

10/29/21 Friday

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Israel Has Ability to Block US From Reopening Consulate in Jerusalem for Palestinians, Official Says

By - Morgan Artyukhina

A senior US government official has confirmed that the US would have to get Israel's consent before reopening a consulate in Jerusalem for Palestinians that was shuttered two years ago. The revelation came during a [Wednesday hearing](#) by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee when Sen. Bill Hagerty (R-TN) asked Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources Brian McKeon about the protocols for opening a consulate in another country. "Is it your understanding that, under US and international law, the government of Israel would have to provide its affirmative consent before the United States could open or reopen the US consulate to the Palestinians in Jerusalem, or does the Biden administration believe it can move forward to establish a second US mission in the Israeli capital city of Jerusalem without the consent of the government of Israel?" Hagerty asked.

"Senator, that's my understanding – that we'd need to get the consent of the host government to open any diplomatic facility," McKeon replied.

The Consulate General of the United States in Jerusalem was never explicitly for Palestinians and was created in 1844, long before Israel or the Palestinian National Authority was created. However, after the creation of Israel in 1948 and the opening a separate US embassy in Tel Aviv, the consulate provided such services for Palestinians who no longer had a state in which to do so.

After the Trump administration announced in 2018 it was moving the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in line with a 1995 act of Congress that was repeatedly waived by presidents before him unwilling to throw a hornet's nest into a fragile peace process, the consulate was merged with the embassy.

Earlier this year, after US President Joe Biden took office and Israel fought an 11-day war with Hamas in the Gaza Strip, Biden revealed his intent to reopen the consulate [alongside other services](#) for the Palestinian population in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza, such as \$75 million in development funds for the West Bank and \$110 million for Gaza. Funding for the UN's mission to Palestinian refugees, [UNRWA, was also restored](#) after being severed by Trump, to the tune of \$235 million.

Hagerty suggested at the Wednesday hearing that the US reopening the consulate general would be a violation of the Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995.

"President Biden's proposal to open a second US mission in Jerusalem would begin to reverse the recognition of Jerusalem, and it would divide Israel's eternal and undivided capital city," Hagerty said.

However, McKeon corrected him, adding that "There's no intention to move the US embassy from Jerusalem."

When Britain's Palestine Mandate was partitioned by the United Nations into Jewish and Palestinian states in 1947, Jerusalem was intended to be an international city controlled by neither country, but in the war against Jordan, Syria and Egypt that followed its declaration of independence the following year, Israel captured far more land than had been partitioned to it, including western Jerusalem. East Jerusalem was later captured from Jordan in the 1967 Six-Day War, and in 1981, it declared the city annexed and that it was the Israeli capital. The UN denounced the land seizures as violations of international law.

The Palestinian National Authority, formed after the 1994 Oslo Accords, governs from Ramallah in the West Bank, which is under Israeli control. However, the PNA has said that in any future Palestinian state - to which the Biden administration says it remains committed - the capital must be East Jerusalem. That position has been backed by the UN and European Union.

About 2.8 million Palestinians live in the West Bank, while another 327,000 live in East Jerusalem and another 2 million live in Gaza, which is not connected to the West Bank and has been under an Israeli blockade since Hamas won elections there in 2007.

After US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on October 13 that the administration was ready to "move forward with the process of opening a consulate as part of deepening of those ties with the Palestinians," the government of Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, which came to power after the May pledge to do so, made clear its rejection of the proposal.

Gideon Sa'ar, who heads the Israeli Ministry of Justice, which alongside the Foreign Ministry would have to sign off on the move, flatly [told the Jerusalem Post](#) there was "no way" that would happen.

"I want to make it very clear. We oppose it ... we 100% oppose that. It needs Israeli approval, I don't believe it will have Israeli approval," he said. Noting that for Biden it had been an election commitment, Sa'ar said that "for us, it's a generations commitment ... and we will not compromise on this issue."

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Saudi Arabia Reportedly Gives Lebanese Ambassador 48 Hours to Leave Kingdom
By - Morgan Artyukhina

The Saudi monarchy has given Lebanon's ambassador in Riyadh 48 hours to leave the kingdom, the latest incident in a growing row between the two Arab states after Lebanese Information Minister George Kordahi publicly criticized the Saudi coalition's seven-year-long war in Yemen.

Saudi state media [made the announcement](#) on Friday, noting that its own ambassador in Beirut had also been recalled for consultations. The kingdom has also banned all Lebanese imports and is reportedly considering severing diplomatic ties entirely.

The Gulf Cooperation Council, a body composed of all Persian Gulf nations, will [meet in the morning](#) to discuss expelling all Lebanese ambassadors from their respective states. Several Gulf states are very close to the Saudi kingdom, including the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain,

and Kuwait, while Qatar has mended its relationship with the Saudi bloc over the past year, but remains in a careful balancing act with Iran, as well.

Just before midnight on Friday, Bahrain's Foreign Ministry said it also demands Lebanon's ambassador leave the island nation within 48 hours "against the background of a series of unacceptable and offensive statements issued by Lebanese officials in recent times." However, they clarified that other Lebanese citizens living there remain welcome and are not being asked to leave.

Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati said in a statement late Friday evening that he regrets the Saudi kingdom's decision and will continue to work hard to alleviate Riyadh's concerns. He also appealed to other Arab leaders to help Lebanon overcome the crisis with Saudi Arabia.

Lebanese Foreign Minister Abdallah Bou Habib said late Friday that he would chair an emergency ministerial meeting on Saturday "to search for opportunities to overcome regrettable differences."

"Since we are sure that what is happening is a problem, and not a crisis with our brothers in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries, and this can be overcome through dialogue," Habib said.

Lebanese television [also reported](#) that Habib had asked Kordahi to "do the right thing" and resign.

Criticism of War in Yemen Deepens Row

Relations between the two states have spiraled downhill after Kordahi criticized the Saudi-led coalition's conduct in the War in Yemen, where the coalition of Sunni states and local militias is fighting an insurgency by the Zaidi Shiite Houthi movement, who controls the capital and most of northern Yemen.

In the interview that aired on Monday, Kordahi said the Houthis were "defending themselves ... against an external aggression" and that their "homes, villages, funerals and weddings were being bombed" by the coalition. He also called the Saudis' seven-year war effort "futile" and said was "time for it to end."

Mitaki said on Friday that Kordahi's statement do not represent the government's opinion and he reaffirmed the keenness of Lebanese-Gulf relations.

His comments came after a [two-week air blitz](#) by the Saudi Royal Air Force against a Houthi offensive in Mar'ib and Shabwa Provinces, the last stronghold in northern Yemen for the country's internationally-recognized government led by President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, with whom the Saudis are allied. The war has claimed nearly a quarter-million lives, many of which have died due to indirect causes such as famine and disease, including cholera and COVID-19.

The Saudi release on Friday describes Kordahi's comments as "slanderous" and "deplorable and unacceptable."

"This also comes in addition to Lebanon's failure to take the measures demanded by the Kingdom to stop the export of the scourge of drugs from Lebanon through Lebanese exports to the Kingdom, especially in light of the terrorist Hezbollah's control of all ports, as well as the failure to take penalties against those involved in those crimes that target the people of Lebanon," the statement added.

Saudi Arabia's General Directorate for Narcotics Control has interdicted several large shipments of drugs in the past year that it says came from Lebanon. In April, [Saudi customs seized](#) 2.4 million Captagon amphetamine tablets hidden inside pomegranates shipped from Lebanon,

which it said had been the work of Hezbollah. Then in June, a [shipment of 14 million](#) Captagon tablets was reportedly found inside a shipment of iron plates by authorities in the port of Jeddah, Al-Arabiya reported at the time, citing the Saudi Press Agency.

Saudi media giant MBC Group, the Arab world's largest private media conglomerate, announced earlier on Friday it would [close all its operations](#) in Lebanon. Kordahi once hosted the Arabic version of the popular game show "Who Wants to be a Millionaire?" which aired on MBC from 2000 until 2010. MBC also operates Al-Arabiya.

On Wednesday, Saudi Arabia classified the Lebanese group Al-Qard Al-Hassan as a terrorist organization, claiming it "works on managing funds for the terrorist organisation [Hezbollah] and its financing, including support for military purposes" and banning all transactions with the group. Riyadh has long shunned the Lebanese government, of which Hezbollah is a member, due to allegations that Hezbollah has helped the Houthis and because Washington regards Hezbollah as a terrorist organization.

Kordahi is close to the Maronite Catholic Marada Movement, which are close allies of Hezbollah.

In November 2017, Lebanon's then-Prime Minister, Saad Hariri, was effectively kidnapped for two weeks during a vacation in Saudi Arabia and forced to deliver a [pre-written resignation](#) message. While he did so, he voided the declaration as soon as he returned to Lebanon and continued to head the Lebanese government until January 2020.

Riyadh then attempted to claim Lebanon had [declared war](#) on Saudi Arabia due to alleged actions by Hezbollah.

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US Intel Concludes COVID-19 Not Developed as Biological Weapon, Remains Divided on Virus Origins

By - Morgan Artyukhina

In a report declassified on Friday, the Office of the US Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) said that while the intelligence community (IC) remains divided on the origins of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, they have assessed it was not developed by China as a biological weapon.

The report seems to be the August report for which ODNI released an [unclassified executive summary](#) at the time. A note on its second page says it is in response to US President Joe Biden's May directive to explore the origins of SARS-CoV-2 and that the report "is based on information through August 2021." Further, the two documents name the same number of IC elements reaching the same findings.

However, release of the full report reveals more about how US intelligence analysts arrived at their conclusions.

The [document says](#) that the IC found that SARS-CoV-2 "probably emerged and infected humans through an initial small-scale exposure that occurred no later than November 2019 with the first known cluster of COVID-19 cases arising in Wuhan, China in December 2019."

Not a Bioweapon, Probably Not Engineered

"We judge the virus was not developed as a biological weapon," the report says. "Most agencies also assess with low confidence that SARS-CoV-2 probably was not genetically engineered; however, two agencies believe there was not sufficient evidence to make an assessment either way. Finally, the IC assesses China's officials did not have foreknowledge of the virus before the initial outbreak of COVID-19 emerged."

The IC's many agencies reached a variety of conclusions on several questions related to the novel coronavirus' origin, such as whether it came from an animal or a "laboratory incident." The report notes that while "most" intel analysts agreed the novel coronavirus wasn't genetically engineered in any way, they couldn't give a higher degree of confidence because "some genetic engineering techniques can make modifications difficult to identify" and because scientists don't have a complete understanding of how naturally occurring coronaviruses operate. However, they noted that all of the unique characteristics of SARS-CoV-2 have been observed in other betacoronaviruses, which have the ability to recombine with other viruses in nature and acquire new characteristics, such as the enhanced transmissibility SARS-CoV-2 has compared to other human coronaviruses.

Likely Jumped From Animals to Humans Naturally

Four IC elements and the National Intelligence Council assessed with "low confidence" that the virus infected humans via natural exposure by making the jump from an infected animal that came in contact with humans while carrying a virus almost identical to SARS-CoV-2.

A chart included in the report lays out various samples of coronaviruses taken from animals across East Asia and describes how closely they resemble SARS-CoV-2. The closest whole genome match found as of August 2021 was in a 2013 sample taken from a bat in China's southern Yunnan Province.

The report notes that most analysts found natural exposure more plausible because such transfers of other coronaviruses are known to have occurred and because of the many opportunities in China for such a jump to occur. These include hunters, farmers and merchants who sell both live and slaughtered animals at markets across the country, such as the popular Huanan Wet Market in Wuhan that Chinese scientists have long pointed to as the spread site for the first outbreak in late 2019.

Lab Leak Plausible, But No Evidence

One IC element which is left unnamed assessed with "moderate confidence" that "the first human infection with SARS-CoV-2 most likely was the result of a laboratory-associated incident, probably involving experimentation, animal handling, or sampling by the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV)." Debate over the issue, and whether Beijing had engaged in a coverup to hide its culpability for the outbreak, helped drive Biden to order the inquiry.

However, as [Sputnik has reported](#), the theory arose in right-wing anti-China circles in early 2020 and was used by then-US President Donald Trump to deflect blame from his own policies, which contributed to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Americans.

The report says the scientists who favor or lean toward the lab leak hypothesis "place emphasis on academic articles authored by WIV employees indicating that WIV scientists conducted research on other coronaviruses under what these analysts consider to be inadequate biosafety conditions that could have led to opportunities for a laboratory-associated incident."

However, it also notes that "the IC has no indications that WIV research involved SARS-CoV-2 or a close progenitor virus," simply stating that "it is plausible that researchers may have unwittingly exposed themselves to the virus without sequencing it during experiments or sampling activities, possibly resulting in asymptomatic or mild infection."

The report totally dismisses the idea that reported flu-like symptoms among several WIV employees in the autumn of 2019 could ever be demonstrated to have been COVID-19. Analysts at three IC elements were "unable to coalesce around either explanation" without further evidence. The report goes on to claim that China has not cooperated with the origins investigations, leaving the IC's results uncertain.

How Would Origins Be Confirmed?

The report also gives examples of what would confirm either hypothesis.

Finding a natural reservoir of SARS-CoV-2 or immediately related to it, or an intermediate host, or evidence that towns near such an animal population had contact with the virus, would confirm zoonotic transmission. However, such conclusions require field work, collaboration, and above all, time - which could also be an enemy, as [World Health Organization scientists](#) pursuing the virus' origins have warned.

When it comes to a lab leak, the ODNI report says that "China's coronavirus research or related information from origins investigations by Beijing or international organizations could provide clear indications of a laboratory-associated incident or at least yield some new insights."

The report also says that China is likely to impede further investigation, claiming they "limited the World Health Organization (WHO) investigation team's access to sites" and have called such probes politicized. However, the WHO scientists who participated in [that January 2021 venture](#) have [repeatedly pushed back](#) on those accusations, saying that China cooperated in every way they would be expected to and that the US would never accept such demands of openness if made of their own biolabs.

The WHO report, published in March, two months before Biden ordered the IC to investigate, arrived at essentially the same conclusions as the IC's report: zoonotic transfer is the most likely method of infection, but still more research needs to be done, and a lab leak is the least likely explanation, for which little actual evidence exists.

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Photos: China's Carrier-Based Stealth Fighter, Based on FC-31, Makes First Appearance
By - Morgan Artyukhina

New photos circulating on social media bear a close resemblance to Shenyang's FC-31 test aircraft, but a number of clues point to the jet photographed being something new: could it be the long-rumored aircraft carrier adaptation that fans call the J-35?

Is it a bird? No, it's a plane! And it seems to be China's forthcoming carrier-borne stealth fighter. The photos of a fluorescent green fighter jet with a J-11 chaseplane circulating on social media seem to pretty definitely show an aircraft based on the FC-31 that's been adapted for carrier

operations. A close-up image clearly shows a catapult launch bar and wing fold lines, neither of which land-borne aircraft have any use for.

Observers have also noted a chin-mounted EOIRST, or infrared sensor turret, and what seems to be a slightly remodeled canopy profile, which could indicate a larger avionics package stored in the fuselage behind the cockpit.

[According to Naval News](#), the flight took place at Harbin Aircraft Industry Group test facility in the northern Heilongjiang Province.

Little is known about the aircraft, which has been provisionally called the J-35 by observers. It's unclear how it got that name, but it seems likely it's because of accusations that China stole information about Lockheed Martin's F-35 Joint Strike Fighter. While the FC-31 and its newer derivative seem superficially similar, in reality they are very different aircraft, as [Sputnik has reported](#).

It seems more likely the new jet will be named J-21, since the newest Chinese fighter in service is the J-20, China's other fifth-generation aircraft.

Shenyang built two FC-31s in 2012 and 2016 to serve as test beds without a specific military demand, and for years Beijing [remained unsure](#) about what to use the jet for, if at all. For many reasons, the FC-31 is better suited to carrier flight operations than the J-20, but as of yet, the People's Liberation Army Navy hasn't had a way to make good use of such a jet, since both its aircraft carriers launch their J-15 fighters using bow ramps.

However, the forthcoming [Type 003 aircraft carrier](#), a much larger flattop with electromagnetic aircraft catapults, will be able to fling aircraft off the flight deck with much greater speed, allowing it to launch [heavier and slower](#) aircraft than its predecessors.

In July 2020, the Chinese Aeronautical Establishment, the research and development branch of the Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC), [reported it intended to begin testing a "new type of aircraft" for naval use](#) in conjunction with Shenyang. Then a few months later, [a photo emerged](#) of an FC-31 in a new paint job bearing the AVIC logo on its tail, further exciting observers' minds that the two were related.

However, the FC-31 was notably absent a tailhook, which aircraft use to land safely on aircraft carriers, meaning at least that jet at that time was not testing its ability to fly from a ship.

Another hint came this past March, when [Shenyang's WeChat teased](#) that it would be boosting research and testing on a new stealth aircraft and its related technologies this year. While it again declined to name the aircraft, the post included a photo of an FC-31.

Further teasers have come from a naval research and testing facility in Wuhan that has a building made to look like an aircraft carrier's command tower. A [mockup of an aircraft](#) closely resembling an FC-31 was spotted at the facility in June.

What appeared to be photos of a [two-seater variant](#) of the J-20 also appeared earlier this week. Observers remain skeptical, but if the photos are legitimate, it would be the first two-seat version of any fifth-generation fighter. A second pilot could have a number of uses, from dedicated weapons officers to piloting instructors, or even managers of drone swarms.

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DC Judge Temporarily Bans Biden Administration from Firing Civilians Seeking Vaccine Exemptions

By - Adriana Montes

Talks between military officials to reverse plans of immediately firing unvaccinated troops once the deadline passes are also being put in motion.

A Washington, DC district court judge issued a temporary restraining order Thursday that prevents both civilian and active-duty military plaintiffs from being terminated while they await a ruling after a suit over religious exemptions to COVID-19 vaccines.

"None of the civilian employee plaintiffs will be subject to discipline while his or her request for a religious exception is pending," read a [minute order](#) from District Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly obtained by Fox News.

Biden is facing criticism after thousands of civilians, contractors, and troops are facing the risk of being ultimately fired from their jobs if they are not fully vaccinated against coronavirus.

In a filing on Friday, the Biden administration [reportedly](#) said that it refused to halt the discipline and termination of any employees in the process of seeking a religious exemption to the vaccine, pending the court's ruling on the temporary restraining order (TRO) motion.

"It is Plaintiffs' burden to demonstrate impending irreparable harm...but Plaintiffs offer nothing beyond speculation to suggest that their religious exception requests will be denied and that they will be disciplined at all, much less on the first day that such discipline is theoretically possible."

The judge also requested Thursday that the administration agree that "active duty military plaintiffs, whose religious exception requests have been denied, will not be disciplined or separated during the pendency of their appeals."

Jenna Lynn Ellis, an American lawyer who worked on Donald Trump's election, shared a copy of the minute order to Twitter in what she referred to as a "HUGE WIN in Church v. Biden."

"This is an amazing development from the DC District Court in the stand for OUR RIGHTS against the unconstitutional vaccine mandates," the tweet read.

The Biden administration was given until noon on Friday to file a supplemental notice that indicates whether they agree with the terms of no plaintiff facing discipline or termination pending the court's ruling. If they fail to do so, another briefing is set to be scheduled.

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NASA Scientists Call for New Framework to Discover Evidence of Life Beyond Earth

By - Adriana Montes

The NASA group envisioned a scale informed by decades of experience in astrobiology - an interdisciplinary scientific field dedicated to the understanding of life's origin and possibilities of life elsewhere.

NASA scientists are calling for a new framework in the search for extraterrestrial life, and are proposing the creation of a scale that evaluates and combines different lines of evidence that could ultimately prove if we are indeed alone in the universe.

In a new [article](#) published in Nature on Wednesday by the agency's chief scientist, Jim Green, the agency offers a sample scale to use as a starting point for discussions among anyone who would potentially make use of it.

"Having a scale like this will help us understand where we are in terms of the search for life in particular locations, and in terms of the capabilities of missions and technologies that help us in that quest," Green added.

The scale contains seven levels that NASA said are "reflective of the winding, complicated staircase of steps that would lead to scientists declaring they've found life beyond Earth."

The first three levels of the scale will help scientists determine clues of a "signature of life," ensure that detection was compromised by the instruments contaminated on Earth, and help understand how biological signals are found in an analog environment.

The objective aims at scientists being able to conclude in published studies how their new astrobiology results fit into such a scale in the near future.

"Until now, we have set the public up to think there are only two options: it's life or it's not life," said Mary Voytek, head of NASA's Astrobiology Program at NASA Headquarters in Washington, DC and the study's co-author. Voytek added that the agency needed a better way to share the "excitement of each discovery" with the public and other scientists along the journey.

"The search for life beyond Earth requires broad participation from the scientific community and many kinds of observations and experiments. Together, we can be stronger in our efforts to look for hints that we are not alone."

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Study: Texas Sees Massive Drop in Abortions in Month After 'Heartbeat' Ban Took Effect
By - Adriana Montes

Researchers noted that no other Texas law or order restricting abortion has seen such a dramatic decrease.

New research indicates that the number of abortions performed in Texas over the course of September 2021 decreased by about 50% - bringing the effect of the state's near total ban on the procedure into stark relief, according to research from the Texas Policy Evaluation Project. The [data](#) determined that the number of abortions also surged by 28 percent in August, likely reflecting the rush to secure reproductive care before the bill went into effect.

In its research, the project explains that the 4,313 abortions performed in September of last year collectively dropped down to 2,164 abortions performed in the same month this year.

The Texas abortion law, known as [Senate Bill 8](#), amounts to a nearly complete ban on abortion in the entire state, which effectively bars the procedure after six weeks of pregnancy. It is considered to be the most restrictive law allowed to be enforced since the 1973 [Roe v. Wade](#) case legalized abortion in the U.S.

Shortly after advancing through the legislature, the Texas law sparked national and international outrage as it provides no exceptions for rape or incest - while also permitting anyone in the country to sue anyone who assists a person in getting the procedure after six weeks. The Supreme Court [is set](#) to hear two challenges to the law next month, according to Axios. As the number of abortions performed in Texas continue to drop, abortion facilities in neighboring states are reporting a massive increase in out-of-state patients coming in to seek abortion care after it was effectively outlawed in their home state.

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Elevated Threat Issued in Northern Virginia on Halloween Weekend Amid Daesh Attack Rumors

Officials with Northern Virginia police departments say they are “aware” of rumors circulating on social media about possible terrorist attacks at malls this Halloween, but noted that details are limited.

An “elevated, highly specific” threat against Northern Virginia this Halloween weekend will increase police presence at major shopping areas in the city, according to Mike Valerio, a journalist with WUSA9, who confirmed the news on Twitter Friday.

“We are told this is *not* a vague, run of the mill, usual Halloween elevated threat,” [read the tweet](#) shared by the reporter.

A spokesperson for the FBI Washington Field Office on Friday afternoon said the agency had no comment.

“However, we would remind you the FBI takes all potential threats to public safety seriously and we take all appropriate steps to determine the credibility of any information we receive,” the spokesperson said in an email shared by Valerio on [Twitter](#).

The rumors begin after an alleged screenshot of what appeared to be a law-enforcement email alerting the public of a “potential Daesh* attack by a cell in Northern Virginia” circulated on social media. The attack was said to potentially take place “within the next 72 hours,” specifically targeting a shopping mall center in the Alexandria or Woodbridge area.

The threat, according to federal officials, was received earlier in the week, causing a “high” degree of concern.

Fairfax County Police Chief Kevin Davis said Friday that his department is stepping up police presence over the weekend at malls, shopping centers and along major transportation hubs — as his detectives work to corroborate the information.

Prince William County Police Master Officer Renee Carr said the department is aware of the information circulating and will “provide additional information when we are able.”

The Loudoun County Sheriff’s Office issued a statement saying the information was limited about the possible threat and was not specific to the county.

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Cuomo Demands Sheriff's Office "Preserve All Records" Related to Groping Investigation

A sex crime misdemeanor complaint against Cuomo was filed by an Albany County Sheriff's Department investigator on Thursday. The ex-NY governor previously had to resign after an investigation by State Attorney General Letitia James found he harassed nearly a dozen colleagues. Cuomo denies any wrongdoing.

Andrew Cuomo demands the Albany County sheriff's office "preserve all records" from the groping probe, while the investigator has slammed the ex-governor's camp as "bullies". In a letter to Sheriff Craig Apple, Cuomo's attorney Rita Glavin outlines records which led to the misdemeanor criminal complaint filed this week to be kept confidential including correspondence with Brittany Commisso, the former executive assistant who claims Cuomo groped her in the Executive Mansion.

Additionally, they are requesting correspondence from Commisso's husband Frank Commisso, Jr., and his father, a former Albany County Democratic Majority Leader, as well as all records of correspondence with the press.

Cuomo also shared an additional tweet saying that although Apple claimed there was an "overwhelming amount of evidence in the case," every item listed "only verifies uncontested facts that this employee was in & out of the mansion as part of her job—there is zero corroborating evidence that a crime occurred."

"They're bullies," said Apple in an [interview](#) with The Post Saturday. "But we expected this," referring to the preservation that Cuomo and his attorney are using as a standard legal tactic. "If he doesn't show up the stakes will be raised," Apple said. "They keep doing what they do, and we're going to continue to move forward with our investigation. People can see through that smoke screen. We've tried to keep this from being a circus but they've turned it into a circus."

On Thursday, a New York court [charged](#) Cuomo with a sex crime over allegations that he forcibly touched a former aide in December 2020. The complaint accuses Cuomo, 63, of "forcibly" putting his hand under the victim's blouse and groping her last December at his official residence.

Though the name of the victim is redacted in the complaint, she is apparently the former executive assistant to the governor, Brittany Commisso, who gave a tearful interview to US media this August detailing the alleged harassment against her on the part of Cuomo.

A summons has been [issued](#) to Cuomo to appear at Albany City Court on Nov. 17.

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Tension Sparked Between Zayn Malik and Yolanda Hadid Over Snap Shared of Daughter Khai

The troubled singer has also been dropped by his record label amid fans' fears that he has been smoking "extremely strong" cannabis.

Zayn Malik and Yolanda Hadid are reportedly in conflict over an alleged leaked image of his and her daughter Gigi's little one Khai.

According to a [source](#) from The Sun, friends of Gigi revealed that Malik, 28, previously lost his temper on Yolanda when she posted a picture of his daughter's face on Instagram. Yolanda had reportedly deleted the snap immediately upon realizing the mistake and replaced it with a different image, but by then fans had already obtained a glimpse of Khai's face. The former One Direction singer has been charged with harassing Gigi and [allegedly striking](#) her mum Yolanda and pushing her into a dresser after a verbal and "physical" altercation at his Pennsylvania home.

Malik immediately denied the claims and is pleading no contest to harassment. He responded to the allegations in a [statement](#) to TMZ, which reportedly read "I adamantly deny striking Yolanda Hadid, and for the sake of my daughter I decline to give any further details, and I hope that Yolanda will reconsider her false allegations and move towards healing these family issues in private."

Court documents reportedly confirm Malik was charged with four counts of harassment following an altercation at the home he shares with Gigi and their daughter.

Zayn, who is very adamant about not showing their daughter's face publicly, was said to have been furious with Yolanda.

"I remain vigilant to protect Khai and give her the privacy she deserves," he added.

A [source](#) told the publication: "Back in January, Yolanda accidentally posted a photo of Khai where you could see her face and Zayn went crazy - he's so protective of his daughter's privacy, he was so mad."

"Yolanda doesn't see what the issue is, but Zayn - and Gigi - are very against their child being photographed and it's been a huge cause of tension between them."

Zayn, seemingly hinting that he and Gigi had split, added that he wants to "co-parent my daughter in a manner in which she deserves."

"As you all know I am a private person and I very much want to create a safe and private place for my daughter to grow up in."

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Trump's Attorney Reportedly Blamed Pence's Team for Jan. 6 Violence Over Not Tossing Out Election

Before the January 6 insurrection, the attorney allegedly tried to persuade Pence to block the certification of the election in order to allow state lawmakers to investigate Trump's claims of election fraud.

John Eastman, a lawyer for former President Donald Trump, told an aide of Vice President Mike Pence that Pence caused the attack on the Capitol by refusing to overturn the election, Washington Post reported Saturday.

Additionally, he reportedly continued to pressure him after Trump supporters stormed the Capitol, but Pence's refusal resulted in violence.

Eastman [reportedly](#) made the comments in an email exchange in January with top Pence aide Greg Jacob, who described the riot as a "siege" while he sheltered with the vice president in a secure area.

"Thanks to your bullsh*t, we are now under siege," Jacob wrote, according to the paper.

"The "siege" is because YOU and your boss did not do what was necessary to allow this to be aired in a public way so that the American people can see for themselves what happened," Eastman reportedly claimed, referring to Trump's false claims about the 2020 election being fraudulent.

The emails reportedly revealed the extent to which Eastman was trying to persuade Pence to block the certification of the election — who reportedly repeatedly refused, arguing that he had no constitutional authority to do so.

On the day of January 6 events, Trump [tweeted](#), "Mike Pence didn't have the courage to do what should have been done to protect our Country and our Constitution."

The events [are being investigated](#) by the House Select Committee, as they plan to subpoena Eastman.

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Germany Says Waiting for Iran's Next Move as Tehran Hints at Nuclear Talks Renewal

BERLIN, October 29 (Sputnik) - Germany wants Iran to offer a concrete timeline for the resumption of the stalled nuclear talks, a foreign office spokesman said in Berlin, after Tehran suggested it could name a date this week.

"Iran did not suggest a concrete date, so the ball is in Iran's court. We urge Iran to follow its words on the resumption of negotiations with actions," Christofer Burger told a news conference.

Negotiations in Vienna on how to bring Iran and the United States back into compliance with the 2015 nuclear deal halted ahead of the Iranian presidential polls in June and have yet to resume. Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said earlier on Monday that Tehran was going to consult all parties to the pact before setting a date for the restart of multilateral talks. This comes after the US, the UK, France and Germany said in a joint statement on Saturday that they were concerned about Iran's accelerated pace of uranium enrichment.

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No Russian Planes Based in Syria's Qamishli – Turkish Defense Ministry

ANKARA, October 29 (Sputnik) – A source in the Turkish Ministry of National Defense denied reports of Russian aircraft basing at an airport in the northeastern Syrian Qamishli area, located near the border with Turkey.

"Some footage is being distributed on social networks. They depict an event that took place that day. The event revolved around a plane that landed and then flew away. There is no deployment," the NTV broadcaster quoted the source as saying.

Last week, a number of media and social media users assumed that a Russian fighter jet landing in northeastern Syria was presumably a part of an upcoming larger deployment in an effort to strengthen Russia's presence in this part of the country.

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European COVID Vaccine Certificates Offered for \$300 on Darknet - Russia's Kaspersky Lab

MOSCOW, October 29 (Sputnik) - European electronic COVID-19 vaccine certificates are put up for sale on the darknet, with an average price of \$300, Russia's leading cybersecurity and anti-virus company Kaspersky Lab said on Monday.

"Kaspersky Lab has studied several shadow sites and found offers for the sale of electronic COVID-19 vaccine certificates of the European type. The document in the ads is offered for an average of \$300," the company said in a statement.

Experts believe that the ads are mainly aimed at luring money from users, the statement said, adding that offers indicate payment is accepted in any cryptocurrency.

The certificates are offered both in English and Russian and users can choose the country of vaccination and the vaccine manufacturer—AstraZeneca, Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson or Moderna. The certificate is allegedly issued in one of the countries of Eastern Europe and may be verified using official applications such as CovPass, CovidCheck, Corona-Warn.

The cybersecurity firm warned against purchasing any certificates on the darknet, saying all such advertisements are most likely to be a fraud.

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More States Striving for Cooperation With Turkic Council – Erdogan

ANKARA, October 29 (Sputnik) – The number of countries willing to cooperate with the Turkic Council and become observers in the organization, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Monday without naming these states,

The Turkic Council was founded in 2009 as a platform for cooperation between Turkic-speaking nations, including Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey, and Uzbekistan. Hungary participates in the council as an observer.

"The number of countries that have expressed their desire to cooperate with our council and to be an observer to our council is increasing day by day," Erdogan was quoted as saying by the Anadolu Agency in a video message to the first meeting of the Turkic Council Chief Prosecutors in Baku.

Turkey attaches great importance to the formation of the council of chief prosecutors amid such growing global issues as terrorism, illegal migration, and cross-border crimes, the leader went on, adding that the organization has outgrown regional format up to an international scale. The ongoing situation in the world shows the necessity to develop new ways of cooperation in all fields, including transport, defense, healthcare, trade, among others, Erdogan said.

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Iran to Unveil Date of New Round of Nuclear Talks in Vienna This Week - Foreign Ministry

MOSCOW, October 29 (Sputnik) - Tehran will announce the date of resuming the Vienna-hosted nuclear talks this week after consulting all parties to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), primarily China, Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said on Monday.

"We and Beijing are holding very close consultations, and the date [announced] in Brussels was not final, because Iran wanted to consult all parties, including Beijing, and the date will be finalized this week," Khatibzadeh said, as quoted by the Fars news agency.

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani said last week that the Vienna talks would resume by the end of November. Washington, in turn, said that considered it possible to quickly reach a deal to revive the 2015 agreement.

Since April, Vienna has been hosting talks aimed at reviving the Iran nuclear deal, which fell through after Washington's unilateral withdrawal and Tehran's retaliating actions. The sixth round of talks finished on June 20 and the negotiations have since hit a deadlock.

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Ethiopian Government Says TPLF Killed Over 100 Young Residents of Seized City

MOSCOW, October 29 (Sputnik) – The Ethiopian government said on Monday that rebels from the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) killed more than 100 young people living in the northern city of Kombolcha, captured by the insurgents on past weekend.

"The terrorist group TPLF has summarily executed more than 100 youth residents of Kombolcha in areas it has infiltrated. The international community should not turn blind eye to such atrocities," Ethiopia's government communication service said on Twitter.

The north of the African country has been engulfed by an internal conflict for almost a year. In November 2020, the authorities blamed the TPLF dominating the political landscape of Ethiopia for almost three decades for attacking a military base. The government forces launched a counter-operation, supported by neighboring Eritrea.

In spring 2021, Ethiopia announced the withdrawal of Eritrean troops from the Tigray region. In June, the rebels seized the administrative center of Tigray, Mekelle, prompting the government

to declare a ceasefire. However, the insurgents later said that they stepped up offensive and established control of a major part of the south of Tigray.

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Israel to Open Borders to Tourists Vaccinated With Sputnik V - Tourism Minister to Sputnik

TEL AVIV, October 29 (Sputnik) - The Israeli government has decided to allow tourists vaccinated with Sputnik V to travel to the country from November 15, but the possible inclusion of Russia in the COVID-19 list of "red countries" may postpone the implementation of the decision by several weeks, Israeli Minister of Tourism Yoel Razvozov told Sputnik on Monday. On October 21, Razvozov announced that Israel will allow vaccinated tourists to enter the country provided that their certificates are recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO) and that they have not been to the country on the red list 14 days previously.

Israel closed its borders to foreign tourists in March 2020. From January to February 2021, Ben Gurion Airport was closed. In May 2021, the first group of foreign tourists from the United States visited Israel. Vaccinated tourists were expected to enter Israel from July 1, but due to the spread of the Delta strain, the decision was postponed.

In October, the government decided to receive tourists with vaccination certificates approved by the WHO. The list of vaccines approved at the meeting included Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca, Sinovac, Sinopharm and Janssen. The Russian Sputnik V vaccine was not mentioned in the document.

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Algeria Ready to Develop Long-Term Cooperation With Russia in Pharmaceuticals - Minister ALGIERS, October 29 (Sputnik) - Algeria is interested in long-term cooperation with Russia in the pharmaceutical industry, including the production of the Sputnik V COVID-19 vaccine, Algerian Minister of Pharmaceutical Industry, Abderrahmane Lotfi Djamel Benhamed, told Sputnik.

"As you know, a cooperation protocol has been signed with the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF). A digital database on the Russian vaccine has been created to provide a technology transfer procedure that will allow Algeria to produce [Sputnik V]," the minister said.

However, according to him, such a procedure usually takes a long time. In particular, as Benhamed said, the Russian side has not yet sent working groups to inspect Algerian enterprises. The minister stressed that it was not a delay, but the necessary time to launch the production of drugs in accordance with the standards of the pharmaceutical industry.

"We are ready to continue working with Russia. Moreover, we have expanded our cooperation at the expense of other products, since we know the excellent quality of Russian products. We were the first African country to register Sputnik V," Benhamed said.

According to the minister, Algerian enterprises will be able to start producing the vaccine two months after receiving the raw materials.

Along with the vaccine, cooperation with Russia also involves the production of anti-cancer drugs intended for the local market and for export to the Middle East and African countries, Benhamed said.

"We have 130 pharmaceutical laboratories that, in accordance with the world standards, produce almost all drugs the African continent needs. We export to African and European countries," he added.

Previously, Algeria did not promote exports of pharmaceuticals because of the obligation to meet the needs of the local market, but the situation has changed, Benahmed explained. In particular, the African Medicines Agency, involving 15 of the continent's countries, will begin its work in a few weeks. According to Benhamed, Algeria is "seriously preparing" to work within the framework of this organization.

In February, Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune announced that the production of the Sputnik V COVID-19 vaccine would begin in the country in about six months. In the same month, Russia's trade representative in Algeria, Ivan Nalich, told Sputnik that Algeria was showing great interest in localizing the production of this vaccine and resolving technical issues. The vaccination campaign began in Algeria on January 30. The Sputnik V vaccine is actively being used. Vaccination is free of charge for all population groups.

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American Airlines Cancels Almost 2,000 Flights Over Weekend - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 29 (Sputnik) - The number of flights canceled over the weekend by major US air operator American Airlines reached almost 2,000 for a variety of reasons, according to the media reports.

On Sunday alone, American Airlines canceled more than 1,000 flights, which is about 20% of its schedule, the Wall Street Journal writes.

On Saturday, the airline's Chief Operating Officer, David Seymour, said in a memo that there were certain problems on Thursday due to strong wind gusts that reduced the throughput capacity at Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport, the busiest airport in Texas, according to the newspaper.

"Our staffing begins to run tight, as crew members end up out of their regular flight sequences," Seymour told his employees.

The number of cancellations increased significantly because pilots and flight attendants were not in the right places for next flights.

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RPT - COVID-19 Vaccination Campaign to Start in Remaining Afghan Provinces in 2-3 Days - UNICEF

WASHINGTON, October 29 (Sputnik) - Some 40,000 people are vaccinated daily in Afghanistan after a vaccination campaign against the novel coronavirus started mid-October in 14 of the country's 32 provinces and the remaining provinces will begin administering the shots in about a couple of days, UNICEF's representative in Afghanistan Salam Al-Janabi told Sputnik.

"UNICEF and partners are supporting a massive COVID-19 vaccination campaign targeting people in urban locations. This campaign started on October 16 in 14 Provinces. It started in the Southern region a day later," the representative said. "In the remaining provinces, it will start in the next 2 -3 days. Currently, almost 40,000 people are being vaccinated daily. This massive campaign will continue until we utilize 1.8 million doses of the Johnson & Johnson available in stock."

Afghanistan has received about 5.25 million doses of different types of vaccines both through COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) facility and bilateral donations, he added.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), there have been 155,985 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 7,257 deaths in Afghanistan. As of October 23, a total of 2,925,490 vaccine doses have been administered, the representative added.

The Taliban terror group (banned in Russia) came to power in Afghanistan in mid-August, causing the US-backed government to collapse.

The Taliban then set up a new government, led by Mohammad Hasan Akhund, who served as the foreign minister during the previous period of Taliban rule and has been under UN sanctions since 2001.

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RPT - High Schools for Girls in Most Afghan Provinces Remain Closed - UNICEF

WASHINGTON, October 29 (Sputnik) - High schools for girls in most provinces in Afghanistan remain closed, but the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is waiting to see whether the authorities' rhetoric that they will allow girls' access to education will match the reality on the ground, UNICEF's representative in Afghanistan Salam Al-Janabi told Sputnik.

"When it comes to girls' education, UNICEF is waiting to see if the rhetoric will match reality on the ground," the UNICEF representative said. "In most provinces, with the exception of five in the northern region, high schools for girls remain closed," Al-Janabi said.

UNICEF calls for opening schools, community-based education classes and universities to all girls and young women, he added.

"It is also important that teachers, both male and female, are trained, that they receive their monthly salaries, and that they are supported in their teaching," the representative said, adding that 38% of the 9.5 million children in primary and secondary education in Afghanistan are girls. "By comparison, there were only 1 million children in the education system in 2001 and only 10 percent of them were girls," Al-Janabi said. "We cannot afford to lose the gains made in

educating girls and women over the last two decades. We can only protect progress by continuing to ensure that the most disadvantaged girls complete primary and secondary education."

The UNICEF representative pointed out that the Fund has a working relationship with the Taliban, which it had long before this current crisis.

"It is standard practice for UNICEF all over the world to work with government and anti-government elements wherever necessary to reach the children most in need," he said.

"Engagement with armed actors enables UNICEF and other humanitarians to negotiate for the assurances and safeguards necessary for rapid, unimpeded and safe humanitarian access and to ensure that programs and resources reach their intended populations, according to their needs, and without diversion."

Al-Janabi said a work plan was established in December to expand access to education into areas under Taliban control for all children, including for girls.

"We hope to continue to build on this," he added. "We have been engaging constructively with the 'de facto authorities' at the local level through interlocutors and are engaging with them at all levels to reach the children we have been previously unable to with life-saving health services, education and more."

The Taliban terror group (banned in Russia) came to power in Afghanistan in mid-August, causing the US-backed government to collapse. The Taliban then set up a new all-male government, led by Mohammad Hasan Akhund, who served as the foreign minister during the previous Taliban rule and has been under UN sanctions since 2001.

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RPT - US Government Engaging With Russia to Secure Additional Overflights - Source WASHINGTON, October 29 (Sputnik) - The US government is currently engaging with its Russian counterparts to secure additional overflights, a source familiar with the matter told Sputnik.

"The U.S. government ... is engaging with the Russian government in an effort to secure rights for additional overflights going forward," the source said.

They pointed out that the US government has already secured approval of most of the requested overflights for the winter season.

On Thursday, Reuters reported that Airlines for America trade group, which represents such carriers as American Airlines, Delta Airlines, FedEx Corp, and United Parcel Service, has asked the State Department to take an immediate action to address the needs of airlines to safeguard rights to overfly Russian airspace.

In a letter, dated October 14, the group requested US Secretary of State Antony Blinken to intervene, according to the report. The group warned that without these additional rights US airlines will have to operate on alternate, which will lead to time penalties, technical stops, excess CO2 emissions as well as loss of historic slot rights.

Earlier on Friday, the trade group told Sputnik that US air carriers have urged the government to secure extra Russian overflights in the near future.

"A4A appreciates the U.S. government's efforts to secure approvals of Russian overflights for the upcoming winter season on behalf of U.S. airlines," Carter Yang, Managing Director, Industry Communications at Airlines for America, said. "A4A underscores the importance of the U.S. government securing additional Russian overflights for U.S. airlines in the near term." Yang underscored that Russian overflights are "key to maintaining and expanding U.S. airlines' global network."

"These overflights allow U.S. passenger and cargo carriers to operate efficiently between the U.S. and destinations in Asia, India and the Middle East," he said.

American airlines have called on the US government to secure extra Russian overflights for the upcoming winter season, he noted.

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RPT - Afghanistan Among World's Worst Crises, Social Services on 'Brink of Collapse' - UNICEF

WASHINGTON, October 29 (Sputnik) - Afghanistan is currently experiencing one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, with the health system and social services at a breaking point, UNICEF's representative in Afghanistan Salam Al-Janabi told Sputnik.

"Afghanistan now is amongst the world's worst crises and the needs are growing by the day," Al-Janabi said. "In addition to the growing malnutrition crisis and food insecurity, the health system and social services are on the brink of collapse."

Early this year, the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan was already one of the worst in the world, with nearly half of the country's population - including some 10 million children - having been in need of humanitarian aid, the UNICEF representative said.

"Due to the recent events and the economic shocks the country has been experiencing, more families are pushed to the brink," he said. "More than half of Afghanistan's population is projected to face acute hunger as humanitarian needs grow to record levels. As food insecurity spikes in Afghanistan, so does severe acute malnutrition amongst children under five years old." Without immediate action, an estimated 1 million children are projected to suffer from severe acute malnutrition over the course of this year, and could die, the representative warned.

"With winter quickly approaching, amidst drought, measles and acute watery diarrhea outbreaks millions of children are on borrowed time," Al-Janabi said. "UNICEF anticipates that the humanitarian needs of children and women will increase over the coming months amidst a severe drought and consequent water scarcity, an uncertain security environment, continued displacement, the devastating socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the onset of winter."

UNICEF underscored that without urgent action, the humanitarian situation will continue to deteriorate in 2022. The representative noted that the current humanitarian funding requirement for Afghanistan stands at \$192 million.

"This figure will certainly increase as the needs continue to grow. Of the \$192 million UNICEF's donors have funded around 70% of the needed support," Al-Janabi said. "We urge donors to

maintain their humanitarian and development investments in Afghanistan so that the hard-fought gains over the past decades are not lost."

The Taliban (banned in Russia as a terrorist group) came to power in Afghanistan in mid-August, causing the US-backed government to collapse. The group then set up a new government, led by Mohammad Hasan Akhund, who served as the foreign minister during the previous Taliban rule and has been under UN sanctions since 2001.

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RPT: ANALYSIS - Russia, China Reaction to US Cybersecurity Bureau Depends on How It Is Presented

WASHINGTON, October 29 (Sputnik), Ekaterina Chukaeva - The reaction of China and Russia to the United States launching a new cybersecurity bureau will depend on how it is presented — if as a tool of deterrence, the two nations will regard it with skepticism, analysts told Sputnik. Earlier in the week, the State Department announced that it will establish a Bureau of Cyberspace and Digital Policy, with its main focus on international cybersecurity, led by an ambassador at large. The US will also appoint a special envoy for critical and emerging technology to spearhead a technology diplomacy agenda with American allies and partners. The announcement comes against the backdrop of the West's continued allegations of Russian interference in internal affairs and cyberattacks. Moscow denies all such accusations, stating that Western countries have not presented any evidence.

US President Joe Biden also warned that cyberattacks allegedly conducted by Russia are "going to end up in a war, a real shooting war with a major power." The American leader accused Russia of seeking to meddle in next year's midterm elections in the US.

CHINA, RUSSIA LIKELY TO CHOOSE WAIT AND SEE APPROACH

Following the US announcement, China and Russia - which are apparently the targets of this program - will probably take "a wait-and-see approach," Tony Robinson, a peace activist and the director of the Middle East Treaty Organization, told Sputnik.

"The USA doesn't respect China and Russia as democratic countries and so it appears to be another attempt by Washington to drive a wedge between the most powerful countries on the planet. There is nothing new here as an anti-China and anti-Russia narrative is what the military-industrial complex requires in order to maintain control of the US government," he told Sputnik.

Whether this bureau will help Washington mend relations, or not, will depend very much on how much goodwill the US intends to offer to Russia and China, which, however, doesn't look hopeful, according to Robinson.

"Any action by the US government to engage in diplomacy in different spheres of security is to be welcomed, but we are still very far away from the US regaining it's reputation after years of pulling out of international treaties whenever it so decides," he said.

Robinson referred to the growing anti-Chinese sentiment in the US, which he says is being mimicked in the UK and Australia, among other places, as evinced by the new AUKUS alliance.

"Efforts are really being stoked up by these governments and repeated in the media in order to start a conflict over Taiwan," he explained.

US, RUSSIA VIEW CYBERSECURITY DIFFERENTLY

The importance of issues related to cybersecurity is rising not in the context of US-Russia, but the entire international community, Noah Mayhew, a research associate at the Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation, told Sputnik.

"Especially considering that the United States and Russia view this issue fundamentally differently – the United States as cybersecurity and Russia as information security – a dedicated expert and diplomatic presence on this issue bodes well for future," he said.

According to Mayhew, the signal that Washington will send to Beijing and Moscow depends largely on how it is packaged.

"If it is packaged as a tool to deter and respond to cyberattacks against the United States, China and Russia may view the creation of the Bureau with some skepticism. If it is packaged as a medium through which the United States intends to more efficiently engender dialogue with other nations on issues related to new and emerging technologies, including reducing miscommunications, it would likely be seen as a positive development by China and Russia," he said.

Mayhew said that he suspects the new body to serve both functions, but in any case, this is the US step in the right direction.

"Ideally, the Bureau will provide a medium for more coordination within the United States government on cyber matters, which one would hope would have a positive impact on the United States' messaging in bilateral meetings with Russia, such as those taking place under the auspices of the Strategic Stability Dialogue," he said, adding that it would be wrong to speculate as to what will be the bureau's approach to US-Russia cyber relations at this time. He noted that more coordination between countries, especially when it comes to cyberspace, is a good thing.

"In this regard, I would hope that the creation of the Bureau will improve coordination between not just the United States and its allies, but also between Russia and China," he concluded.

DEPENDING ENTIRELY ON RUSSIA

Clyde Prestowitz who served as a counselor to US Secretary of Commerce in the Reagan Administration, told Sputnik, that the primary aim of the bureau is evident.

"The action is certainly aimed at interrupting and halting cyber attacks and these seem to come mostly from Russia and China. So, of course, the program will be aimed at them, but it will also be aimed at any others who are or want to be involved in such a destructive game," he explained.

He believes that whether this agency can mend relations with Russia or make them worse depends on Moscow. Yet, it is hard to predict how it will affect the ongoing cybersecurity and security talks between Washington and Moscow, according to the former official.

"The U.S. side is hoping that the Russian side might take this U.S. move seriously and quickly move to some satisfactory mutual agreement in the present talks. But whether the Russian side will be more cooperative or less is difficult to predict," he said.

The landmark summit in Geneva on June 16 marked the first meeting Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin, which the presidents themselves assessed as productive. The two leaders agreed back then to launch consultations on strategic stability, as well as adopted a joint

statement reaffirming commitment to the 1985 formula by Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.

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RPT - Bid to 'Change Narrative' Won't Let Facebook Alter History - Experts

WASHINGTON, October 29 (Sputnik), Barrington M. Salmon - Facebook may hope rebranding allows it to evade accountability amid recent scandals, but a name change alone will not regain user trust without radical policy and leadership changes, public relations experts told Sputnik.

On Thursday, Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg announced that the parent company has adopted the new name "Meta" to focus on building the metaverse. The move comes just as the social media giant has been overwhelmed by bad publicity since a former employee released thousands of pages of documents detailing dangerous and possibly illegal activities including allowing hate groups and disinformation to flourish.

"It strikes me as nondescript, something difficult for people to remember the stories, accusations and scandal that has trailed them," Spotlight PR founder Jennifer Farmer said. "The name has been and changed at the height of public criticism and scrutiny. It is an attempt to evade accountability.... [but] your history will still follow you for a while."

Farmer said the name change is a temporary salve to a wound that will linger and will not heal.

"They will need more than a name change. They will have to do some radical changes to regain people's trust," she said. "I would ask, 'Will there be leadership changes on the bus and leading people off the bus, and not just reshuffling seats?'"

"This reminds me that a lot of people start out wanting to do and continue doing good but with the growth of power and resources, it's even harder to stay on the right track. It's also very important who you surround yourself with," Farmer concluded.

Ivory Communications Founder Lee Ivory said he is not surprised by the move because Facebook is facing the "nightmare of all nightmares" with the documents from their former employee.

"I always liked Facebook and saw it as a harmless way to connect with friends and family but it developed into an almost insidious portal for evil," Ivory said. "Clearly they knew. They can read."

Facebook has to bear much of the blame, Ivory added, considering White supremacists QAnon and the Proud Boys and other hate groups were building up on this platform and proliferated.

"It's very troubling that these groups were allowed to run amok," Ivory said.

Ivory added that not blocking misinformation and disinformation about COVID and vaccines is unforgiveable. Hence, he knew exactly why Facebook decided to rebrand.

"They've gotta do something to change the narrative," Ivory said.

SRB Communications Senior Digital Marketing Manager Catherine McClary said she suspects this rebranding move is an attempt to cover up a veritable hornet's nest of issues, troubles and problems that are vaster and considerably more significant than the public could ever imagine.

McClary said Facebook and other social media entities engage in shady practices but no more so than "Big Brother," referring to the federal government.

"Honestly, in this digital world, there are so many ways to get information and give data to marketers," she said. "They're not doing anything other companies are doing and it's nothing the government hasn't been doing for years."

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FEATURE - Afghan English Teacher Leaves Five Kids Behind Due to Evacuation Nightmare

WASHINGTON, October 29 (Sputnik) - Former interpreter and English teacher from Afghanistan shared his heart-piercing story with Sputnik on how he had to leave five kids and wife behind at the Kabul airport because of the evacuation nightmare in August, without any guarantee to see them again.

Although the refugee is grateful to the US forces for taking him out of Afghanistan, he admits the evacuation turned out to be a disaster for the countless thousands of those who were left behind the gates of the Kabul airport.

"It was like a nightmare. It was unbelievable. I have never thought that I will face such events," said the refugee, who asked not to reveal his name due to security concerns. "The evacuation process was much worse than it was shown by the media."

The asylum-seeker recalls that the situation at the Kabul airport became uncontrolled after someone spread a rumor that the United States was considering evacuating everyone and this became a trigger for the chaotic influx of people to the area near the airport. Unfortunately, the reality was different.

"My house was like half a kilometer from the airport and I saw thousands of people rushing to the airport – kids, boys, elder people," he said.

People were so overwhelmed with fear and despair that they went to great lengths to get the coveted seat on a plane. Afghans were attempting to pass through the airport checkpoint without any forms of identification.

"But many people didn't have any supporting letters when they came to the airport. Some people came with electrical bills. Some people came with boxes of American cookies," he recalled.

NOT AN EASY DECISION

The interpreter comes from Afghanistan's east where he studied English literature to become a teacher. After graduation, he worked as a translator for his cousin's company which provided services to the US military and visited many American bases across the country to help the troops find common ground with locals. He also worked as an English lecturer at one of the regional universities.

Leaving his loved ones behind was a tough decision but he had no other choice standing in front of the airport gate with his family next to him.

"The problem was that there was a canal [near the airport gate]. It was very difficult for them [kids and wife] to cross it. There was only one very narrow bridge. It was a wooden bridge. So,

when they came to the airport, the firing started and I was not able to bring them. That's why they are there [in Afghanistan] now," the refugee said.

While he was at the airport waiting for his turn to be evacuated he witnessed a score of heart-breaking scenes that soon became widely-known around the world.

"Many people have never experienced an airplane and they thought that they would be better off hanging on an aircraft wheel than staying in Afghanistan with the Taliban," he said.

While being witnesses to all the horrors near the airport gates, right on the spot, he and his wife agreed it would be better for him to escape the country. He promised to bring the family to the United States at the first opportunity.

Every single time he speaks with his children, he does his best to keep them full of hope that they will be together soon.

LIFE AFTER THE ARRIVAL IN THE US

The difficult journey from Afghanistan ended at the Philadelphia airport. After going through all the paperwork and custom procedures, Afghan refugees were tested for coronavirus and measles, vaccinated, and later accommodated at one of the US military bases nearby.

Unlike thousands of others, the teacher had relatives in the US who picked him up from the base. He stayed in their house for several days before moving into an Airbnb apartment that was rented with the financial backing of the local social services. The same services gave him gift cards to buy food at grocery stores.

"US social services provided us with gift cards and we used them to buy food. If we ran out of money we asked for more and they gave us. They also delivered food for us," the teacher said.

HOPES FOR BRIGHT FUTURE

There are still many obstacles on the way to reunification of the refugee with his family but he is not losing hope and tries to share it with his beloved ones.

"I take pictures of other people's bicycles and send them to my kids telling them I bought it for them. I do this to keep hope in them, to keep them motivated," the refugee said. "I will talk to everyone to bring my family here, otherwise I will go back to Afghanistan."

Today, he says he feels safe and is full of strength and energy to start a new life in the United States, but his primary task now is to evacuate his family out of Afghanistan at any cost.

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UPDATE - Gitmo Detainee Sentenced to 26 Years, Details CIA Torture - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 29 (Sputnik) - A US military jury has sentenced Majid Khan, a former resident of the state of Maryland who is held at the Guantanamo Bay detention center, to 26 years in prison for joining the al-Qaeda terror group (banned in Russia), ABC News reported.

Seven of the eight jurors recommended clemency to the defendant in a letter to the Defense Department that accompanied the sentence, the report said on Friday.

The defendant is a 41-year-old Pakistani national who moved to the United States in the 1990s and graduated from a high school near Baltimore, Maryland. Khan pleaded guilty to a range of

charges, including his involvement in al-Qaeda plots to bomb the J.W. Marriott hotel in Jakarta, Indonesia, in 2003 and in attacks in the United States after September 11, 2001, the report said. However, under a plea agreement Khan can be released as soon as February because he cooperated with US authorities, the report said.

If Khan is released after the trial, he would be resettled in a third country which is yet to be determined and it cannot be Pakistan, the report said.

"Since the commission of these crimes, Majid is a different person," Army Maj. Michael Lyness, a defense attorney said as quoted by the report. "Majid Khan is reformed and deserving of your mercy."

Nevertheless, the prosecution continues to recommend an imprisonment sentence at the higher end of a 25-40 year range, according to the report.

According to The New York Times, Khan gave to the jury a detailed account of brutal forced feedings, waterboarding, and other abuse he suffered in the CIA's overseas prison network. The Times said it is the first time in public a detainee described torture at CIA black sites.

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US Military Jury Sentences Man Detained in Guantanamo to 26 Years - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 29 (Sputnik) - A US military jury has sentenced Majid Khan, a former resident of the state of Maryland who is held at the Guantanamo Bay detention center, to 26 years in prison for joining the al-Qaeda terror group (banned in Russia), ABC News reported. Seven of the eight jurors recommended clemency to the defendant in a letter to the Defense Department that accompanied the sentence, the report said on Friday.

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US Charges Dutch National for Participating in Terror Financing - Statement

WASHINGTON, October 29 (Sputnik) - The US government has charged a Dutch national for participating in a terror financing ring after being extradited in the United States, the Justice Department said in a statement.

"After more than seven years of extradition proceedings in the Netherlands, a Dutch woman brought by the FBI to the United States yesterday made her initial appearance today in the US District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia to face charges stemming from her alleged participation in a terrorist financing ring in support of the Somalia-based terrorist group al-Shabaab," the statement said on Friday.

Farhia Hassan, 38, was engaging with an international group of women from different countries who ran a fundraising ring to provide financial support to al-Shabaab terror group between February 2011 and July 2014, it added.

This group funneled assets through money remitters to al-Shabaab's members helping them fund safehouses and to purchase trucks and weaponry.

"Hassan, in particular, was allegedly involved in fundraising in the Netherlands under false pretenses by representing to donors that money was being collected to fund charitable ventures, such as schools for orphans, when it was in fact being funneled to terrorists," the statement added.

Hassan has been charged with a conspiracy to provide material support to a designated foreign terrorist organization and may face a maximum penalty of 15 years in prison, according to the statement.

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Prince Andrew Asks US Court to Dismiss Lawsuit Over Sexual Abuse Claims - Filing

WASHINGTON, October 29 (Sputnik) - Prince Andrew of the United Kingdom asked a US federal court to dismiss a lawsuit filed by Virginia Roberts Giuffre that claims he sexually assaulted her when she was 17 years old, according to a court filing.

"For the reasons set forth in the Memorandum of Law and Request for Judicial Notice, filed concurrently herewith, Defendant Prince Andrew, Duke of York respectfully moves to dismiss Plaintiff Virginia Giuffre's Complaint, pursuant Rule 12(b)(6) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure for failure to state a claim upon which relief can be granted, or in the alternative, for an order requiring Plaintiff to provide a more definitive statement of her allegations, pursuant to Rule 12(e) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure," the court filing said on Friday.

Giuffre alleges that Prince Andrew sexually assaulted her in New York, the US Virgin Islands and at the London home of alleged pedophile ring leader Jeffrey Epstein's associate Ghislaine Maxwell, who is set to go on trial in the United States.

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Austin, Colombian Defense Chief Discuss Bilateral Relations, Regional Security - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, October 29 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin met with Colombian Minister of National Defense Diego Molano to discuss bilateral relations and other issues of common interest, Defense Department spokesperson Kenneth Hoffman said.

"The leaders discussed their shared interest in deepening cooperation on strategic issues including Colombia's contributions to global and regional security, migration, cyber defense and intelligence," Hoffman said on Friday. "They also underscored the importance of respect for democracy and human rights in all aspects of the bilateral defense relationship."

The meeting took place on the sidelines of the US Southern Command change of command ceremony.

Hoffman said both sides reaffirmed the importance of the defense partnership between the two countries. They also underscored the importance of respect for democracy and human rights in all aspects of the bilateral defense relationship, he added.

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US Air Force Orders 29 More Engines for F-15EX Fighter Jet Fleet - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, October 29 (Sputnik) - The US Air Force has ordered 29 General Electric F110-GE-129 engines for its fleet of new F-15EX combat aircraft, the Defense Department announced.

"General Electric Co., GE Edison Works, Cincinnati, Ohio, has been awarded a \$1,579,662,187 firm-fixed-price contract including all options for the F-15EX Lots 2+ propulsion system procurement," the Defense Department said in a release on Friday. "This contract provides for 29 F110-GE-129 engines (installs and spares) for the F-15EX fleet."

The contract also provides seven option lots for a most probable quantity of 329 total engines if all options are exercised, the release said.

Work on the program will be performed in Cincinnati in the US state of Ohio and in San Antonio, Texas and is expected to be completed over the next decade by June 30, 2031, the release added.

In July 2020, the US Air Force and Boeing signed a \$1.2 billion contract to build the first eight jets capable of carrying more weapons than any other fighter in its class and launching hypersonic weapons weighing up to 7,000 pounds.

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COVID-19 Vaccination Campaign to Start in Remaining Afghan Provinces in 2-3 Days - UNICEF

WASHINGTON, October 29 (Sputnik) - Some 40,000 people are vaccinated daily in Afghanistan after a vaccination campaign against the novel coronavirus started mid-October in 14 of the country's 32 provinces and the remaining provinces will begin administering the shots in about a couple of days, UNICEF's representative in Afghanistan Salam Al-Janabi told Sputnik.

"UNICEF and partners are supporting a massive COVID-19 vaccination campaign targeting people in urban locations. This campaign started on October 16 in 14 Provinces. It started in the Southern region a day later," the representative said. "In the remaining provinces, it will start in the next 2 -3 days. Currently, almost 40,000 people are being vaccinated daily. This massive campaign will continue until we utilize 1.8 million doses of the Johnson & Johnson available in stock."

Afghanistan has received about 5.25 million doses of different types of vaccines both through COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) facility and bilateral donations, he added.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), there have been 155,985 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 7,257 deaths in Afghanistan. As of October 23, a total of 2,925,490 vaccine doses have been administered, the representative added.

The Taliban terror group (banned in Russia) came to power in Afghanistan in mid-August, causing the US-backed government to collapse.

The Taliban then set up a new government, led by Mohammad Hasan Akhund, who served as the foreign minister during the previous period of Taliban rule and has been under UN sanctions since 2001.

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Afghanistan Among World's Worst Crises, Social Services on 'Brink of Collapse' - UNICEF

WASHINGTON, October 29 (Sputnik) - Afghanistan is currently experiencing one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, with the health system and social services at a breaking point, UNICEF's representative in Afghanistan Salam Al-Janabi told Sputnik.

"Afghanistan now is amongst the world's worst crises and the needs are growing by the day," Al-Janabi said. "In addition to the growing malnutrition crisis and food insecurity, the health system and social services are on the brink of collapse."

Early this year, the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan was already one of the worst in the world, with nearly half of the country's population - including some 10 million children - having been in need of humanitarian aid, the UNICEF representative said.

"Due to the recent events and the economic shocks the country has been experiencing, more families are pushed to the brink," he said. "More than half of Afghanistan's population is projected to face acute hunger as humanitarian needs grow to record levels. As food insecurity spikes in Afghanistan, so does severe acute malnutrition amongst children under five years old."

Without immediate action, an estimated 1 million children are projected to suffer from severe acute malnutrition over the course of this year, and could die, the representative warned.

"With winter quickly approaching, amidst drought, measles and acute watery diarrhea outbreaks millions of children are on borrowed time," Al-Janabi said. "UNICEF anticipates that the humanitarian needs of children and women will increase over the coming months amidst a severe drought and consequent water scarcity, an uncertain security environment, continued displacement, the devastating socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the onset of winter."

UNICEF underscored that without urgent action, the humanitarian situation will continue to deteriorate in 2022. The representative noted that the current humanitarian funding requirement for Afghanistan stands at \$192 million.

"This figure will certainly increase as the needs continue to grow. Of the \$192 million UNICEF's donors have funded around 70% of the needed support," Al-Janabi said. "We urge donors to maintain their humanitarian and development investments in Afghanistan so that the hard-fought gains over the past decades are not lost."

The Taliban (banned in Russia as a terrorist group) came to power in Afghanistan in mid-August, causing the US-backed government to collapse. The group then set up a new government, led by Mohammad Hasan Akhund, who served as the foreign minister during the previous Taliban rule and has been under UN sanctions since 2001.

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High Schools for Girls in Most Afghan Provinces Remain Closed - UNICEF

WASHINGTON, October 29 (Sputnik) - High schools for girls in most provinces in Afghanistan remain closed, but the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is waiting to see whether the authorities' rhetoric that they will allow girls' access to education will match the reality on the ground, UNICEF's representative in Afghanistan Salam Al-Janabi told Sputnik.

"When it comes to girls' education, UNICEF is waiting to see if the rhetoric will match reality on the ground," the UNICEF representative said. "In most provinces, with the exception of five in the northern region, high schools for girls remain closed," Al-Janabi said.

UNICEF calls for opening schools, community-based education classes and universities to all girls and young women, he added.

"It is also important that teachers, both male and female, are trained, that they receive their monthly salaries, and that they are supported in their teaching," the representative said, adding that 38% of the 9.5 million children in primary and secondary education in Afghanistan are girls. "By comparison, there were only 1 million children in the education system in 2001 and only 10 percent of them were girls," Al-Janabi said. "We cannot afford to lose the gains made in educating girls and women over the last two decades. We can only protect progress by continuing to ensure that the most disadvantaged girls complete primary and secondary education."

The UNICEF representative pointed out that the Fund has a working relationship with the Taliban, which it had long before this current crisis.

"It is standard practice for UNICEF all over the world to work with government and anti-government elements wherever necessary to reach the children most in need," he said.

"Engagement with armed actors enables UNICEF and other humanitarians to negotiate for the assurances and safeguards necessary for rapid, unimpeded and safe humanitarian access and to ensure that programs and resources reach their intended populations, according to their needs, and without diversion."

Al-Janabi said a work plan was established in December to expand access to education into areas under Taliban control for all children, including for girls.

"We hope to continue to build on this," he added. "We have been engaging constructively with the 'de facto authorities' at the local level through interlocutors and are engaging with them at all levels to reach the children we have been previously unable to with life-saving health services, education and more."

The Taliban terror group (banned in Russia) came to power in Afghanistan in mid-August, causing the US-backed government to collapse. The Taliban then set up a new all-male government, led by Mohammad Hasan Akhund, who served as the foreign minister during the previous Taliban rule and has been under UN sanctions since 2001.

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Wall Street up 4th Week in Row on Record Highs as Investors 'Accept' High Inflation

NEW YORK, October 29 (Sputnik) - US stocks hit record highs on Friday before rounding out a fourth straight week of gains, powered by mostly strong corporate earnings for the third quarter and investors' acceptance that high inflation was likely to be a way of life in the United States. All three of Wall Street's major equity indexes - the Dow Jones Industrial Average, the S&P 500 and the Nasdaq Composite Index - hit all-time highs in their last session for October, capping out a perfect month for stock bulls who saw cumulative gains of between 5% and 7% over the past four weeks from each of the three indices.

Friday's rally capped a quarter of blockbuster profits for most US corporations in the banking to healthcare, auto, technology and the entertainment sectors.

Still, not all companies had stellar earnings, with online commerce behemoth Amazon and consumer tech giant Apple notably missing analysts' forecasts for the quarter.

US consumer sentiment also remains at risk from soaring inflation although Americans seem resigned to higher costs from economic upheavals caused by the coronavirus pandemic, the University of Michigan said in the latest iteration of its closely-watched consumer survey on Friday.

The survey showed that the US Federal Reserve's annual inflation gauge hitting a 30-year high in September, keeping the pressure up on the central bank's policy makers as well as the White House in reigning in surging costs.

"Despite all the mounting inflationary fears, the growth outlook for next year is still robust and that will keep investors betting on US growth exceptionalism," Ed Moya, analyst at online trading platform OANDA, said.

The Dow, a blue-chip index which groups mostly industrial stocks, closed up 89 points, 0.3%, at 35,820. It hit a record high of 35,893 earlier in the session. For October, the Dow rose 5.8%.

The S&P 500, which consists of the top 500 US stocks, settled up 9 points, 0.2%, at 4,605. It hit an all-time high of 4,609 earlier. For the month, the S&P was up 6.9%.

Nasdaq, which groups Big Tech names such as Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix and Google, closed the day up 50 points, or 0.3%, at 15,498, after hitting a record high at 15,504. For October, the tech-heavy index gained 7.3%.

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US Planning For Joint Training of US Astronauts, Russian Cosmonauts - NASA Official

WASHINGTON, October 29 (Sputnik) - NASA has started initial planning for cooperative missions with the Russian federal space agency Roscosmos to fly US astronauts on Soyuz vehicles and Russian cosmonauts on SpaceX ones, agency Associate Administrator for Space Operations Kathy Lueders said.

"The Russians... have agreed to continue to further the processing of our intergovernmental agreements where we will eventually be flying a USOS crew member on the Soyuz and at least flying a Russian cosmonaut on, at least, a SpaceX vehicle," Lueders told a press conference at Kennedy Space Center on Friday.

Lueders said NASA had already begun planning for this new stage of US-Russian space cooperation to maintain the crewing of the International Space Station.

"That's the next step to come: We're very excited to see [that] we have made progress on this first step going forward and have... cosmonauts do initial assessments with suits and training and begin g to do the initial planning for that. We feel that's the most robust strategy to keep the [space] station going," she said.

Roscosmos CEO Dmitry Rogozin said in Dubai on Tuesday that US astronauts would continue flights on the Russian Soyuz spacecraft.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, October 29 (Sputnik) -

US-RUSSIA RELATIONS

* The US government demands that 55 more diplomats, administrative and technical workers at the Russian embassy and consulates in the United States leave the country in the coming

months, and the situation on the diplomatic "front" will worsen as a result of this demand, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Friday.

- * The US government is currently engaging with its Russian counterparts to secure additional overflights, a source familiar with the matter told Sputnik.

- * Relations between Moscow and Washington have improved this year, but are still far from what can be called normal, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said.

- * The launch of cybersecurity dialogue between Russia and the United States under President Joe Biden's administration is a "big thing," unimaginable just a year ago, Nebenzia said.

ENERGY CRISIS IN EUROPE

- * US State Department Senior Advisor for Global Energy Security, Amos Hochstein, said that he was glad to hear that Russian President Vladimir Putin told Gazprom to begin filling Europe's gas storage on November 8, but wished it happened a month earlier.

- * Russia should remain a big energy supplier to Europe, but the continent should work on diversification and transition away from dependence on natural gas, Hochstein said.

- * Gas futures prices in Europe on Friday are falling below \$800 per 1,000 cubic meters for the first time since mid-September, down by almost 14%, according to trading data on ICE Futures.

- * The G20 summit, chaired by Italy this weekend, will focus on the situation on the energy market but adopting specific measures is not expected, Russian G20 sherpa Svetlana Lukash said.

SITUATION IN LEBANON

- * Saudi Arabia recalled its ambassador to Lebanon for consultations and demanded that the Lebanese ambassador to the kingdom leave the country within the next 48 hours and decided to suspend imports from Lebanon to the kingdom, Saudi state-run broadcaster Al-Ekhbariya reported.

- * All countries of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) are ready to sever diplomatic relations with Lebanon in the near future, Lebanese TV channel MTV reported, citing a source close to the GCC.

OLEG TINKOV CASE IN US

- * US Judge Jon Tigar on Friday accepted the plea deal the Russian billionaire banker Oleg Tinkov reached with the US authorities and sentenced him to time served and one year of supervised release on top of fines he has already paid for lying to the US tax authorities

- * The US government dismissed the remaining count of the indictment against Tinkov.

SUDAN DEVELOPMENTS

- * Sudan's armed forces commander-in-chief and de facto leader, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, told Sputnik that he would be glad if Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok stayed in politics, but the final decision would be up to Hamdok himself.

- * Sudanese authorities consider protests legal if they are peaceful, al-Burhan, told Sputnik.

- * A legal commission will make decisions on the fate of all those detained in Sudan, al-Burhan said in an interview with Sputnik, commenting on the calls for release made by the United States and the European Union.

US SANCTIONS AGAINST IRAN

* The United States has added four Iranian individuals and two entities to sanctions imposed against the Islamic republic, the Treasury Department said on Friday.

* The United States has rolled out new sanctions targeting Iran's unmanned aerial vehicle program and its chief, the Treasury announced.

US INTEL REPORT ON COVID-19

* The US intelligence community remains divided over the origins of the novel coronavirus, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence said in a declassified report on Friday.

* The US intelligence community continues to believe that China's cooperation is needed to reach a conclusive assessment of the origins of the novel coronavirus, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence said

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US Supreme Court Agrees to Hear States' Appeal to Restore Trump Immigration Rule - Order

WASHINGTON, October 29 (Sputnik) - The US Supreme Court has agreed to hear an appeal from 13 Republican state attorneys-general to overturn a 2020 federal court ruling that struck down a Trump administration immigration restriction, the court's list of orders granted said on Friday.

"Arizona et. Al. v. San Francisco, Ca [California] et. Al. The petition for a writ of certiorari is granted limited to Question 1 presented by the petition," the court announced in its "Certiorari Granted" list of cases it has agreed to hear.

The federal ruling was issued by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, which is usually regarded as highly liberal. However, the US Supreme Court, following a series of appointments made by President Donald Trump has a six-to-three majority of conservative justices.

Arizona Attorney General Mark Brnovich of a lower court's ruling that rejected their bid to defend Trump's "public charge" rule. President Joe Biden's administration dropped the government's defense of the policy. A federal judge in the state of Illinois in a separate case vacated the rule nationwide.

In February 2020, The Trump administration announced that immigrants likely to receive a wide range of benefits for more than a year over any three year period including Medicaid, housing and food aid would be denied a Green Card and status as permanent legal residents in the United States.

The Ninth Court struck down that rule, but ABrnovich and the top legal officers of the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas and West Virginia have now appealed that decision to the US Supreme Court.

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US Supreme Court to Hear Case on Whether EPA Can Limit Power Plant Emissions - Filing

WASHINGTON, October 29 (Sputnik) - The US Supreme Court has agreed to consider limiting the authority of the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) to limit greenhouse gases from power plants, a court filing revealed on Friday.

The US Supreme Court will review cases challenging the EPA's authority that were brought on by the states of West Virginia and North Dakota and the coal companies North American Coal Corp. and Westmoreland Mining Holdings.

"The petitions for writs of certiorari... are granted," the filing said. "The cases are consolidated, and a total of one hour is allotted for oral argument."

The US Supreme Court's decision could have consequences for the Biden administration's goal to trim carbon emissions and set the United States on a path to have a carbon neutral economy by 2050.

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Biden Administration Terminates Trump-Era 'Remain in Mexico' Rule for Asylum-Seekers

WASHINGTON, October 29 (Sputnik) - US Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas announced on Friday that he had rescinded the Trump-era Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) program, which required asylum-seeking immigrants to the United States to await court proceedings in Mexico.

"After carefully considering the arguments, evidence, and perspectives presented by those who support re-implementation of MPP, those who support terminating the program, and those who have argued for continuing MPP in a modified form, I have determined that MPP should be terminated," Mayorkas said in a memorandum.

The introduction of MPP had reduced migration flows but did so by imposing substantial and unjustifiable human costs on those individuals who were waiting for the decisions in Mexico, he said.

However, the new memorandum to terminate MPP will not take effect until the current injunction from the Texas court is lifted and the Department of Homeland Security Homeland Security (DHS) said in a press release that it is required to restart the MPP program as ordered by the court.

While DHS continues to contest the ruling, it has been engaged in discussion with the Mexican government on the issue and has issued contracts to build temporary court facilities in Texas, the release said.

In August, a US District Court in Texas ordered the Biden administration to restart MPP followed by the Biden administration attempt fight this order in the US Supreme Court, which ruled against this bid to end the policy.

President Joe Biden halted the MPP program through an executive order immediately after being sworn into office on January 20. The memorandum noted that as of May 25 about 11,200 migrants enrolled in MPP have been processed in the United States under Biden's plan to process them in a phased and orderly manner.

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US, France Support Nuclear Deterrence, Push for Talks Within NATO - Statement

WASHINGTON, October 29 (Sputnik) - The United States and France issued a joint statement on Friday saying that they agree on the need to bolster nuclear deterrence as a central element of their collective defense as well as to contribute to NATO's collective security.

"The United States and France share the goal of continuing to bolster deterrence as a core element of our collective defense and to contribute to the indivisible security of the NATO Alliance," the joint statement said.

The United States and France also reaffirmed that the NATO allies should continue close consultations to strengthen arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation.

In addition, the two countries agreed to increase cooperation on issues related to space, the statement said.

Earlier on Friday, US President Joe Biden and French President Emmanuel Macron recognized during their meeting in Rome the need for robust cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region following the row over the submarine deal with Australia, the statement said.

Biden and Macron committed to ensure transparency bilaterally and multilaterally with NATO and EU partners of their policies and initiatives, the statement said.

France will assume the presidency of the European Union for the first half of 2022 and intends to keep the United States closely informed of its priorities, the statement said.

The two countries also intend to increase cooperation, including with the US-led Coalition, to combat terror networks of the Islamic State (banned in Russia), especially in Iraq and Syria.

The statement said Biden and Macron intend to launch a US-France defense trade strategic dialogue to address defense market access and export issues.

The meeting between Biden and Macron was their first since last month's falling out over the so-called AUKUS defensive pact, which led Australia to scrap a multi-billion-dollar submarine deal with Paris and receive submarine technology from the United States.

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Congress Approves \$1.5Bln for NASA But No Funds for Moon Lander- Administrator

WASHINGTON, October 29 (Sputnik) - The US Congress in its new reconciliation funding bill has approved \$1.5 billion funding for NASA, but none for the manned lunar lander essential to return US astronauts to the surface of the Moon in the Artemis program, agency administrator Bill Nelson said on Friday.

"The hurricane [relief] supplement gave \$320 million for infrastructure for NASA," Nelson told a televised press conference. "The money announced on Thursday in the reconciliation bill [included a] total of \$1.5 billion for NASA: That is a considerable positive."

Nelson acknowledged that the proposed legislation, which is supported by President Joe Biden, did not include any money to develop a human lander system for the Artemis manned program to return Americans to the Moon. However, he said the necessary funds would be approved in the following financial year.

"The big plus-up in that [provision] comes in Fiscal (Year) '23- \$150 million [is] being given to the human lander system," Nelson said.

Five companies have been selected to compete for that and NASA has been working with the White House and both houses of Congress to get the plus-ups it needs, he added.

NASA Associate Administrator for Space Operations Kathy Lueders told the press conference that her team was already working on a program to deliver sustainable human landing systems for the Artemis lunar landing by the end of the 2020s.

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US Upcoming Talks With E3 Leaders on Iran 'Not for Deliverable' - Senior Official

WASHINGTON, October 29 (Sputnik) - The United States does not expect any particular result from the upcoming meeting between President Joe Biden and the leaders of Germany, Italy and France - the E3 - because the gathering is not about a "deliverable, a senior Biden administration official said.

"This is not a meeting for a deliverable," the official said during a press briefing on Friday. However, the official said the meeting will send a "good public signal" about the unity of the international community regarding Iran.

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US, France Support Nuclear Deterrence, Push for Talks Within NATO - Statement

WASHINGTON, October 29 (Sputnik) - The United States and France issued a joint statement on Friday saying that they agree on the need to bolster nuclear deterrence as a central element of their collective defense as well as to contribute to NATO's collective security.

"The United States and France share the goal of continuing to bolster deterrence as a core element of our collective defense and to contribute to the indivisible security of the NATO Alliance," the joint statement said.

The United States and France also reaffirmed that the NATO allies should continue close consultations to strengthen arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation.

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Biden Renews National Emergency Declaration on Sudan After Military Coup - White House

WASHINGTON, October 29 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden has renewed the existing state of national emergency with respect to Sudan following the military coup in Khartoum on October 25, the White House announced in a press release on Friday.

"I have sent to the 'Federal Register' for publication the enclosed notice stating that the national emergency with respect to Sudan declared in Executive Order 13067 of November 3, 1997, is to continue in effect beyond November 3, 2021," Biden said in the declaration as quoted by the release.

Sudan made strides in its transition toward democracy since 2019, but the military takeover of the government and arrest of civilian leaders now threaten those positive gains, Biden said. The crisis that led to the declaration of a national emergency over Sudan and its continuation over 15 years have not been resolved and the situation in Darfur continues to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States, Biden added.

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Biden, Macron Recognize Need to Cooperate in Indo-Pacific After Submarine Row - Statement

WASHINGTON, October 29 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden and French President Emmanuel Macron recognized during their meeting on Friday the need for robust cooperation in the Indo-Pacific following the row over the submarine deal with Australia, the countries said in a joint statement.

"The Presidents recognize the importance of robust collaboration in the Indo-Pacific, particularly given growing economic and strategic challenges there," the joint statement said.

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Nebenzia Says Sent Letter to UN Chief From Savenkova About Her Blacklisting on Mirotvorets

UNITED NATIONS, October 29 (Sputnik) - Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said on Friday that he had sent a letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) head Henrietta Fore by the 12-year-old girl from Luhansk, Faina Savenkova, who was added to the notorious Kiev-based Myrotvorets database. Savenkova was blacklisted as a person allegedly posing a threat to Ukraine's national security after recording a video message to the UN Security Council in which she asked that its member states acknowledge children in conflict-torn Donbas have a right to a peaceful life and a childhood. The United Nations told Sputnik last week that conflict-affected populations, and particularly children, should not be used for political purposes.

"I sent a letter to the Secretary-General, as well as to Henrietta Fore, to UNICEF, by a 12-year-old girl from Donbass, whose name is Faina Savenkova. She's a well-known child writer, she writes fairytales, science-fiction books, and she was inscribed by the so-called site Myrotvorets, which publishes personal data and names of the so-called enemies of Ukraine," Nebenzia said.

The Russian ambassador said the listing of the 12-years-old girl as enemy of Ukraine and the publishing of her personal information on Mirotvorets is "simply inadmissible."

Last week, Savenkova told Sputnik that she had appealed to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, asking him to close the controversial website and stop the war as soon as possible. Myrotvorets publishes personal information on Russian and Ukrainian citizens, international reporters and representatives of international organizations that it considers to be enemies of Ukraine or work against the country's interests.

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US Aviation Agency to Warns Pilots, Airlines About Possible 5G Interference - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 29 (Sputnik) - The Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) plans to warn pilots and airlines over possible technical disruptions that can be caused by a new 5G wireless services as it is rolled out nowadays, the Wall Street Journal reported on Friday. The FAA is currently drafting a special bulletin and mandates that would provide pilots with information on which automated cockpit features could be affected by the 5G towers on the ground. The aviation watchdog is expected to introduce the documents with warnings in early December, the report said.

At the same time, the new warnings will not be directed at passengers' use of cell phones, according to the report.

The inability to use automated features due to the 5G interference, including equipment helping airplanes land in poor weather or prevent crashes, can result in flight cancellations, delays or diversions in 46 of the US largest metropolitan areas where the wireless towers are installed, the officials said.

FAA and Federal Communications Commission officials also said they are discussing the safety concerns and there is a chance that the air-safety regulators will eventually be able to issue more targeted warnings resulting in fewer travel disruptions.

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New York Attorney General Letitia James Announces Run for Governor - Statement
NEW YORK, October 29 (Sputnik) - New York Attorney General Letitia James announced on Friday she is running for governor and vowed to take on the state's powerful on behalf of the residents.

"I'm running for Governor of New York because I have the experience, vision, and courage to take on the powerful on behalf of all New Yorkers," James said in a statement.

James launched an investigation into allegations of sexual misconduct by former New York Governor Andrew Cuomo that found he harassed nearly a dozen colleagues, which resulted in his resignation. Cuomo continues to deny any wrongdoing.

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UN Security Council P5 Summit to Take Place When Sides Have No Objections - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, October 29 (Sputnik) - The idea of convening a meeting by the leaders of the five permanent member states of the UN Security Council (P5) is still on the agenda and will take place as soon as some sides stop opposing it, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia told reporters on Friday.

In January 2020, Russian President Vladimir Putin proposed convening a summit among the leaders of the P5 countries - China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States. The summit was originally set to be held in 2020 - the 75th anniversary of the United Nations. All the five permanent members of the Security Council backed the idea, but the high-level meeting was delayed because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"First, we had the unfavorable epidemiological situation. Today, we have still not taken this topic off the agenda,... but we should have an agreement. As soon as sides do not object to it and everyone is ready for this summit, it will take place," Nebenzia said.

The Russian ambassador indicated that the five permanent members of the UN Security Council have yet to discuss any specific dates to holding the meeting.

In September, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Moscow has resumed preparations for the summit after the height of the pandemic. All UN Security Council permanent members had previously expressed interest in holding such a meeting.

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Ex-New York Governor's Spokesman Says State Attorney General Using Post for Political Gain

NEW YORK, October 29 (Sputnik) - Former New York Governor Andrew Cuomo's spokesman said on Friday that State Attorney General Letitia James, who pursued allegations of sexual misconduct against Cuomo, used her position for political gain and violated the law. "Tish James used her office to attack the Governor for her own political benefit and she violated the law in the process," Cuomo spokesperson Rich Azzopardi said in a press release. On Thursday, a New York court charged Cuomo with a sex crime over allegations that he forcibly touched a former aide in December 2020. US media reported earlier that James is preparing to run for governor in New York. Azzopardi described James' investigation into Cuomo's alleged sexual harassment a "sham" and the misdemeanor charges announced on Thursday were used to prop her probe. The spokesman said the charges against Cuomo were filed without notification or authorization from the District Attorney or the complainant. In addition, Azzopardi also accused Albany County Sheriff Craig Apple, whose office filed the sex crime misdemeanor complaint against Cuomo, of misconduct. Azzopardi said Apple is a political opponent of Cuomo and is only seeking news headlines, not justice. According to a copy of the misdemeanor complaint, Cuomo is accused of forcibly placing his hand under the blouse shirt of the victim on December 7, 2020. The name of the victim is redacted in the complaint, but she is reportedly the former executive assistant to the governor, Brittany Commisso. Cuomo resigned after an investigation by James found him to have harassed nearly a dozen colleagues, but he continues to deny any wrongdoing.

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US Attorney Dismisses Remaining Count of Russia National Tinkov's Indictment

WASHINGTON, October 29 (Sputnik) - The US government on Friday dismissed the remaining count of the indictment against Russian banker Oleg Tinkov. "The United States dismisses the remaining count of the indictment," Assistant US Attorney Michelle Kane said during the sentencing hearing for Tinkov.

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US Judge Sentences Russian Banker Tinkov to Time Served, 1 Year Supervised Release

WASHINGTON, October 29 (Sputnik) - US Judge Jon Tigar on Friday accepted the plea deal the Russian billionaire banker Oleg Tinkov reached with the US authorities and sentenced him to time served and one year of supervised release on top of fines he has already paid for lying to the US tax authorities

Tigar sentenced Tinkov to time served as well as one year of supervised release after Tinkov pleaded guilty to one count of lying to the US Internal Revenue Service (IRS) about his income. Prior to sentencing on Friday, Tinkov paid the US authorities some \$500 million in restitution and fines as part of the plea deal.

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Biden Says He Thought France Was Informed About AUKUS Submarine Deal With Australia

WASHINGTON, October 29 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Friday that he thought France had been informed of the Australia-United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS) deal to supply submarines to Canberra rather than Paris doing so as originally agreed.

Biden made the comment during a joint press conference with French President Emmanuel Macron after the two leaders met in the lead-up to the G20 Leaders' Summit in Rome. It was the leaders' first meeting since the row over the AUKUS deal began.

"I think what happened was, to use an English phrase, what we did was clumsy. It was not done with a lot of grace. I was under the impression certain things had happened that hadn't happened... I was under the impression that France had been informed long before that the deal was not going through. I, honest to God, did not know you had not been," Biden said.

Biden lauded the US-France relationship, noting the historic ties between the two countries and calling Paris an incredibly valuable partner. The United States and France have suffered and celebrated too much together for anything to break up their relationship, Biden said.

On Thursday, Macron held a telephone conversation with Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and called on Canberra to propose specific actions to reshape bilateral relations after the termination of the original submarine contract between the two countries.

The United States and France must restore the trust undermined by the AUKUS dispute, cabinet spokesperson Gabriel Attal said on Friday. However, it is necessary to relaunch bilateral cooperation to resolve issues such as climate change and the fight against terrorism in the Sahel, Attal added.

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New US Sanctions Target Iran's UAV Program, Its Commander - Treasury

WASHINGTON, October 29 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed new sanctions targeting Iran's unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) program and its commander, the US Department of the Treasury announced on Friday.

"Today, the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated members of a network of companies and individuals that have provided critical support to the Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) programs of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its expeditionary unit, the IRGC Quds Force (IRGC-QF)," the Treasury said in a press release. "OFAC is also designating Saeed Aghajani, the commander of the IRGC Aerospace Force (IRGC ASF) UAV Command."

The Treasury Department said in the release the lethal UAVs - or drones - are used by militant groups like Hezbollah, Hamas, Kata'ib Hezbollah and the Houthi movement. Iran's drones have also been used in conflict-torn Ethiopia as well as in attacks on international shipping and on US forces, it added.

The Treasury Department pointed out that under Aghajani's leadership, the IRGC ASF UAV Command carried out the deadly attack on the commercial shipping vessel Mercer Street in July.

"Aghajani also was behind a UAV attack against a Saudi Arabian oil refinery in 2019," the release said. "Iranian forces have been responsible for several high-profile attacks against international shipping over the last few years, including two prior incidents this year alone. In 2019, Iranian strikes targeting six tankers were widely condemned, including an operation orchestrated by the IRGC in May 2019 that resulted in damage to Saudi, Emirati and Norwegian vessels."

The Treasury Department explained in that it also imposed sanctions against the Kimia Part Sivan Company (KIPAS) over its work with Iran's Quds Force to improve the country's UAV program.

In addition, the latest round of sanctions has targeted the chief of the IRGC ASF Research and Self-Sufficiency Jihad Organization - Abdollah Mehrabi, the release said.

The Treasury Department noted that Mahrabi procured drone engines for the organization from the Oje Parvaz Mado Nafar Company, the release said.

"Mado Company and its managing director Yousef Aboutalebi (Aboutalebi) have procured UAV engines for the IRGC Navy and entities supporting weapons development for the Iranian military, including Iran's Qods Aviation Industries (QAI) and Aircraft Manufacturing Industries (HESA), which is a US-sanctioned company that has provided UAVs to the IRGC," the release added.

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Indo-Pacific Green Resources to Be Part of Solution to Global Energy Crunch - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 29 (Sputnik) - The Indo-Pacific region and its clean energy resources will be a part of the long-term solution to possible crises in the gas and oil markets, US Under Secretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy and the Environment Jose Fernandez said on Friday.

"[W]e are following the situation [with high energy prices]. We are talking to our European partners. I know that the IPBF [Indo-Pacific Business Forum] also included discussions on longer term clean energy solutions and, you know, the Indo-Pacific region will be part of the solution as well," Fernandez said during a press briefing at the close of the IPBF.

Fernandez pointed out that private investors announced during the IPBF they would invest more than \$6.5 billion in the clean energy and digital infrastructure sectors in the Indo-Pacific region. The diplomat also underscored that the Indo-Pacific will remain the main US trading partner as seven of the top 15 US export markets are in the region.

IPBF took place virtually on October 28-29 and was co-hosted by the governments of the United States and India. More than 2,300 participants from all over the world attended the forum.

The State Department issued a press release saying that Washington and Tokyo had initiated during the IPBF a new Japan-US Clean Energy Partnership to address climate change and encourage deployment of clean energy in the region.

IPBF participant US Trade and Development Agency had called upon interested US firms and Southeast Asian and Pacific stakeholders to submit proposals to develop new airport, airspace, airline and other aviation infrastructure in the countries of the region by January 10, 2022, the release said.