender identity while tying in the struggle for Black liberation in comparison to the support received by LGBTQ and feminist movements.
Chapelle sparked immediate backlash, including from Netflix employees who walked off the job on Wednesday, after defending J.K. Rowling against being "cancelled" for saying "gender is a fact," and identifying himself as a "TERF," or a trans-exclusionary radical feminist.
Chapelle's representative told TMZ Dave was no longer going to continue making jokes that inflicted harm to transgenders.
"Dave stands by his art: No more jokes about transgenders until we can all laugh together. The streets are talking and Dave is listening. At some point, when everyone is open, I'm sure the communities will come together."
Netflix CO-CEO Ted Sarandos has supported the company's decision to host the show amid the backlash.
Sarandos reportedly told the Wall Street Journal on Tuesday. "I should have recognized the fact that a group of our employees was really hurting."
"We have articulated to our employees that there are going to be things you don't like," Sarandos said.
"Standup comedy is designed to stir up emotions," he said, adding that "sometimes inclusion and artistic expression bump into each other."
Despite the controversy, "The Closer" is currently in the top 10 most popular Netflix shows in the US.

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Astronomers Witness Explosive Star That Could Help Develop Early Warning System
By - Adriana Montes

For the first time, NASA's Hubble Space Telescope gave astronomers an "unprecedented" view of a star exploding 60 million light-years away and becoming a supernova in "real-time," which may provide a "warning system" for other stars on the brink of death.
Hubble's data, combined with other observations, allowed researchers to understand what was happening to the star just before it died, and examine the material close to the supernova that was ejected from the star in the last year of its life, according to NASA.
The supernova, also known as SN 2020fqv, was discovered in April 2020 by the Zwicky Transient Facility at the Palomar Observatory in San Diego, California. The star's location is said to be Butterfly Galaxies — a pair of members located in the Virgo galaxy cluster.
"We used to talk about supernova work like we were crime scene investigators, where we would show up after the fact and try to figure out what happened to that star," Ryan Foley, an assistant professor at the University of California, said in a statement.
"This is a different situation, because we really know what's going on and we actually see the death in real time."
Based on these observations, the star is expected to have died millions of years ago.
Astronomers were able to get "holistic views" of the event, capturing detailed pictures of the stars in their "final moments" and how they exploded.
"We rarely get to examine this very close-in circumstellar material since it is only visible for a very short time, and we usually don't start observing a supernova until at least a few days after the explosion," added Samaporn Tinyanont, lead author on the study's paper, published in the Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society.
Theoretical models and ultra-rapid observations of the supernova helped the team determine the star's mass to be about 14 to 15 times the mass of the sun before it exploded. In order to understand how massive stars die, it is imperative to understand their mass.
"People use the term 'Rosetta Stone' a lot. But this is the first time we've been able to verify the mass with these three different methods for one supernova, and all of them are consistent," Tinyanont said. "Now we can push forward using these different methods and combining them because there are a lot of other supernovas where we have masses from one method, but not another."
Scientists are using the behavior that they witnessed before this supernova to assist them in finding other stars on the brink of explosion — that tend to be more active and release material.
"This could be a warning system," Foley said. "So if you see a star start to shake around a bit, start acting up, then maybe we should pay more attention and really try to understand what's going on there before it explodes. As we find more and more of these supernovas with this sort of excellent data set, we'll be able to better understand what's happening in the last few years of a star's life."
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VIDEO: Former Marine Reveals How he Disarms Would-Be Robber with a Bag of 'Gatorades and a Snack'
By - Adriana Montes

A Marine veteran reveals how he stopped an attempted robbery with a bag of “Gatorades and a snack” at an Arizona convenience store - the dramatic encounter was caught on video.
US Marine Corps veteran Jason Kelcer was shopping for snacks when three armed muggers stormed the convenience store, while one man was armed with a handgun, according to a Fox News report.
Surveillance footage shows the moment when the armed individual walked toward a customer and pointed the gun toward the cashier. You can see Kelcer thwart the would-be robbers with nothing but a bag containing two bottles of the energy drink Gatorade and a “snack.”
"I turn around to go and leave, kind of walk out, and as I'm turning around, I hear the door kind of open real aggressively," Kelcer reportedly told American Newsroom on Wednesday. "At that point, the ‘spidey senses’ tingled a little bit."
"I saw two other guys with no other weapons and decided that's the guy that I'm going to hit," Kelcer says.
While the gas station clerk was "a little worked up" about the incident; according to Kelcer, he jumped over the counter to chase the suspects.
The former marine said he takes his personal safety and the safety of others "very seriously."
In this act of heroism, Kelcer took gratitude in his military training, in addition to being "mentally prepared" when the attempted robbery occurred.
The armed suspect was arrested and the other two unidentified individuals fled the scene.
No injuries were reported.

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Elon Musk Wins Approval to Dig Citywide Vegas Tunnel System
By - Adriana Montes

A company headed by Tesla CEO Elon Musk was given the greenlight by local officiavls on Wednesday to build a 29-mile tunnel system beneath the Las Vegas strip
Confirmed in a Twitter post, the Clark County Commission unanimously approved a special use permit for The Boring Company’s Vegas Loop. The initial plans to expand the system will consist of drilling an underground motorway that could one day also link the city's international airport and downtown casino mall.
The 51-station tunnel system will allow up to 57,000 passengers to commute underground in Tesla vehicles to and from casinos every hour.
Each of the planned 51 stops will require separate land use permits before being constructed, according to The Las Vegas Journal Review.
The SpaceX founder’s Boring Company recently completed construction of a 1.7-mile network of tunnels that operates a smaller version of the ‘Vegas Loop’ system underneath the Las Vegas Convention Center.
Las Vegas Convention and Tourism Authority chief Steve Hill said it could cost up to $1 billion to build and will be privately funded.

The billionaire entrepreneur has offered the tunnel system as a solution for congested city traffic in thegambling capital of the world.
"Tunnels minimize the usage of valuable surface land and do not conflict with existing transportation systems. A large network of tunnels can alleviate congestion in any city; no matter how large a city grows, more levels of tunnels can be added," the company says on its website.

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Clashes Between Somalian Army, Militants Leave at Least 30 Dead, 70 Injured - Reports

MOSCOW, October 22 (Sputnik) – At least 30 people were killed and 70 were injured in the clashes between the Somalian armed forces and militants of the Ahlu Sunna Wal Jamaa group, previously cooperating with the government in fighting Al-Shabaab terrorists, the Somali Guardian reported.
In addition, the Somalian army managed to capture several militants on the second day of hostilities in the city of Guriel, the outlet reported.
In early October, Somalia's Radio Dalsan reported that the Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jamaa group seized the cities of Guriel and Dusmareb in the central part of the country.
The Somalia-based paramilitary group Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jamaa was formed in 1991, as an opponent to Al-Shabaab. In 2010, Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jamaa agreed to help the Somalian authorities in fighting Al-Shabaab in exchange for the right to manage five ministries. The deal has since fallen apart and the two sides have taken up arms against each other.

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Russia, Ukraine Exchange Remains of Red Army Soldiers Killed in World War II

NOVYE YURKOVICHI, Bryansk Region, Russia, October 22 (Sputnik) – Russian search organizations transferred the remains of four Red Army soldiers killed in World War II to Ukrainian searchers, and the latter handed the remains of 17 Soviet soldiers, who died then in Ukraine, to the Russian side, Sputnik correspondent reported on Sunday.
The ceremony took place at the friendship monument between the Russian Novye Yurkovichi checkpoint and the Ukrainian Senkivka checkpoint. The remains will be buried in the soldiers' home countries with military honors.
The chairman of the public organization Military Archaeology, Yuri Solomatin, said that one of the found soldiers was identified by a piece of photographic film featuring his party membership card, that was surprisingly kept in the warrior's document folder.
Another soldier who died in the Battle of Moscow was identified by the preserved iron name tag.

"The soldier must lie in his ground, return to his family, to his descendants. The soldier must return home irrespective of different political nuances," the Ukrainian organization Military Archaeology spokesman, Andrei Pulin, said, adding that interaction between the sides is "absolutely adequate" and the Ukrainian authorities find it normal.
Ukraine transferred to Russia the remains of soldiers who were from Moscow, Yaroslavl, Kuybyshev (now Samara), Tomsk, Kemerovo, Gorky (now Nizhny Novgorod), Ivanovo, Novgorod regions, the Kabardino-Balkarian, Abkhazian, Bashkir, Komi, and Crimean republics of the USSR.
Russia transferred to Ukraine the remains of soldiers who were from the Kiev, Podolsk, Vinnytsia, and Kharkiv regions.

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About 50 German Neo-Nazis Wielding Machetes, Clubs Detected at Polish Border - Reports

BERLIN, October 22 (Sputnik) – A group of almost 50 German far-right extremists armed with pepper sprays, baseball bats, a bayonet, and machetes was stopped and inspected by police in the federal state of Mecklenburg bordering Poland, Der Spiegel reported on Sunday, citing local law enforcement officers.
The neo-Nazi supporters belong to the right extremist group Third Way. Leaders of the group urged their followers to head to the German-Polish border to stop illegal migration from the East. About 30 extremists, residing in Mecklenburg and other German states, were detected on early Sunday near the village of Gross Gastrose, and the others in the town of Guben and in the Neisse-Damm district. All of them were forced to leave the border regions when police went on patrolling later on Sunday, according to Spiegel.
Earlier this week, German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer told Germany's Bild tabloid that he supports Poland's decision to construct a fence at the Belarusian border to stop illegal migrants. The situation affects Germany and entire Europe too, Seehofer said, adding that hundreds of border guards are patrolling the German-Polish border around the clock.
In the past months, Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania repeatedly complained about a spike in the number of illegal migrants trying to cross the border from Belarus and accused Minsk of facilitating the migration crisis. Poland even declared a state of emergency in its border regions and deployed army and police forces to control the situation. Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said that his country will no longer contain migration flows to the European Union over the lack of money and resources. Minsk has made numerous claims that migrants are forced from Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania into Belarus.

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US Imported Tens of Millions of Used Medical Gloves From Thailand - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) - Tens of millions of already used nitrile medical gloves were imported into the United States from Thailand during the pandemic, CNN reported on Sunday, citing its own investigation.
In Thailand, numerous illegal enterprises sprung up during the pandemic, where migrant laborers have been washing and trying to restore the original appearance of disposable medical gloves given their high global demand, CNN said. The product was then shipped to different countries. A months-long investigation revealed that millions of such counterfeit and second-hand nitrile gloves ended up in the US, according to import records and distributors who bought them.
"There's an enormous amount of bad product coming in, an endless stream of filthy, second-hand and substandard gloves coming into the US of which federal authorities, it seems, are only now beginning to understand the enormous scale," Douglas Stein, an industry expert, was quoted as saying by the broadcaster.
The investigation was prompted by a report by a US company, which had contacted the US Customs and Border Protection and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA)early this year after receiving a shipment of dirty-looking gloves from Thailand. However, the Thai firm responsible for the shipment continued operation until at least July, according to CNN.
In August, the FDA ordered a seizure of shipments of personal protective equipment from a Thai company on the US border, five months after the agency received first complaints from American entrepreneurs.
The FDA told the broadcaster it does not comment on individual cases, but has taken "a number of steps to find and stop those selling unapproved products."
There have been no reports of whether any medical personnel or patients were injured due to the use of contaminated gloves. The US and Thai authorities have launched an investigation into the network, CNN noted. The Thai health regulator has reportedly conducted at least 10 raids in recent months against used gloves traders.

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Ethiopian Foreign Ministry Denies Tigray Airstrikes Forced UN Aid Planes to Return
MOSCOW, October 22 (Sputnik) – The Ethiopian Foreign Ministry denied that airstrikes by the government on Tigray's capital of Mekelle reportedly caused two planes of the United Nations to return to Addis Ababa.
The statement of the country's foreign ministry elaborated on the untrue reports by several media who assumed that the planes with humanitarian aid heading to Mekelle returned to the Ethiopian capital on Friday due to attacks by the state air force on the rebellious city.
"On the same day [as Ethiopian Air Force conducted airstrikes against rebel targets in Tigray], two UN aid planes licensed by the Federal Government of Ethiopia returned to Addis Ababa after being denied permission by local air traffic controllers to land in Mekelle," the foreign ministry said on Facebook.

The ministry highlighted that despite some media reporting that the Ethiopian military targets civilian infrastructure, the air force targets "only communication and military training facilities used by the terrorist group."
On Sunday, the Ethiopian air force attacked the military camp of insurgents in western Tigray, according to national media.
The conflict in Ethiopia flared up in the Tigray region in November of 2020 as the Tigray People's Liberation Front, a major local political force, allegedly attacked a military base prompting the government to launch a counter-operation. Neighboring Eritrea supported the government forces.

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Armorer on Set of 'Rust' Film Was Inexperienced, Caused Problems on Prior Film - Reports

MOSCOW, October 22 (Sputnik) - Hannah Gutierrez-Reed who was in charge of weapons on western film production Rust, on the set of which actor Alec Baldwin accidentally shot director of photography Halyna Hutchins, was "inexperienced and green," The Daily Beast reported on Sunday, citing industry sources.
The 24-year-old has previously raised concerns, the news website has learned, noting that filming on the set of her prior movie, The Old Way with Nicolas Cage, was briefly suspended after she allegedly gave a gun to a teen actress without checking it properly.
"She was a bit careless with the guns, waving it around every now and again," a source, who worked alongside Gutierrez-Reed on the set of The Old Way told the news outlet, noting "she was loading the blanks and doing it in a fashion that we thought was unsafe" couple of times.
A production source from Rust described the armorer as being "inexperienced and green," as guns provided by Gutierrez-Reed were accidentally discharged by other crew members at least twice before Thursday's tragic incident.
The Daily Beast added that there were multiple complaints during the film production, with at least six crew members fed up with the armorer's performance reportedly walking off set hours before Baldwin was handed the prop gun.
The Rust production sources blame assistant director Dave Halls — who handed the gun to Baldwin and said it was safe — for the tragic incident, saying he should have also checked the weapon.
Late on Thursday, Baldwin fired a pistol that was supposed to be loaded with blank cartridges while on set in New Mexico. The film director received a shooting injury but survived, while the 42-year-old camera operator succumbed to her injury after she was airlifted to a hospital in Albuquerque.
Baldwin said in a statement on Friday that he was fully cooperating with law enforcement's investigation into the incident.

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Eleven Picasso Masterpieces Fetch Nearly $109Mln at Sotheby's Las Vegas Auction

MOSCOW, October 22 (Sputnik) - Sotheby's has sold 11 paintings by Pablo Picasso for $108.8 million in Las Vegas ahead of what would have been the Spanish painter's 140th birthday, according to the auction house's website.
The first-of-its-kind auction included Picasso's works from the MGM Resorts Fine Art Collection that had been on display for years in Bellagio Hotel's Michelin-starred Picasso restaurant in Las Vegas.
"Woman with a red-orange cap", one of the last portraits of his beloved muse Marie-Therese Walter, fetched the highest price of some $40.5 million after a starting price was estimated at $20-30 million.

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US Turned Standard Procedure of Issuing Visas Into 'Real Hell' - Russian Foreign Ministry

MOSCOW, October 22 (Sputnik) - The United States has turned the standard technical procedure for issuing visas into "real hell" in violation of its own ideals of freedom, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Sunday, commenting on Washington's decision to include Russians into the category of "homeless nationalities."
"Mockery on the verge of sadism" is how the spokeswoman described the US Department of State's decision to include Russian citizens applying for an American visa to the Homeless Nationalities category. "Homeless" applicants are those referred to neighboring countries when their own state does not have a US consular mission, or the political situation there is so unstable that it does not allow American diplomats to process visa applications.
Apart from Russia, the list includes nine other countries, including Cuba, Iran, and Syria.
Over the weekend, the US Department of State included Russian citizens applying for an American visa to the Homeless Nationalities category, which includes applicants from countries where the US does not have a consular mission, or the political situation is so unstable that it does not allow American diplomats to process visa applications. Such applicants are assigned to the consulate of neighboring countries.
In total, this list includes 10 states, including Somalia, Venezuela, Syria and Iran. Now, Russians can apply for an American visa in Warsaw.
"I saw that the State Department has included Russians who are ready to apply for a visa to the United States into the category of 'homeless nationalities' ... They have turned a technical procedure that is banal for the 21st century into real hell. It is mockery on the verge of sadism," Zakharova wrote on Telegram.

The spokeswoman noted that something important broke down in the US State Department long ago, and it cannot be readily fixed.
"For many years, American diplomats were destroying the system of rendering consular services in Russia that they did not create in the first place. They closed down consulates, reduced the number of consular staff, experimented with how our symmetrical response differs from the mirror one. Didn't it occur to any of the apologists of this dirty strategy that they have been destroying their own ideals of freedom?" Zakharova said.
Such actions not only affect tourism and cultural exchange, but also violate the right of people to freedom of movement and disrupt relations within multinational families, the spokeswoman added.
Since mid-May, the US Embassy in Moscow has suspended all non-diplomatic non-immigrant visa services in response to a decision by the Russian authorities to ban the hiring of local and foreign personnel. The provision of consular services by American diplomats at the consulates in Yekaterinburg and Vladivostok has also been suspended.

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Taliban Not Participating in Ministerial Meeting of Nations Bordering Afghanistan- Reports

KABUL, October 22 (Sputnik) – The Taliban (terrorist organization outlawed in Russia) will not take part in a meeting involving foreign ministers of the countries neighboring Afghanistan, Zabihullah Mujahid, the Taliban spokesman and the Afghan deputy culture and information minister, said, as cited by the national Ariana News broadcaster.
At the same time, Mujahid reportedly called the summit "good" for Afghanistan.
On Wednesday, Khairullah Khairkhwa, the acting minister of culture and information of the Afghan interim government, told Sputnik that the Taliban had not decided yet whether to participate in the summit or not.
The meeting will take place next Wednesday in Iran's capital of Tehran, according to Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh.
In August, the Taliban stepped up their offensive on the government forces of Afghanistan. The militants announced the war was over after they entered Kabul on August 15. In early September, the Taliban declared the interim all-male government with Hasan Akhund at the helm who had previously served as a foreign minister in the first Taliban government.

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Sudanese Police Fire Tear Gas at Protesters Demanding Transfer of Power to Civilian Gov't

KHARTOUM, October 22 (Sputnik) - Police have deployed tear gas against demonstrators demanding a transfer of power from the military to the civilian government in the Sudanese capital, a Sputnik correspondent reported on Sunday.
Protesters had gathered near the presidential palace, blocking several streets in Khartoum downtown.
On Thursday, several thousand demonstrators held protests in the cities of Khartoum, Omdurman, Nyala, Ed Dueim and others, shouting the slogan "Hand over power, Burhan" addressing the head of the council, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan.
The term of the eleven-member transitional Sovereign Council of Sudan expires next month. After that, the military council is to transfer power to the civilian government.
Sudan saw a military coup in April 2019, which was prompted by popular protests amid a deep economic crisis and a steep decline in living standards. As a result, President Omar Hassan al-Bashir, who ruled for 30 years, was ousted and later imprisoned.
Later that year, the head of the transitional military council of Sudan, al-Burhan, took office as head of the country's Sovereignty Council, which promised to hand over power to the civilian authorities after a transitional period.

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Sudan Blocks Oil Tankers From Docking Over Protests – Energy Minister

CAIRO, October 22 (Sputnik) – The Sudanese authorities temporarily barred oil tankers from coming to the country, as the vessels that arrived earlier can not be discharged over closed by protesters Eastern ports, Energy Minister Gadein Ali Obeid told the Middle-Eastern Asharq broadcaster on Sunday.
The country's largest port, Port Sudan, an airport, and a railway station have been blocked by the protesters from the high council of the Beja tribes since late September. They also blocked the road between the capital of Khartoum and Port-Sudan, and the oil pipeline connecting Khartoum and the town of Haiya is suspended.
"Sudan decided to suspend the flow of ships carrying oil into the territorial waters to avert fines," the minister said, adding that his country is running out of strategic oil supplies, as Port Sudan is closed by protesters. Moreover, the oil tankers that already arrived can not be discharged, leading to Sudan's growing debts.
The rebels demand to amend the peace treaty of Juba, claiming their interests allegedly were not respected. On Saturday, the protesters threatened to separate the East of the country if their requirements are not met.
The peace agreement between the transitional government of Sudan and armed groups was signed in the capital of South Sudan, Juba in October 2020. The document entails sharing power and natural resources with former militants who also must be included in the national army and federal and local authorities.

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Putin to Take Part in G20, ASEAN, East Asia Summits Next Week - Reports

PETROPAVLOVSK-KAMCHATSKIY, Russia, October 22 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladimir Putin will participate in several international summits next week, according to the Rossiya 1 broadcaster's "Moscow. Kremlin. Putin" TV program.
The agenda includes high-level meetings of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the East Asia summit. Putin will also virtually partake in the G20 summit.
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Putin Calls Meeting With Israel's Bennet Meaningful, Productive
PETROPAVLOVSK-KAMCHATSKIY, Russia, October 24 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladimir Putin has called the recent meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennet meaningful and productive.
The meeting took place on Friday when the Israeli leader was on his first official visit to Russia.
"Thank you very much, I was very glad. I think it was a very meaningful, productive meeting," Putin told Bennet following the talks, as broadcast by the Rossiya 1 TV channel on Sunday.
The Russian leader also advised the Israeli prime minister to come to Sochi to have a rest, noting that this is a modern resort city.

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Russian Chief Investigator Orders More Measures in Businessman Ismailov Extradition Case

MOSCOW, October 22 (Sputnik) - Russian Investigative Committee head Alexander Bastrykin has ordered to take additional measures in the criminal case against businessman Telman Ismailov for his extradition from Montenegro, where he received asylum, the committee said on Sunday.
The ex-owner of the Moscow-based Cherkizovsky market was detained in Podgorica on October 1 on an arrest warrant issued by Russia. The businessman, however, was released from the extradition detention facility earlier this week and granted political asylum, which hampered his extradition to Russia.
"The head of the Russian Investigative Committee instructed the [committee's] international legal department... together with the Prosecutor General's Office and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to take additional measures to extradite him to Russia for especially grave crimes," the authority said in a statement.
The committee added that at the moment, it has "not yet received official documents from the competent authorities of Montenegro on the issue of Ismailov's extradition."

The Russian investigation put Ismailov on the international wanted list back in 2017 in connection with the establishment of his involvement in the murder of two entrepreneurs and arms trafficking. He faces up to 13 years in prison in Russia.

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Kremlin Says Moscow's Efforts for Cooperation With NATO Were Fruitless

PETROPAVLOVSK-KAMCHATSKIY, Russia, October 22 (Sputnik) - Russia has always advocated the development of relations with NATO despite the alliance's aggression, but all of Moscow's efforts for cooperation have been in vain, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Sunday, commenting on Moscow's move to suspend the work of its mission to the bloc.
"It is also important to note here that despite the aggressiveness of this bloc, Russia has always stood for the development of relations. Only now, when it became obvious that all our efforts were in vain, we just made official what was real," Peskov told the Rossiya 1 broadcaster.
NATO considers Russia to be its adversary, therefore, there is nothing wrong with suspending relations with the organization, the official added.
"Nothing terrible will happen if... against the background of aggravation of aggressiveness, against the background of such declarations that the main task is to restrain us, we simply abandon these relations," he added.

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Reactor at Japan's Nuclear Power Plant Suspended Over Counter-Terrorism Demands - Reports

TOKYO, October 22 (Sputnik) – The third reactor at Japan's Mihama nuclear power plant was suspended by the operator, the Kansai Electric Power company, over inability to enhance counter-terrorism infrastructure in time, the Japanese public broadcaster NHK reported on Sunday.
All the required measures to strengthen security are expected to be completed in September 2022, and the reactor might resume operations in mid-October of that year, the outlet said, citing the operator.
The reactor was restarted on June 23, 2021, after more than 40 years of work. The law limits the maximum lifespan of reactors to 40 years, but if additional requirements are met, a reactor can work more. Mihama's third reactor was stopped for a decade after the Fukushima earthquake and tsunami, which in 2011 claimed over 15,000 lives, displaced thousands of people and caused a meltdown at the power plant.

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German Interior Minister Says Poland's Choice to Toughen Control on Belarus Border Legal

BERLIN, October 22 (Sputnik) - German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer in an interview with the German tabloid Bild, said that Poland's decision to build a fence on their border with Belarus amid the ongoing illegal migration crisis was legal.
"In the spirit of the European idea, I am convinced that we must know who is arriving [to our country]. It is legal that we strive to protect our external borders in such a way, so that it will be impossible to cross them unnoticed," the lawmaker said referring to Poland's actions as quoted by the newspaper.
On October 14, Poland's lower house passed a bill that will allow the country to erect a fence at their border with Belarus in an attempt to stop the influx of illegal migrants trying to enter the country.
Seehofer noted that the situation with the illegal migration is so serious that it exerts strong pressure not just on Germany, but on the whole of Europe. The German-Polish border, for instance, is patrolled by hundreds of border guards around the clock, and if necessary their number will be increased.
"Ideally, there should be no border control at all within Europe. But this can only be possible if external borders will be protected," Seehofer added.
On October 20, Seehofer confirmed his proposal that Germany and Poland arrange joint border patrols to control the numbers of refugees arriving to the European Union through Belarus.
In August, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said EU sanctions left Minsk with no resources to restrain the flow of migrants to the EU any longer. Poland, as well as neighboring Lithuania and Latvia, have reported an increase in illegal crossing attempts. They accuse Belarus of encouraging migration, which Minsk denies.
On October 22, a number of EU leaders confirmed their readiness to further adopt personal sanctions against Belarus over the influx of migrants.

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Moscow Says Cannot Prevent Ukraine From Joining NATO But Can Minimize Its Consequences

PETROPAVLOVSK-KAMCHATSKIY, Russia, October 22 (Sputnik) - Russia cannot prevent Ukraine from joining NATO, but it is possible to minimize the consequences of such steps, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Sunday.
"We cannot prevent it. It is impossible. But we can minimize the consequences of such steps for our country. I have no doubt that should the rapprochement between Ukraine and NATO continue, everything that is necessary will be done in Russia," Peskov told the Rossiya 1 broadcaster.

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Kremlin Says Russia, US Understand Next Putin-Biden Summit Should Be Held Soon
PETROPAVLOVSK-KAMCHATSKIY, Russia, October 22 (Sputnik) - There is an understanding that Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President Joe Biden should meet in the foreseeable future, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Sunday.
"After the presidents make a decision, we will inform you. So far, let us not get ahead of things. There is an understanding that the next high-level contact should take place in the foreseeable future. Accordingly, now it will be implemented," Peskov told the Rossiya 1 broadcaster.

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Football Star Beckham to Become Face of Qatar World Cup in $206Mln Deal - Reports

MOSCOW, October 22 (Sputnik) - Former captain of England's national football team David Beckham is set to become the face of the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar, in a deal worth150 million pounds ($206.4 million), The Sun newspaper reported on Sunday.
The 46-year-old has agreed to become the Middle Eastern nation's ambassador, making 15 million pounds per year over the next decade under the deal, the tabloid reported.
The World Cup 2022 in Qatar has been shrouded by controversy since the beginning due to concerns over alleged human rights violations in the country's construction sites, as well as Qatar's attitude towards women and the LGBT community. The football star, however, was assured that fans in Qatar would be safe and allowed to display rainbow flags in stadiums, according to The Sun
Before signing the multi-million contract, the ex-footballer consulted with his wife, Victoria, the newspaper said.
Qatar has become the first Arab nation to host a football world cup. The tournament will be held from November 21 to December 18, 2022.

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LPR's People's Militia Says Ukraine Dispatched Heavy Armament to Donbas

LUHANSK, October 22 (Sputnik) – The People's Militia of the self-proclaimed Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) said on Sunday that 12 2A36 Giatsint-B field guns arrived at theKiev-controlled Rubizhne station in Donbas.

The LPR's intelligence service has recently revealed 17 military equipment items during a week in localities under Kiev's control near the contact line, according to the People's Militia.
"The arrival of 12 towed 2A36 Giatsint-B howitzers at the railway station in the Rubizhne locality has been detected," a spokesperson of the People's Militia told reporters.
The deployment of Ukraine's armament and armored vehicles in inhabited localities contradicts the truce measures adopted by both sides, the official added.
"The units of the People's Militia constantly monitor the enemy strictly abiding by the terms of the existing truce and are ready to quickly react to the changes of the environment upon the order of the command," the spokesperson noted.
In summer 2020, additional measures to ensure ceasefire entered into force in Donbas. The measures prohibit fire, armament deployment in and around inhabited localities, offensive operations and acts of sabotage. Additionally, the measures entail disciplinary liability for breaching the ceasefire, which is in effect till the full resolution of the conflict.
The skirmishes in the region continue periodically even after the Minsk contact group adopted truce agreements to de-escalate the conflict.

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Indian Prime Minister to Visit Italy, UK for G-20, COP-26 Summits - Foreign Ministry

NEW DELHI, October 22 (Sputnik) - India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Italy to attend the G-20 Summit and the United Kingdom for the World Leaders' Summit of COP-26, the country's Ministry of External Affairs said in a press release.
"Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi will be traveling to Rome, Italy and Glasgow, the United Kingdom from 29 October 2021 to 12 November 2021 to attend the 16th G-20 Summit and the World Leaders' Summit of COP-26 respectively," the ministry's statement said.
Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi invited Modi to participate at the G-20 Summit from 30 to 31 of October. The summit will also be attended by leaders of G-20 member states, the European Union and other invited countries and International Organizations.
"Prime Minister will, thereafter, travel to Glasgow to attend the World Leader's Summit of the 26th Conference of Parties (COP-26) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), at the invitation of the Prime Minister of the UK, H.E. Mr. Boris Johnson," the statement added.
Modi's stay in Glasgow is expected to last from 31 October until 12 November. The World Leaders' Summit of COP-26 will be held on November 1 and 2 and will be attended by leaders and governments from over 120 countries.
The prime minister is expected to participate in a number of bilateral meetings at the sidelines of G-20 and COP-26, the statement noted.

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Turkish Opposition Says Erdogan's Move to Expel 10 Envoys Linked to Domestic Agenda

TANKARA, October 22 (Sputnik) - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's decision to declare personae non grata ambassadors of 10 countries that have called on Ankara to release human rights activist Osman Kavala is designed to justify Turkey's economic crisis, main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu said on Sunday.
On Tuesday, the embassies of Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden and the US made a joint appeal to release Kavala after four years under arrest. In response, the Turkish foreign minister summoned the 10 ambassadors and Erdogan threatened to expel them from the country over the violation of the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.
"The person who quickly dragged the country into the abyss gave the order to declare 10 ambassadors persona non grata. I can clearly say that the reason for these actions is not to protect national interests, but to create artificial excuses for the collapse of the economy that he destroyed," Kilicdaroglu tweeted.
On Thursday, the Central Bank of Turkey slashed a key interest rate by 2 percentage points to 16% against the backdrop of record plunging of the Turkish lira. After that, the national currency hit a new historic low of 9.64 per 1 US dollar on Friday.

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Death Toll From Gas Blast in Northeastern China Rises to 5 With 47 Injured - Reports

MOSCOW, October 22 (Sputnik) - The death toll from a gas explosion that occurred at a restaurant in the city of Shenyang in China's northeastern province of Liaoning rose to five while the number of injured rose to 47, China's Global Times reported.
The blast took place on Thursday morning and affected 99 buildings, 1,858 households and 93 stores. Currently, the affected buildings are being inspected, 86 of them were deemed safe to live in. Authorities vowed to compensate for all damages, the outlet reported.
Reports on Thursday indicated that at least one person died and 33 were injured in the incident. The cause of the blast is yet to be established, but current repair of the city's gas pipeline systems may be involved, the Global Times reported.

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Russian Military Base in Tajikistan to Add 30 New Tanks to Fleet Before End of Year

DUSHANBE, October 22 (Sputnik) – The Russian 201st Military Base in Tajikistan will replace its old combat vehicles with 30 upgraded T-72B3M tanks before the end of this year, the head of the unit's staff, Col. Evgeny Okhrimenko, said on Sunday.
"Currently, the military base is rearming the units with modern military and special equipment. Before the end of the year, 30 modern T-72B3M tanks with advanced combat specifications are planned to arrive to replace combat vehicles of earlier modifications," Okhrimenko told reporters.
The commander added that the motor rifle divisions of the base have recently received a batch of advanced BMP-2 infantry fighting vehicles, cutting-edge Verba man-portable infrared homing surface-to-air missiles, rocket-propelled infantry flamethrowers of longer range and higher power, Kornet anti-tank guided missiles, 12.7mm ASVK-M Kord sniper rifles, AK-12 rifles, Linza sanitary armored cars, and the equipment of rear and technical services.
Okhrimenko noted that the unit personnel master the new equipment during exercises and learn effective military operations using the experience of the latest conflicts.
On Saturday, Col. Gen. Alexander Lapin, the commander of Russia's Central Military District, said that the large-scale CSTO strategic military exercise Boyevoe Bratstvo-2021 (Combat Brotherhood) in Tajikistan, is a response to the deteriorated security situation in Afghanistan governed by the Taliban (banned in Russia as a terrorist organization).

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Ex-Afghan Lawmaker Says 8 Children Died of Hunger in Minority-Populated Western Kabul

MOSCOW, October 22 (Sputnik) - Eight children have died of hunger in western Kabul mainly populated by the Hazara minority, former Afghan lawmaker Haji Mohammad Mohaqeq said on Sunday.
"Poverty and hunger have killed eight children in western Kabul," Mohaqeq wrote on Facebook.
The Taliban (banned in Russia as a terrorist organization) do not ensure the adequate living standard for the people after coming to power, the politician added, calling on the international community to help Hazaras and Shia people in Afghanistan.
Hazara people, who practice Shia Islam, make up 9% of Afghanistan's 40 million-strong population. According to Amnesty International, they have been severely persecuted by the Taliban in the past.
International organizations, chief among them the UN, have been sounding the alarm over the deterioration of living conditions in Afghanistan since the Taliban swept to power in mid-August. Large amounts of international aid ceased and Afghan foreign assets were frozen, drying up the flow of cash and supplies to the country and leaving the economy on the precipice.

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Pakistan Aiding Taliban in Fight With IS-K - Reports

MOSCOW, October 22 (Sputnik) - Pakistan is providing aid to the Taliban (terrorist movement, banned in Russia) in the fight against the Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K, banned in Russia) terror group, two Taliban leaders told the Washington Post.
Pakistan uses unofficial intelligence channels to provide the Taliban with information on IS-K as well as observing online activity and telephone communication, Taliban sources told the newspaper.
"Pakistan is our brother and they support us in many ways, including sharing information and intelligence [about the IS-K]. If the United States and the rest of the world shares information with us we could defeat Daesh [IS] in just days," a senior Taliban leader said as quoted by the Washington Post.
On the other hand, Taliban spokesman Bilal Karimi noted that the IS-K movement is not a serious threat to Afghanistan and the country does not need outside help to fight it.
At the same time, a Pakistani official told the newspaper that the cooperation between the two sides was not on any official level.
IS-K has proved a security challenge for the Taliban, who are eager to project an image of stability since seizing power in August. Earlier this month, IS-K was implicated in a massive explosion at a mosque in the city of Kandahar that took the lives of over 60 people.

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China Places Satellite Into Orbit to Test Debris Mitigation Technologies - Space Agency

BEIJING, October 22 (Sputnik) - China has successfully placed Shijian-20 satellite into orbit to test and verify space debris mitigation technologies, the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC) said on Sunday.
The satellite was launched aboard a Long March 3B carrier rocket at 9:27 a.m. local time (01:27 GMT) from the Xichang spaceport in China's southwestern province of Sichuan.
The satellite entered the specified orbit within hours and the launch was recognized successful.
This was the 393rd mission for the Long March carrier rocket family.

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Mexican Army Detains 'Priority Target' in 2019 Massacre of Mormon Family - State Attorney

MEXICO CITY, October 22 (Sputnik) - Mexico's army detained a 'priority target' on suspicion of involvement in the murder of the nine members of the US LeBaron Mormon community in November 2019, Chihuahua State Attorney General Roberto Fierro said.

"We can confirm that among the detainees is Francisco Javier 'A', nicknamed 'El Jaguar', the priority target in the massacre of the LeBaron family in Sonora," Fierro said as quoted by newspaper El Debate.
On Saturday morning, officials from the Ministry of Defense clashed with a criminal gang in the municipality of Madera in the Mexican state of Chihuahua.
As a result of the shootout, four people were detained, one of whom was recognized as the alleged initiator of the attack on the LeBaron and Langford families in Bavispe, Sonora in 2019, Fierro added.
On November 4, 2019, 17 members of the LeBaron and Langford families, who were part of the Mormon community that came to Mexico from the US decades ago, were heading to a wedding in a three-car caravan when they were ambushed by unknown gunmen. Nine members of the LeBaron Mormon family, including six children, were massacred in the shooting.

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Russia Urges UN Mission to Ensure Security of Staff in Russian Office in Pristina

MOSCOW, October 22 (Sputnik) – Russia calls on the United Nations Mission in Kosovo to guarantee security for the employees in the Russian office in Pristina, Maria Zakharova, the Russian Foreign Ministry's spokeswoman, said on Saturday.
On Friday, the president of the self-proclaimed republic of Kosovo, Vjosa Osmani, announced that Pristina will expel two Russian diplomats based in the city.
"We call on the UN Mission in Kosovo and the International forces in Kosovo within their power according to the resolution 1244 to ensure reliable security and necessary conditions for the work of the personnel of the Russian Chancellery in Pristina. We are waiting for the pursuant written guarantees from the UN administration," Zakharova said in a statement.

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Bolivia's President Likely to Visit Russia in 2022 – Foreign Minister to Sputnik

MOSCOW, October 22 (Sputnik) – Bolivian President Luis Arce is highly likely to pay an official visit to Russia next year, Bolivian Foreign Minister Rogelio Mayta told Sputnik on Saturday.
"Luis Arce wants to visit Russia in the context of our relations; this is the country we want to strengthen our ties with… [There is] a very high likelihood [of Arce's visit to Moscow in 2022 exists]" Mayta said.
The Bolivian foreign minister noted that the bilateral relations have been rather positive throughout this year. Talks between the presidents and the foreign ministers have taken place, and the countries have an extensive common agenda.

"Russia and Bolivia stand for multilateralism in settling serious issues of mankind. Regarding the pandemic, we agree with the position on the necessity to cancel patents [for vaccines] and to transfer technologies as the best way to overcome the pandemic," Mayta added.
On Friday, Mayta announced that Bolivians prefer the Russian-made Sputnik V over any other COVID-19 vaccines, even though different choices are now available in Bolivia.

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Russia-Turkey Friendship Park Opens in Antalya – Local Authorities

ANKARA, October 22 (Sputnik) – An opening ceremony of a park dedicated to Russian-Turkish friendship took place on Saturday in the district of Muratpasa of the southern Turkish city of Antalya, the head of the district, Umit Uysal, said.
"In the heart of Antalya, the tourism capital, we have opened the park of Russian-Turkish friendship, where a bust of Leo Tolstoy is installed – an immortal name of the world literature! Congratulations to our district, Muratpasa!" Uysal tweeted.
Antalya is home to about 95,000 foreigners from 90 countries including around 20,000 Russians, according to Uysal.
The park spans 3,000 square meters (32,291.7 square feet) in the Caglayan quarter. The Leo Tolstoy bust was gifted to Muratpasa by the Russian Association of International Cooperation, the Turkish Friendship Association, and the Dialogue of Cultures – United World charity fund.

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Greek Police Says 7 Officers Injured in Chasing Car Thieves in Athens, One Offender Dead

ATHENS, October 22 (Sputnik) – Suspected car thieves rammed five police motorcycles and injured seven police officers during a chase in Athens, with one assailant killed in the process, the Greek police said.
The incident occurred on late Friday in southern Athens. Police officers decided to inspect a vehicle with a broken window and three people inside. However, the car took off immediately and the police began a hot pursuit.
"Trying to hide, the criminals rammed five police motorcycles, injured seven police officers. The police used guns to stop the car, which resulted in deadly injuries of the driver, and one of the passengers has been hospitalized and is now getting treatment; his life is now not in danger. The third person in the car has escaped and is now wanted," the police said.
The car turned out to have been stolen.

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Moldova Owes Russia $709Mln for Gas, Supplies Might Stop Without New Contract – Gazprom

MOSCOW, October 22 (Sputnik) – A complex situation connected with Russian gas supplies to Moldova emerged only due to the authorities of the republic, and the debt for the gas supplies equals to $433 million, Gazprom spokesman Sergey Kupriyanov said on Saturday.
"Currently, a complicated situation related to the Russian gas supplies to Moldova has emerged. Blame for it is completely on the Moldovan authorities. It is about the crisis of non-payment for Russian gas by Moldova," Kupriyanov said.
The official added that Moldova did not pay Russia for the gas supplied, leading to rise in debt.
"At the moment, the debt itself is $443 million, and given the delays in payments, the total debt is $709 million. Moldovan officials do not want to acknowledge the amount of the debt. Moldovan officials also do not like the gas price, though the pricing here is clear and transparent," Kupriyanov noted.
However, Gazprom is ready to extend the contract with Moldova provided the country pays out the debt, Kupriyanov said.

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Ukrainian Lawmaker Says Moldova Asked Kiev for Gas Supplies Amid Critical Energy Situation

KIEV, October 22 (Sputnik) - Moldova has appealed to Ukraine, asking to supply 15 million cubic meters of gas, amid an energy shortage, senior Ukrainian lawmaker Andriy Gerus said on Saturday.
Earlier in the day, Moldovan Deputy Prime Minister Andrei Spinu said that Moscow assured Chisinau of additional gas supplies in October, as the country is on the verge of an energy crisis.
"Indeed, the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine discussed yesterday gas assistance to Moldova. Now, Moldova is in difficult negotiations with Gazprom on the extension of the contract... the country has a physical shortage of gas, in particular, for critical infrastructure facilities. Moldova has turned to Ukraine with a request to provide about 15 million cubic meters of gas," Gerus wrote on Facebook.
Last week, the Moldovan government declared an "alarm mode" over gas shortages, with electricity disruptions, which could serve as a prelude to a full-blown state of emergency.
According to Chisinau, the country received only 67% of the necessary gas volume this month.
Russian energy giant Gazprom and Moldova are currently negotiating a new long-term deal.
Earlier this week, media reported, citing a source close to the talks, that Russia offered Moldova a fair market price of gas with an additional discount of 25% provided that Chisinau will pay its $700 million debt, but Chisinau insisted on halving the price.

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Tokyo Says Self-Defense Forces Fighters Scrambled Over Chinese Chopper Takeoff Near Danjo

TOKYO, October 22 (Sputnik) - Fighter jets of the Japanese Air Self-Defense Force were scrambled in response to the takeoff of a Chinese helicopter from the deck of a warship, which, along with other Chinese and Russian warships, was passing near the Danjo Islands, the Japanese defense ministry said on Saturday.
According to the ministry, 10 Chinese and Russian warships sailed through the Osumi Strait and at around 10 a.m local time (01:00 GMT) the Japanese military registered that a helicopter took off and landed from the deck of a Chinese destroyer 130 kilometers (81 miles) south of the Danjo Islands.
"In connection with the takeoff and landing of the... helicopter, the fighters were scrambled on alarm," the ministry says in a statement.
The ministry noted it was the same warship, from the deck of which a helicopter took off on Thursday in the Izu archipelago area.
Earlier on Saturday, the Russian defense ministry said that Russian and Chinese warships conducted the first joint patrol in the Pacific Ocean from October 17-23. The vessels traversed the Tsugaru Strait in the Sea of Japan. Since the strait between Japan's Honshu and Hokkaido islands is international, the passage of foreign ships, including military ones, is permitted by international law.

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Latvia Might Cancel Drug Subsidies for Citizens Refusing COVID-19 Vaccination – Reports

RIGA, October 22 (Sputnik) – Latvian Finance Minister Janis Reirs proposed to consider cutting off state compensation payments for drugs for citizens who refuse COVID-19 vaccination.
"Maybe, the health ministry will finally propose something to limit those who have not been vaccinated? For example, we have approved 40 million euros [$46.6 million] for payrolls for medical workers, only due to COVID-19. And I would like to say that many people receive, for example, compensated medicines, but they [these people] have not been vaccinated. But, maybe, we need this money to treat them, but not for compensation mechanisms?" Reirs said, the LSM news outlet reported.
Over 700,000 Latvians are entitled to receive such government support, which costs the Baltic state over 183 million euros annually, according to the media.

Patient organizations and associations of people with special needs in Latvia agree on the necessity of boosting motivation to get vaccinated. However, deprivation of compensated drugs would be inhuman, according to activists.
On Thursday, COVID-19 related lockdown began in Latvia, which will be in effect till November 15. The containment measure will cost the country's economy about 200 million euros, Reirs estimated on Tuesday.

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Saudi Arabia Announces New Environmental Initiatives to Tackle Climate Change- State Media

CAIRO, October 22 (Sputnik) - Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman announced new initiatives to preserve the environment and address climate change at the inaugural edition of the annual forum of the Saudi Green Initiative in Riyadh, the official Saudi Press Agency reported on Saturday.
In an opening speech, the crown prince said that Saudi Arabia would plant more than 450 million trees and rehabilitate 8 million hectares (19.8 million acres) of degraded lands as part of the government's efforts.
The crown prince also unveiled a roadmap to contribute to achieving the ambitious goals of the Saudi Green Initiative, including reducing carbon emissions by 278 million tonnes annually by 2030.
Additionally, the crown prince announced his nation's intention to join a number of climate organizations, such as the Global Oceans Alliance, the Alliance to Eliminate Plastic Wastes in Oceans and Beaches, the Sports for Climate Action Agreement, in addition to creating a global center for sustainable tourism and a non-profit foundation to explore the seas and oceans.

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Russia Ready to Repel Any Sabotage Act From Ukraine – Lawmaker From Crimea

SIMFEROPOL, Russia, October 22 (Sputnik) – Russia is interested in friendly relations with Ukraine, but if its authorities attempt any acts of sabotage, they will be countered swiftly, Mikhail Sheremet, Crimea's representative in Russia's lower house of parliament, told Sputnik on Saturday.
On Friday, Oleksiy Arestovich, an advisor to the head of the President of Ukraine's office, said that Ukraine will resort to sabotage activities in Russia if Moscow demonstrates "large-scale aggression." The Ukrainian official cited severing electricity and gas pipelines in Russia when talking about the measures to take in case a "big war" begins.
"Russia has always been interested in good neighborly relations with Ukraine and sought them, viewing the Ukrainians as the fraternal people. But the nationalists who came to power in

Ukraine did not only sell their country to please overseas masters, but also try to turn the people against Russia. But we are warning that if the Ukrainian authorities attempt any sabotage raids, they will be met with a resounding rebuff," Sheremet said.
He went on to say that attempts to unleash a "big war" would quickly be scuppered.
"It is very sad that in Ukraine, those came to power, who make provocations and try to wave lighted matched near the gunpowder barrel. The Ukrainian people deserve a better future, and this future is possible only in friendship and together with Russia," Sheremet concluded.
On Thursday, Arestovich announced that Ukraine is ready for accession to NATO and will add "immense might" to the alliance.

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Shoigu Says German Counterpart Must Know Results of Amassing Troops Near Russian Border

MOSCOW, October 22 (Sputnik) - German Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer must know very well what the pulling troops to Russian borders leads to, Sergei Shoigu said on Saturday, commenting on the counterpart's recent call on NATO to deter Russia.
Earlier this week NATO defense ministers adopted a new plan to protect member states from alleged threat from Russia. Commenting on the plan, the German minister called it "the way of deterrence," noting it is due to Russia's "current behavior."
"Against the backdrop of calls for military containment of Russia, NATO is consistently pulling forces to our borders. The German defense minister must know well how this once ended for Germany and Europe," Shoigu said.
The minister noted that security in Europe can only be integral, without infringing on Russia's interests.
"But it is NATO that is not ready today for an equal dialogue. Moreover, NATO's plan to 'deter' Afghanistan enged up in a catastrophe, with which the entire world is dealing now," he added.

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Merkel Says Always Felt 'Significant Differences' of Opinions With Russian President

BERLIN, October 22 (Sputnik) - Outgoing German Chancellor Angela Merkel said in an interview with the Suddeutsche Zeitung newspaper that "significant differences" had persisted between her and Russian President Vladimir Putin since his 2001 speech in the Bundestag.
"It has always been clear to me, even when he spoke in the Bundestag in 2001, that there are significant differences between us. For the Russian President, the collapse of the Soviet Union is a tragic event, we, on the contrary, felt the joy of the end of the Cold War, the joy of German

and European unity," Merkel said when asked if she considered it possible to build a relationship of trust with Putin when taking office in 2005.
The chancellor, however, noted that she could not imagine when taking office that "he would annex Crimea" and a military confrontation would break out in eastern Ukraine, "almost at the border of the European Union."
Tensions between Russia and the West have been simmering since 2014, when a conflict broke out in eastern Ukraine and Crimea rejoined with Russia. Neither Kiev nor Western countries recognized the legitimacy of the reunification, accusing Russia of meddling in Ukraine's affairs. Moscow has repeatedly denied any interference, and insisted that the Crimean referendum was in line with international law.

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Benefits of Pfizer COVID-19 Vaccine for Children Surpass Risks – US Drug Regulator
WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) – The benefits expected from the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine shots for children between 5 and 11 years old outweigh the risks of side effects, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) said in a report.
On Friday, Pfizer and BioNTech said that their vaccine had proved more than 90% efficacy in children between ages 5 and 11. However, the companies acknowledged the possibility of post-vaccination myocarditis among children, in the report.
"While benefits of vaccination were highly dependent on COVID-19 incidence, the overall analysis predicted that the numbers of clinically significant COVID-19-related outcomes prevented would clearly outweigh the numbers of vaccine-associated excess myocarditis cases over a range of assumptions for COVID-19 incidence," the FDA's report read.
Next week, FDA experts are set to hold a meeting on the recommendation to allow emergency use of the vaccine for children aged 5-11, with the approval for emergency use is expected in November.
At the moment, emergency use of the Pfizer vaccine is authorized for those older than 12, and fully sanctioned for people aged 16 and over. Since the beginning of the pandemic, at least 1.8 million children between ages 5 and 11 have contracted COVID-19 in the US, and at least 143 children succumbed to the disease.

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South Korea Reaches 70% Full Vaccination Goal - Reports

MOSCOW, October 22 (Sputnik) - South Korea's Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA) announced on Saturday that the country's authorities have fully vaccinated 70% of the population, media reported.

The total number of people vaccinated comes to about 35.94 million, the Yonhap news agency reported citing KDCA.
The country also plans to weaken certain COVID-19 restrictions at the start of November and introduce the "Living with COVID-19" scheme which will ease social distancing measures, according to the agency.
By the start of next week, the country's government will outline plans to reach the 85% fully vaccinated mark and thus reach herd-immunity.
Booster shots are yet to be enforced, however discussions on their introduction for people over the age of 60 have commenced, Yonhap reported.
South Korea started its vaccination campaign in late February. On Saturday, the KDCA reported 1,508 new positive coronavirus cases. Since the start of the pandemic, the country saw a total of around 350,000 positive cases and over 2,700 deaths.

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Moscow Assured Chisinau of Additional Gas Supplies in October - Moldovan Official

CHISINAU, October 22 (Sputnik) - Moscow has assured that Russian energy giant Gazprom will arrange additional gas supplies to Moldova in October, Moldovan Deputy Prime Minister Andrei Spinu said on Saturday.
Last week, the Moldovan government declared an "alarm mode" over gas shortages, with electricity disruptions, which could serve as a prelude to a full-blown state of emergency.
According to Chisinau, the country received only 67% of the necessary gas volume this month.
"During the talks, the Russian side has assured us that Gazprom will immediately supply additional volumes of gas in October ... We hope that these volumes will be delivered to Moldova in the near future," Spinu wrote on Facebook after returning from Moscow.
Russia agreed to increase daily supplies by 5 million cubic meters (176.5 million cubic feet), he said.
At the same time, the politician noted that Gazprom offered Moldova to buy gas at a higher price than it proposed to other countries in the region.
"The proposal that Gazprom is now putting forward is unprofitable for our citizens. The price of the proposal, which consists of financial and non-financial conditions, including the repayment of the historic debt in a short time, is higher than the proposals on the international gas markets. Moldova cannot agree to pay for gas at a higher price than all other states in the region," Spinu added.
In this regard, Chisinau wants to hold a new round of negotiations with Gazprom but, at the same time, will continue looking for alternate suppliers to diversify gas supply sources, the official noted.
On October 1, Gazprom extended the contract with Moldova for the supply of gas for one month. Gas prices have surged to $790 per 1,000 cubic meters with Moldova's average purchase price in 2021 at $200 per 1,000 cubic meters.

The sides have launched talks on a new long-term deal last summer. Earlier this week, media reported, citing a source close to the talks, that Russia offered Moldova a fair market price of gas with an additional discount of 25% provided that Chisinau will pay its $700 million debt, but Chisinau insisted on halving the price.

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Former Greek Foreign Minister Criticizes Signing of Defence Agreements With France, US

ATHENS, October 22 (Sputnik) - Greece's signing of the defense agreements with France and the United States could potentially draw the country into conflict with Russia, China and the Arab world, former Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikos Kotzias said in an interview with newspaper Nea Egnatia published Saturday.

The former minister called the recent signings of the U.S-Greece Mutual Defense Cooperation Agreement (MDCA) and the France-Greece Defense and Security Agreement an "unconditional surrender" and stressed that Greece must have a multidimensional foreign policy that plays a mediating role between the West and East.

"[Greece] must hold an independent multi-dimensional foreign policy and be a mediator when the West and East are in conflict; to act as an arbiter... When you act as an arbiter and negotiate on behalf of others, when you promote your requests, everyone will listen to you," Kotzias said as quoted by the newspaper.

According to the diplomat, Athens signed the MDCA with the belief that the US was ready to support Greece in the standoff with Ankara, by treating Turkey as their "common enemy," while Washington's priorities lay elsewhere.

"The question is, who is the enemy? Are the Americans creating bases to strike the Turks alongside [Greece], or to prevent Turkey from inflicting insidious blows? ... No, they mean Russia," Kotzias said.

He stressed that questions arise whether the open-ended agreement and transfer of Greek territories to the US could be a means to provoke Russia and break off relations with China.

While referring to the France-Greece agreement, the former foreign minister noted that it would have been best if it was limited by the interests of France and Greece like the maritime zones and the Exclusive Economic Zone of the Greek-Cypriots.

Kotzias served as Greece's foreign minister from 2015 to 2018 and is now the leader of the PRATTO political movement.

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Palermo Court Begins Hearing Against Italy's Salvini Over Blocking Migrant Ship - Reports

ROME, October 22 (Sputnik) - Former Italian Interior Minister Matteo Salvini appeared before a Palermo court on Saturday for alleged abuse of power over denial to let an NGO migrant rescue ship to dock in Italy, media reported.
Salvini attended in person the first court hearing, La Sicilia newspaper said, adding that the Palermo court ruled not to allow journalists into the courtroom. Media representatives can follow the process from a special room in the court, where the video broadcast of the trial is aired.
Salvini is said to have prevented the Spanish Open Arms rescue ship with some 150 migrants aboard from docking at Lampedusa island in August 2019 when he was the country's interior minister. Last year, Italy's Senate voted to strip Salvini of his parliamentary immunity, paving the way for charges in the so-called Open Arms case.
Salvini insists that it was his duty as minister to stop the irregular migrant flow to Italy, as it was government policy at the time. If convicted, the ex-minister may face up to 15 years in prison.
Last month, the far-right politician said that US actor Richard Gere who had boarded the ship while it was stranded agreed to testify in the case.

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CSTO Drills in Tajikistan Counter Worsened Situation in Afghanistan – Russian Military

HARB-MAIDON TRAINING GROUND, Tajikistan, October 22 (Sputnik) – Large-scale strategic military exercise Boyevoe Bratstvo-2021 (Combat Brotherhood), conducted by the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in Tajikistan, was a response to the deterioration of the situation in Afghanistan, Col. Gen. Alexander Lapin, the commander of Russia's Central Military District, said on Saturday.
"The completed large-scale drills in Tajikistan with the CSTO Collective Rapid Reaction Force have become one of the most important counter-measures towards a rapid deterioration of the situation in Afghanistan," Lapin said at the ceremony of closing the drills.
The exercise was aimed at safeguarding the CSTO member countries against any terrorist threat, the commander added.
The maneuvers featured cutting-edge intelligence, electronic warfare, and communication equipment, as well as technical and medical supplies. An intelligence management system was launched at the drills, "which enabled foiling increasing threats in advance and thwarting the intended actions of criminal groups," according to Lapin.
The official also mentioned that a united information warfare space was created at the exercise, which gave soldiers an advantage in remote areas.
The experience gained will definitely successful performance in a real battle situation, Lapin concluded.

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Kremlin Says Will Make Announcement if Russian, Armenian, Azerbaijani Heads Agree to Meet

MOSCOW, October 22 (Sputnik) - If the leaders of Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan agree to hold a meeting, the Kremlin will make the relevant announcement, Russian presidential spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Sputnik on Saturday.
Earlier in the day, an informed source told Sputnik that Russian President Vladimir Putin, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev might meet in Moscow in early November and sign trilateral statements related to the process of delimitation and demarcation of the state border between Armenia and Azerbaijan.
"In case if such an agreement is reached, we will inform you in a timely manner," Peskov said when asked whether the summit is really planned to take place in Moscow early next month.

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Kyrgyzstan Plans to Buy Combat Drones From Russia, Turkey - President

BISHKEK, October 22 (Sputnik) - Kyrgyzstan intends to purchase combat drones from Russia and Turkey, Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov said on Saturday.
"We are buying combat drones from Turkey and Russia. We are also repairing jet aircraft with the help of Russia. Money is allocated for all this, it is not for free," Japarov told reporters when asked about efforts to strengthen the country's armed forces.
Earlier this week, the State Committee for National Security of Kyrgyzstan said that the Central Asian nation would purchase Turkey's Bayraktar drones to boost defense and reconnaissance capabilities, adding the drones will soon arrive.

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Kyrgyzstan to Evacuate 300 Ethnic Kyrgyz Families From Afghanistan - President

BISHKEK, October 22 (Sputnik) - Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov said on Saturday that his country intends to bring home 300 ethnic Kyrgyz families from Afghanistan.
"There are approximately 300 families that wish to be relocated. We will definitely help them. This will happen next year," the president said during a press conference.
Several thousand ethnic Kyrgyz live in the Pamir Mountains in Afghanistan.
Since the Taliban's (terrorist organization banned in Russia) takeover of power in Afghanistan in August, governments have been evacuating their citizens from the country. On September 21, Japarov announced that Kyrgyzstan will provide humanitarian aid to the Afghan people and ethnic Kyrgyz.

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Kazakhstan Ratifies Protocol on Conservation of Biodiversity in Caspian Sea - Presidency

ALMATY, Kazakhstan, October 22 (Sputnik) – Kazakhstan's President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev signed into law the ratification of the protocol on preserving the biodiversity in the Caspian Sea, the Kazakh presidency said on Saturday.
"The head of the state signed the law of the Republic of Kazakhstan 'On ratification of the protocol on conservation of the biodiversity to the framework convention on the protection of the marine environment of the Caspian Sea'," the presidency said.
The protocol previously adopted by the parliament entails protection, conservation, and restoration of viability and integrity of the biodiversity and ecosystem of the Caspian Sea, as well as ensuring sustainable use of biological resources.
To reach these goals, the Caspian nations of Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia and Turkmenistan had agreed to conserve endangered species and vulnerable ecosystems to enhance their viability and diversity in previous summits on the matter. Additionally, the countries of the Caspian region are to prevent deterioration, degradation, and damage to species, habitats, and ecosystems.
The document also provides for control over the activities harming the wildlife and prohibition, if needed, of using plants and animals for commercial purposes, according to the lower chamber of the country's parliament.
On Thursday, lawmakers of the upper chamber of the Kazakh parliament approved ratification of the protocol on protection of the Caspian Sea from pollution.

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Russia, China Conduct First Joint Naval Patrol in Pacific Ocean - Russian Defense Ministry

MOSCOW, October 22 (Sputnik) - Russian and Chinese warships conducted the first joint patrol in the Pacific Ocean, the Russian Ministry of Defense said on Saturday.
"The warships of the Russian Navy and the Chinese naval forces conducted the first patrol in the western Pacific Ocean from October 17-23," the ministry said in a statement.
The vessels traversed the Sea of Japan as part of the patrol and practiced joint tactical maneuvering, the statement read.
Russia was represented by 10 ships of the Pacific Fleet, while five vessels took part in the patrol from the Chinese side.
From October 14-17, Russia and China held joint naval exercise Maritime Interaction-2021 in the Sea of Japan. The crews worked out joint tactical maneuvering, anti-mine support of detachments, as well as conducted artillery fire at sea targets, among other things, according to the Russian military.

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Kyrgyz President Says Country Will Not Host US Military Bases, Russian Presence 'Enough'

BISHKEK, October 22 (Sputnik) - Kyrgyzstan will not host a US military base on its territory as Russia's presence was "enough," Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov said on Saturday.
"We have a Russian [military] base in [the town of] Kant. One base is enough for us. We do not want to play cat and mouse with powers, hosting two bases," Japarov told reporters when asked about the possibility of hosting a US airbase in the territory of Kyrgyzstan after the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan.

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Turkish Defense Minister Notes Stabilization in Syria's Idlib After Putin-Erdogan Meeting

ANKARA, October 22 (Sputnik) - The situation in Syria's Idlib de-escalation zone has stabilized after the meeting of Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan last month, Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar said on Saturday.
The two leaders met in the Russian resort city of Sochi in late September. The talks focused on cooperation in a number of fields, including space, as well as regional issues, such as the situation in conflict-torn Syria.
"From time to time, some violations occur [in Idlib]. In general, in the framework of the measures taken, ceasefire and stability persist. The situation has become calmer after the meeting of our president with Putin in Sochi," Akar said, as cited by the Turkish defense ministry.
Idlib remains the only Syrian region outside the control of Damascus. Turkey has deployed its forces to the region to counter the Kurdish units in the area and back some militant groups. Damascus views the Turkish military presence in Idlib as a violation of its sovereignty.

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Colombian Drug Regulator Approves Use of China's COVID-19 Vaccine for Children Aged 6-12

MEXICO CITY, October 22 (Sputnik) - The Colombian National Institute of Drug and Food Surveillance (Invima) approved the use of China's Sinovac vaccine in children aged six to 12 after analyzing data from other countries.
"The widespread use of the inactivated CoronaVac [Sinovac] vaccine against SARS-COV-2 among children aged 3-17 in China and 6-17 in Peru, among other countries, showed to have

had no negative effects on the childrens' health... This allows the ward to believe that the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, based on analysis of the development of the pandemic and of the public health's needs, can start the vaccination [of children] from the age of six years old, with those in risk groups at high priority," the institute said in a statement on its website.
The statement noted, however, that despite the institute's permission to vaccinate children, it did not recommend modifying the vaccine's emergency use authorization, since the data on its effectiveness and safety in qualitative studies is still limited. The Sinovac vaccine was authorized for emergency use by Invima on February 3.
The regulator stressed the need to commence local studies on the vaccine's efficacy and safety once it was distributed to the children in the now approved age group.
In September, Invima approved the use of the Moderna vaccine in teenagers aged 12-17. The Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine is also approved for use in that age group.
Data from the ministry of health showed that 48% of the country's population over the age of 12 is fully vaccinated and 69% received at least one dose of the vaccine. Since the start of the pandemic, the country logged nearly 5 million positive COVID-19 cases and around 127,000 deaths.

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RPT - Watchdog Report Alleging US Agents Abused Migrants Reveals Oversight Needed - Rights Group

WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) - A new watchdog report alleging US officials abused asylum-seeking migrants in recent years reveals that oversight is sorely needed at the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and other immigration enforcement agencies, Hope Border Institute Deputy Director Marisa Limon Garza told Sputnik.
"This report is sobering and absolutely necessary," Limon Garza said on Friday. "Each revelation helps the public understand how oversight is sorely needed for DHS and these enforcement agencies."
Limon Garza added that the dangerous rhetoric against migrants over the last several years undoubtedly helps foment a culture of violence and impunity.
On Thursday, a DHS spokesperson told Sputnik that the department does not tolerate abuse conducted by its personnel. However, the spokesperson did not disclose if DHS took action to address the allegations brought to light in the documents obtained by the human rights organization.
Human Rights Watch released earlier this week more than 160 internal reports that document allegations of physical, sexual and other abuses of asylum seekers by US border authorities.
In one cited example, the records show that a supervisor in the San Francisco Asylum Office communicated the following internally at DHS:
"AO [asylum officer] [redacted] brought a serious matter to our attention just now: one of the applicants she interviewed today has a young child who was sexually molested by someone we believe to be a CBP [Customs and Border Protection] or Border Patrol Officer. They were

apprehended by Border Patrol, sent to the Ice Box [a border holding cell], then this occurred: the young girl was forced to undress and touched inappropriately by a guard in the Ice Box wearing green, with the nametag [redacted]."
The heavily redacted documents, which Human Rights Watch obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, also included reports of due process violations, harsh detention conditions, denial of medical care and discriminatory treatment at or near the US-Mexican border.
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US Airstrike Kills Senior Al-Qaeda Leader Abdul Hamid Al-Matar in Syria - CENTCOM

WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) - The US military conducted an airstrike that killed senior al-Qaeda (terrorist group banned in Russia) leader Abdul Hamid al-Matar in northwest Syria, Central Command (CENTCOM) spokesperson Maj. John Rigsbee said in a press release.
"A US airstrike today in northwest Syria killed senior al-Qaeda leader Abdul Hamid al-Matar. We have no indications of civilian casualties as a result of the strike, which was conducted using an MQ-9 aircraft," Rigsbee said on Friday.

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Warrant Issued to Search N. Mexico Ranch Where Baldwin Fatally Shot Camerawoman - Police

WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) - Santa Fe County Sheriff's Office spokesperson Juan Rios told Sputnik they issued a warrant to search a ranch in the state of New Mexico where actor Alec Baldwin accidentally shot and killed a camerawoman with a prop gun on the set of a western movie being filmed.
"Yes that is correct," Rios said on Friday when asked if the sheriff's office issued a search warrant for Bonanza Creek Ranch as part of their investigation into the fatal shooting.

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Blinken, UN Chief Talk About Boosting Efforts to End Violence in Ethiopia - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres discussed via telephone various opportunities to strengthen the global response to the conflict in northern Ethiopia, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said in a press release.

"Secretary and Secretary-General Guterres discussed opportunities to strengthen international collaboration to stop the current hostilities, promote negotiations toward a sustainable ceasefire, and deliver life-saving assistance," Price said in the release on Friday.
Blinken and Guterres shared their concerns about the worsening violence in northern Ethiopia and the humanitarian needs in the region as a result of the conflict.
Earlier on Friday, Price said the Biden administration is fully prepared to impose sanctions on persons preventing a ceasefire in Ethiopia's Tigray region. He added that the Biden administration is currently working on measures to mitigate any unintended effects the sanctions could potentially have on the Ethiopian people or the region.
The internal conflict in Ethiopia erupted in the Tigray region in November of 2020 as the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), a major local political force, attacked a military base and the Ethiopian government launched a counter-operation.

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Alec Baldwin Shooting Happened Amid Union Working Conditions Protest - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) - The fatal shooting of Soviet-born cinematographer Halyna Hutchins by actor and producer Alec Baldwin on the set of the movie "Rust" happened amid union protests related to the working conditions of the film crew, the Los Angeles Times reported, citing anonymous crew members.

Hutchins had reportedly been advocating for better working conditions for the crew on the film set at Bonanza Creek Ranch near Santa Fe, New Mexico, the report said on Friday. The crew complained of long working hours, problems getting paychecks, and the 50-mile drive they were expected to make from Albuquerque every day, three sources familiar with the matter reportedly said.

A member of the production staff ordered union camera workers - members of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees - to leave the set to be replaced by nonunion workers, one crew member said. The shooting occurred approximately six hours after the union crews left.

The prop gun was misfired twice on Saturday and once more the previous week, the person said. They also noted a "serious lack" of safety meetings on set.

Rust Movie Productions LLC, who manage the film, said that they were never made aware of safety concerns on set in a statement.

"Though we were not made aware of any official complaints concerning weapon or prop safety on set, we will be conducting an internal review of our procedures while production is shut down. We will continue to cooperate with the Santa Fe authorities in their investigation and offer mental health services to the cast and crew during this tragic time," the production company said.

Baldwin said in a statement on Friday that he is fully cooperating with law enforcement's investigation into the fatal shooting.

Hutchins was born and raised in Soviet-era Ukraine. She graduated from the International Journalism Department of Kiev University and collaborated with British documentary filmmakers as an investigative journalist before moving to Los Angeles several years ago.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) -

NATO DEFENSE MINISTERIAL MEETING
* The NATO defense ministers have agreed on the alliance's first artificial intelligence strategy, Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said on Friday.
* It is up to Ukraine and NATO allies to decide on Kiev's membership in the alliance and no other countries can interfere in that decision, Stoltenberg said.

ENERGY MARKETS
* Ukraine is offering Gazprom a 50% discount on gas transit to Europe in excess of the contractual volume of 40 billion cubic meters per day, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said.
* In connection with the energy crisis, Moldova asked Ukraine for help in gas supplies, and Kiev will give its neighbor gas on a refundable basis, Oleksiy Danilov, the secretary of the National Security and Defense Council (NSDC) of Ukraine, said.
* The EU leaders will discuss high energy prices during another meeting in December, President of the European Council Charles Michel said.
* The European Commission will present a new analysis on the situation in the gas market by mid-November, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said.

INTERNATIONAL TALKS ON SYRIA
* A new session of the meeting of special envoys for Syria from Russia, Turkey and Iran is scheduled for the end of the year in Nur-Sultan, a decision on the date will be made in the near future, Russia's Special Presidential Envoy for Syria Alexander Lavrentyev said on Friday.
* UN special envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen proposed a new meeting in Geneva on November 22 and December, but Damascus has not yet made a decision, Lavrentyev told reporters.
* The results of the meeting in Geneva on Syria do not give reason to be disappointed in the prospects for the work of the constitutional committee, Lavrentyev told reporters.
* UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen on Friday called the latest meeting of the Syrian Constitutional Committee meeting a "big disappointment," as the participants failed to reach an understanding of how to move forward.
* The Syrian Constitutional Committee has failed to agree on the date for the next round of negotiations, Pedersen said.

RUSSIAN DIPLOMATS IN KOSOVO
* The self-proclaimed republic of Kosovo will expel two Russian diplomats based in Pristina, President Vjosa Osmani said on Friday.
* The Russian Embassy in Serbia said it did not recognize the decision of the "government" of Kosovo to "expel" diplomats and considered it a provocation.

ALEC BALDWIN SHOOTING INCIDENT
* Famous US actor Alec Baldwin has accidentally shot dead a camerawoman and injured a film director during the shooting of the "Rust" western movie, Santa Fe County Sheriff's Office said.

* Camera operator Halyna Hutchins, accidentally shot by Baldwin on the set of a western "Rust" in the United States, was born and raised in the Soviet Union, according to her personal website.
* Actor Alec Baldwin said that he is fully cooperating with a police investigation into his accidental shooting of camera operator Halyna Hutchins on the set of a western movie that was being filmed in the United States.
* White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki has called the accidental fatal shooting Baldwin of a cinematographer on a movie set, which also injured the director, a tragedy and offered sympathies to the victims.

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Wall Street Up 3rd Straight Week as Dow, S&P500 at Record Heights Despite Volatile Session

NEW YORK, October 22 (Sputnik) - US stocks ended up for a third straight week, with the Dow Jones Industrial Average and S&P 500 indexes hitting record highs on Friday, despite volatility triggered by comments about the Federal Reserve's impending stimulus taper and rate hike.
The Dow, which groups mostly industrial stocks, eked out a gain in Friday's trade despite tumbling from the day's peaks.
The S&P 500, which consists of the top 500 US stocks, closed in the negative after also posting a record high too.
The Nasdaq Composite Index, which lists the marquee names in Big Tech, also fell, after an all-time high in the previous session.
All three indexes were, however, rose for the week, extending their winning streak for a third week in a row.
Wall Street had a mixed Friday after Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell confirmed the central bank's plans to start tapering its monthly stimulus of $120 billion between November and December, while holding out on giving a timeline for rate hikes.
"Powell prepared markets for [the eventuality] that rate hikes will happen if they are wrong about inflation being transitory," Ed Moya, analyst at an online trading platform OANDA, said. "Some traders used Powell's comments to lock in profits, but overall still remain optimistic."
A flurry of forecast-beating third quarter earnings at US companies had also energized Wall Street all week. Electric car-maker Tesla, banking icon Goldman Sachs, healthcare giant Johnson & Johnson, consumer products behemoth Procter & Gamble and streaming services provider Netflix were among those who reported stellar profits for the quarter.
The Dow closed Friday's trade up 74 points, or 0.2%, at 35,677. It hit a record high of 35,765 earlier. For the week, it rose 1.1%, bringing its cumulative three-week gain to 3.9%.
The S&P 500 index settled down 5 points, or 0.1%, at 4,545. It hit an all-time high of 4,560 earlier. The S&P 500 was up 1.6% for the week, for a compounded three-week gain of 4.3%.
Nasdaq finished the day down 125 points, or 0.8%, at 15,090. It was up 1.3% on the week, for a total three-week rise of 3.6%.

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Whistleblower Says Facebook Values Profits Over Fighting 'Hate Speech' - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) - A former Facebook employee has alleged in a legal affidavit that the company puts a higher priority on maximizing profits and growth over combating or banning so-called "hate speech," the Washington Post reported on Friday.
The whistleblower made his or her allegations under condition of anonymity but they echo those previously delivered in testimony to the US Congress earlier this month by ex-Facebook employee Frances Haugen, the report said.
The report identified the new whistleblower as a former member of Facebook's Integrity Team and the newspaper said it knew his or her identity. The new source also made allegations to the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), which oversees and monitors publicly traded companies, the report said.
On Wednesday, the US tech blog The Verge reported that Facebook intends to change its company name next week to reflect its plans to build a new shared virtual environment that makes online interactions much more like communicating in person.
The US corporate media recently published reports showing that Facebook was aware of its platforms being a toxic environment for young girls among other problems but did not do enough to address them. The reports were largely based on internal documents provided by Haugen.

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US Trade Representative Discusses WTO Reform With UK, French Counterparts - Statement

WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) - US Trade Representative (USTR) Katherine Tai met with UK and French counterparts in bilateral meetings on the sidelines of the G7 Trade Ministerial conference in London and discussed issues including World Trade Organization reform, the Office of the USTR said on Friday.
"United States Trade Representative Katherine Tai today met with France Minister-Delegate for Foreign Trade Franck Riester on the margins of the G7," the Office of the USTR said in a release. "Ambassador Tai and Minister-Delegate Riester then discussed the need for World Trade Organization (WTO) reform, including the dispute settlement system, and reaching meaningful outcomes at the upcoming WTO Ministerial conference."
Tai also discussed with UK Secretary of State for International Trade Anne-Marie Trevelyan the importance of reforming the WTO and its dispute settlement system, USTR said. They also discussed the upcoming 12th WTO Ministerial Conference, which is set to address the COVID-19 pandemic, the release said.

Tai also discussed the issue of China's non-market practices, particularly Beijing's excess capacity in the steel and aluminum sectors that has been identified by the WTO as a major problem with the country's trade regime in a recent report, the release added.
Tai also expressed the United States' commitment to the bilateral relationships it maintains with the United Kingdom and France, according to the release.

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US Offers $10Mln Reward to Capture Columbia Money Launderer Vargas - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) - The US government is offering a reward of up to $10 million for the capture of Colombian national Alvaro Pulido Vargas for his involvement in money laundering in a fraud and bribery scheme diverting funds meant for food relief for the people of Venezuela, the Department of State on Friday.
"Today, the Department of State is announcing a reward offer of up to $10 million for information leading to the arrest and/or conviction of Colombian national Alvaro Pulido Vargas," the department said in a news release.
The announcement came as the Department of Justice announced a criminal indictment against Pulido Vargas and others for money laundering in connection with the bribery scheme, the release said.
"Pulido and his co-conspirators allegedly marked-up the cost of producing the boxes of food in order to make a personal profit from their production. From this cost mark-up, the conspirators were able to pay bribes and kickbacks to those Venezuelan government officials who assisted them," the release added.
Pulido Vargas was charged by indictment in October 2021 along with four other individuals. The charges include one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering and four counts of laundering of monetary instruments, according to the release.

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US Jury Finds Ex-Giuliani Associate Parnas Guilty of Campaign Finance Crimes - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) - A US jury found Ukraine-born businessman Lev Parnas, a former associate of Donald Trump's attorney Rudy Giuliani, guilty of taking part in a federal campaign finance scheme in the United States, CNN reported on Friday.
The jury convicted Parnas for his role in a scheme with others to fund political contributions in the United States in exchange for political favors, the report said.
Parnas faces up to 45 years in prison, the report said, but added that his sentencing date is pending.

In addition, co-defendant Andrey Kukushkin was also convicted on two counts related to his role in the campaign finance scheme, the report said. Kukushkin faces up to ten years in prison, the report added.
In October 2019, the US authorities charged Kukushkin and Parnas as well as David Correia and Igor Fruman with funneling $1 million in donations from foreign nationals to unspecified political campaigns in the United States, including making false statements and falsifying records to the Federal Election Commission.

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US Jury Convicts 2 Florida Residents for Scheme to Export Prohibited Items to Libya

WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) - A federal jury has convicted two residents of the US state of Florida for their role in a scheme to illegally export of rebreather diving equipment to Libya in 2016, the Justice Department said on Friday.
"A federal jury convicted a pair of Florida residents yesterday for their roles in an illegal exports scheme. According to court documents and evidence presented at trial, Peter Sotis, 57, of Delray Beach, and Emilie Voissem, 45, of Sunrise, participated in a scheme to cause the illegal export of rebreather diving equipment to Libya in August 2016," the Justice Department said in a press release.
Rebreathers allow divers to stay significantly less noticeable while underwater for long periods of time by producing little to no bubbles and have both civilian and military use, the release said. The fixtures are included on the Commerce Control List and are subject for export control and licensing.
Both defendants decided to export the items even though they warned by an agent from the Commerce Department that such items cannot be sold abroad while a license determination is pending, the release said.
Sotis and Voissem were convicted of conspiracy to violate the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) and smuggling, the release added.
If found guilty, they face a maximum penalty of five years in prison and a $250,000 fine for the IEEPA conspiracy charge as well as a maximum sentence of of ten years in prison and $250,000 fine for the smuggling charge, according to the release.

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US 'Absolutely Prepared' to Sanction Persons Blocking Ceasefire in Ethiopia - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) - US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Friday that the Biden administration is fully prepared to impose sanctions on persons preventing a ceasefire in Ethiopia's Tigray region.

"We are absolutely prepared to take action under this EO [Executive Order] to impose targeted sanctions against those responsible for the ongoing crisis," Price said during a telephone briefing.
On September 17, President Joe Biden issued an executive order authorizing new sanctions on individuals and organizations involved in the escalating conflict in Ethiopia, but action has been delayed as the US administration waits to see if the warring parties resolve their dispute soon.
Price said the Biden administration is currently working on measures to mitigate any unintended effects the sanctions could potentially have on the Ethiopian people or the region.
The internal conflict in Ethiopia erupted in the northern Ethiopian region of Tigray in November 2020 as the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), a major local political force, attacked a military base and the Ethiopian government launched a counter-operation.
Earlier in October, the Ethiopian military launched a new major offensive on TPLF positions in northern Ethiopia, including airstrikes.

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Biden Does Not Want to See Cross-Strait Issues Between China, Taiwan Come to Blows - Psaki

WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden does not want to see cross-Strait issues between China and Taiwan come to blows, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki told reporters on Friday.
"I would also note that Secretary [Lloyd] Austin also spoke of this and he said as Secretary of Defense, of course, nobody wants to see cross-Strait issues come to blows, certainly not President Biden, and there is no reason that it should," Psaki said.
At a nationally televised CNN town hall meeting on Thursday, Biden said the US would come to Taiwan's defense if it came under attack by China.
"There has been no shift. The President was not announcing any change in our policy nor has he made a decision to change our policy," Psaki said. "Our defense relationship with Taiwan is guided by the Taiwan Relations Act."
Taiwan took notice of Biden's pledge of readiness to protect the island but will refrain from rash actions, the Taiwanese government's spokesperson Chang Tun-han said on Friday as quoted as saying by the local Central News Agency.
Taiwan, which has been ruled independently from China since 1949, will continue to strive for ensuring its own defense, as well as cooperate with other countries for the security of the Indo-Pacific region, the spokesman added.
Earlier this month, Taiwanese Defense Minister Chiu Kuo-cheng said that mainland China may be fully prepared to attack the island by 2025. His assumption followed the deployment by China of 150 military aircraft into Taiwan's air defense zone since early October for drills.
Beijing described its military exercise near the Taiwan border as a preventive measure to ensure its sovereignty and territorial integrity and counter any separatist activities and foreign interference.

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US Could Be at or Near Full Employment in 2022 - Federal Reserve Chair

WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) - The Federal Reserve is likely to achieve or be near its mandate of ensuring full employment for Americans next year, chairman Jerome Powell said on Friday.
"It is very possible that we will be at or near full employment next year," Powell said during a virtual appearance at a Bank of International Settlements event.
The US economy grew by an annualized rate of 6.5 percent in the second quarter of 2021, after a 3.5 percent contraction for all of 2020 due to shutdowns and other measures implemented to address the coronavirus pandemic.
The Federal Reserve has forecast a 6.5 percent economic growth for all of 2021 and some officials at the central bank have more ambitious expectations, forecasting an expansion of up to 7 percent.
Powell, however, says loftier targets for growth cannot be achieved without restoring the labor market to its pre-pandemic level or the central bank's measure of "full employment" - defined by a monthly unemployment rate of 4.0 percent. The unemployment rate stood at 4.8 percent in September.
"I believe job growth will return to the high levels seen last summer, but it may take longer than expected," Powell said.
The United States lost more than 21 million jobs between March and April 2020. At least five million of those jobs have yet to return, Powell said.

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Actor Baldwin's Shooting Incident Shows People Must Seriously Practice Discipline - Expert

WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) - The tragic incident involving actor Alec Baldwin, who fatally shot dead a camera operator and injured a film director on the set of the movie "Rust," shows that people should seriously practice discipline, US lawyer Arkady Bukh told Sputnik.
"This is a very strong message to the community that people should practice discipline very seriously," Bukh said, adding that he only works as an expert in this case.
Bukh said the tragic accident will most likely not result in anyone being prosecuted given that the chances for prosecution are very law.
"I do not think anyone will be prosecuted in this case, unless, of course, evidence will show otherwise reckless or criminal negligence or intent," he said.
Balwdin said in a statement earlier on Friday that he is fully cooperating with the police investigation into his accidental shooting of camera operator Halyna Hutchins.

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US Supreme Court Agrees to Hear Arguments on Texas Abortion Law on November 1 - Filing

WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) - The US Supreme Court agreed to hear arguments on November 1 in the case of whether the federal government can sue the state of Texas over the legislation banning abortion after six weeks of pregnancy, court documents revealed on Friday.
"The petition for a writ of certiorari before judgment is granted... The case is set for oral argument on Monday, November 1, 2021," the court filing said.
This is the second time the Supreme Court declined to act immediately halt the Texas abortion ban.
Justice Sonia Sotomayor, according to court documents, dissented in the decision to not take immediate action to halt the Texas abortion ban. She said that every day that the Supreme Court fails to block the ban is devastating for individual women and for the US constitutional system.
The law went into effect in September but the US Justice Department sued Texas seeking a temporary freeze. The Biden administration argues that abortions are protected under the US constitution after the Supreme Court's decision in the Roe v. Wade case in 1973 that effectively legalized abortions throughout the United States.
Opponents of the law say that banning abortions at six weeks is equivalent to prohibiting the procedure given that 90 percent of women turn to hospitals for abortions later in their pregnancy. The previous abortion ban threshold in Texas stood at 20 weeks.

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US Judge Sets Hearing for Trump Lawsuit Against House Panel on November 4- Court Filing

WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) - US judge Tanya Chutkan has set a hearing date for November 4 in former President Donald Trump's lawsuit against the US House of Representatives Select Committee investigating the January 6 events at the Capitol, according to a court document filed on Friday.
"The court further orders that a hearing is set for November 4, 2021, at 11:00 a.m. via video teleconference before Judge Tanya S. Chutkan," the court document said.

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North Korea Sanctions Should Be Reviewed, Eased Due to Pandemic - UN Special Rapporteur

UNITED NATIONS, October 22 (Sputnik) - The UN sanctions against North Korea should be reviewed and eased when necessary given the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on that nation, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in North Korea Tomas Ojea Quintana said on Friday.
"Under the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Security Council Sanctions Committee should reevaluate the sanctions regime... and, when necessary, ease those sanctions," Quintana saidv during a press briefing.
Quintana pointed out that North Korea residents face the risk of starvation while the sanctions regime impacts the work of humanitarian actors in the coountry.
"There have been very serious problems with banking channels, administrative costs and risks, problems with customs clearance, reluctance from foreign suppliers, increased costs in operations and items... a lot of problems directly related to the sanctions regime," he said.
Quintana expressed hope that the UN Security Council Sanctions Committee will find the means to overcome the problem.

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US Lawmaker Introduces Articles of Impeachment on Biden for Abusing Power to Aid His Son

WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) - US Republican Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene on Friday introduced articles of impeachment against President Joe Biden to the House of Representatives for allegedly abusing his power to aid his son Hunter Biden.
"I have introduced House Res. 57. These are articles of impeachment on President Joe Biden for abuse of power in regards to his willingness to use his position of power to aid his son Hunter Biden in their business dealings," Greene said on the US House floor.
Greene also said that she introduced separate articles of impeachment regarding Biden's mishandling of the situation on the US-Mexico border, his disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan and his COVID-19 eviction moratorium.
James Comer, the top Republican on the US House Oversight Committee, issued a letter in September in which he asked the owner of a New York art gallery to provide a list of customers who bought Hunter Biden's artwork due to concerns that the purchases were being used to avoid foreign sanctions.
Comer also raised concerns about Hunter Biden's connection to the White House, his network of foreign associates, and the fact Georges Berges - the owner of the New York art gallery that sold Hunter's work - had expressed a desire to be the "lead guy" in China's burgeoning art world.

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US Budget Deficit at $2.8 Trillion for Fiscal Year 2021 Due to Pandemic Rescue - Treasury

WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) - The US budget deficit fell by $360 billion in fiscal year 2021 but remained high at almost $2.8 trillion due to rescue programs mounted by the federal government to contain the economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic, the Treasury Department said on Friday.
"The deficit in FY 2021 was $360 billion less than in the prior fiscal year, reflecting an improved economy due in part to the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 and COVID-19 vaccination rollout," the Treasury Department said in a statement.
The fiscal year 2021 deficit of $2.77 trillion, rounded up by the Treasury at $2.8 trillion, was $897 billion less than forecast in the President's 2022 budget and $342 billion less than estimated in the 2022 mid-session review of the budget, the statement said.
"Today's joint budget statement is further evidence that America's economy is in the midst of a recovery," Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said in the statement. "While the nation's economic recovery is stronger than those of other wealthy nations, it is still fragile."
The US economy grew by an annualized rate of 6.7 percent in the second quarter of 2021, after a 3.5 percent contraction for all of 2020 due to shutdowns and other disruptions caused by the COVID-19. The Federal Reserve has targeted a 6.5 percent growth for all of 2021, although some officials at the central bank have more ambitious expectations, forecasting growth of up to 7.0 percent.

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Baldwin Says Fully Cooperating With Police After Accidentally Shooting Movie Crew Member

WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) - Actor Alec Baldwin said on Friday that he is fully cooperating with a police investigation into his accidental shooting of camera operator Halyna Hutchins on the set of a western movie that was being filmed in the United States.
"There are no words to convey my shock and sadness regarding the tragic accident that took the life of Halyna Hutchins, a wife, mother and deeply admired colleague of ours. I'm fully cooperating with the police investigation to address how this tragedy occurred," Baldwin said in a statement.
Baldwin said he has been in contact with Hutchins' husband and offering support to him and his family. He added that he is heartbroken over the Hutchins' death in this incident.
Hutchins was born and raised in Ukraine, which was then part of the Soviet Union. She graduated from the International Journalism Department of Kiev University and moved to Los Angeles several years ago.
Before relocating to the United States, Hutchins collaborated with British documentary filmmakers as an investigative journalist.
Hutchins' works include Darlin' (2019), Arch Enemy (2020) and Blindfire (2020).

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US Reports Decrease in COVID-19 Cases, Hospitalizations, Deaths - Health Agency

WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) - The United States is reporting a decrease in the number of novel coronavirus cases, hospitalizations and virus-related deaths though they still remain high, US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director (CDC) Rochelle Walensky said on Friday.
"As of yesterday, the seven day daily average of cases was about 73,000 cases per day, which represents a decrease of about 15% over the previous week. The seven day average of hospital admissions was about 6,000 per day, also a decrease of about 10% from the previous week. And seven day average of daily deaths were about 1,250 per day, a decrease of about 4% from the previous week," Walensky said during a press briefing.
Walensky noted that the CDC is not yet ready to change its masking recommendation as about 90% of US counties remain in substantial risk with high community transmission.
With respect to the administration of vaccine booster shots in pregnant or nursing women, Walensky said that it is safe to get such an injection.
To date, the United States has registered a total of 45,149,234 cases of the novel coronavirus and 730,368 virus-related deaths, according to data compiled by CDC.

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Pedersen Calls Syrian Constitutional Committee Meeting 'Big Disappointment'

WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) - UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen on Friday called the latest meeting of the Syrian Constitutional Committee (SCC) meeting a "big disappointment" as the participants failed to reach an understanding of how to move forward.
"I think it's fair to say that the discussion today was a big disappointment. We did not manage to achieve what we had hoped to achieve," Pedersen said. "I think we lacked a proper understanding on how to move that process forward. So in the end it was the government delegation that decided not to present any new text, the opposition decided that it would respond to the two texts that was presented by the government and indeed by the civil society groups, and based on that we had the round but that round did not produce any understanding on commonalities."
Pederesen pointed out that before the delegations arrived in Geneva, it was agreed they should submit for titles.
The US Special Envoy went on to say that throughout the week he had meetings with the two SCC co-chairs, sometimes several times a day.
"The two co-chairs then agreed on the following principles that - not the principle but mechanism - that on the first day, on Monday we would be discussing the following principle-sovereignty,

independence and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic and that principle would be presented by the delegation nominated by the government," Pderesen said. "On Tuesday, it was agreed that the opposition, the SNC, would present draft constitution text on the army, on forces, security and the intelligence."
Pedersen said it was agreed on the third day that a draft constitution text would be presented on the issue of the rule of law by the Middle Third delegation.
The US Special Envoy also said it was agreed on the fourth day that a draft constitution text on terrorism and extremism would be presented by the government delegation.
Pedersen noted that there were ups and downs through the four days of talks, adding that following the he held discussions with both co-chairs following the disappointing outcome on Friday.
"We agreed that it could not continue like this," he said.
Russia, Turkey and Iran launched the so-called Astana talks in 2017 for the Syrian government and opposition to negotiate a peaceful solution to the conflict in the country. Another international format to resolve the conflict is the UN-brokered talks of the Syrian Constitutional Committee in Geneva. The 150-member body, with equal representation of the government, opposition and civil society, was launched on October 30, 2019, to work toward drafting a new constitution.

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US Trade Chief Meets With German Counterpart to Discuss China's Practices - Statement

WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) - US Trade Representative (USTR) Katherine Tai met with German Economics and Energy Minister Peter Altmaier during the G7 Trade Ministerial meeting in London and discussed global trade challenges that included China's non-market practices, the Office of the USTR said on Friday.
"United States Trade Representative Katherine Tai today met with Peter Altmaier, the German Federal Minister for Economics and Energy, on the margins of the G7 Trade Ministerial. Ambassador Tai and Minister Altmaier reviewed US-EU progress on a number of shared global challenges, including the impact of China's non-market practices that result in excess capacity in steel and aluminum," the Office of the USTR said in a readout of the meeting.
The World Trade Organization recently undertook a trade policy review of China and identified severe and persistent excess capacity in the steel and aluminum sectors as one of several problems with the counbtry's trade regime.
Tai emphasized the need for continued and enhanced collaboration with Germany in the European Union during the meeting, the readout said.
The two officials also discussed areas of future collaboration under the US-EU Trade and Technology Council as well as global trade challenges and Germany's upcoming presidency of the G7, the readout added.

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US Urges China to Transform Approach to Trade, Embrace Market Policies - Trade Chief

WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) - The Office of the US Trade Representative (USTR) on Friday released a statement calling on China to take steps to transform its approach to trade and embrace market policies as was anticipated when the country joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) two decades ago.
"Looking back over the 20 years since China's accession to the WTO, these members noted that China and its economy have greatly benefited from China's WTO membership, but China has not taken the anticipated steps to transform its state-led, non-market approach to trade and the economy. These members, therefore, called once again for China to embrace open, market-oriented policies," the statement said.
Problems with China's trade regime identified by WTO members include policies that skew the playing field against foreign competition, preferential treatment of state-owned enterprises, forced technology transfer and inadequate regulatory transparency, the statement said.
Almost all of the aforementioned problems persist despite having been identified during the WTO's China's trade policy review three years ago, the statement also said. However, the United States holds out hope that China will take the initiative to address the problems now, it added.

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US Forth Quarter Manufacturing in Slow Start Due to Inflation, Supply Issues - IHS Markit

WASHINGTON, October 22 (Sputnik) - US manufacturing saw a slow start to the fourth quarter from surging costs, supply chain disruptions and a labor market crunch, although the services sector picked up from an ease in coronavirus infections, industrial trends surveyor IHS Markit said on Friday.
"While manufacturers also continue to report strong demand, factory production remains plagued by constraints, including record supply chain bottlenecks and labor shortages," IHS Markit Chief Business Economist Chris Williamso said in a report.
IHS Markit's Manufacturing Purchasing Managers Index (PMI) Flash for October fell to a reading of 59.2 from 60.7 in September, lower than the 60.5 expected by economists polled by US media.
"October saw resurgent service sector activity as COVID-19 case numbers continued to fall, marking a encouragingly strong start to the fourth quarter for the economy," Wiliamson said.
"Hiring has likewise picked up as firms have been encouraged to expand capacity to meet rising demand."
However, Williamson said surging costs also weighed on manufacturers.

"Prices paid by factories for raw materials rose at yet another new record pace as a result, in turn feeding through to both higher prices at the factory gate and spilling over into higher service sector prices," he said. "Higher wages are also having to be offered to attract or retain staff, adding to the inflationary pressures."

Williamson also pointed out that while the economy looked set for stronger growth in the fourth quarter, "the upward rise in inflationary pressures also shows no signs of abating."

The US economy grew by an annualized rate of 6.7 percent in the second quarter of 2021, after a 3.5 percent contraction for all of 2020 due to shutdowns and other disruptions caused by the COVID-19. The Federal Reserve has targeted a 6.5 percent growth for all of 2021, although some officials at the central bank have more ambitious expectations, forecasting growth of up to 7.0 percent.

The problem for the Federal Reserve is increasing inflation as prices of almost everything have soared from the lows of the pandemic.

The Consumer Price Index, a key measure of inflation, expanded by 5.4% for the year to September, data showed.

The Federal Reserve's preferred gauge for inflation - the core Personal Consumption Expenditures Index, which excludes volatile food and energy prices - grew 3.6% year on year in September, expanding at the same intensity since July. The PCE Index including energy and food rose 4.3% year-on-year in September, up from 4.2% in August. The Federal Reserve's own target for inflation is 2% per annum.