

11/3/21 Wednesday

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China Set Out to Expand Nuclear Triad Amid Fears US Would Strike Before 2020 Election, Report Says

By - Morgan Artyukhina

A new Pentagon report highlights how heightened US aggression has fueled fears in the People's Republic of China (PRC) that war is likely in the near future, pushing them to more rapidly expand their nuclear arsenal and strike capabilities.

Amid publication in September of a new book about the final days of the Trump administration, it soon became apparent just how afraid military officials in both the US and China were that then-US President Donald Trump might [attempt to stage an incident](#) in the South China Sea that would bring the two countries into war and allow him to stay in power, either by hook or by crook.

However, in the Defense Department's [annual report](#) to Congress on Chinese military developments, the department notes that American posturing in recent years has had a profound effect on Beijing's strategic thinking, driving them to expand their nuclear capabilities at an increasing rate.

'October Surprise'

"China's leaders' perceptions of intensifying strategic competition driven by structural changes in the international system and an increasingly confrontational United States is consistent with the Party's long-held opinion - based on its view of competition between systems - that the United States seeks to prevent China's rejuvenation," the report states. "Given this belief, the accrual of the PRC's comprehensive national power sets conditions for the PRC's greater willingness to confront the United States."

"In the second half of 2020, the PRC perceived a significant threat that the United States would seek to provoke a military crisis or conflict in the near-term. These erroneous concerns were accompanied or fueled by widespread speculation in PRC media that the United States would deliberately instigate a conflict with the PRC in the South China Sea. This speculation accompanied intensified warning messaging in PRC state media, large-scale military drills, heightened readiness, and additional deployments," the report continues.

It goes on to mention that twice in late October 2020, just days before the US election that Trump lost to Biden, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark A. Milley and then-Defense Secretary Mark Esper [both reached out](#) to their Chinese counterparts to try and assuage Beijing's fears. Days earlier, the People's Liberation Army had put all five commands on high alert due to fears of a so-called "October Surprise" by Trump.

A subsequent congressional hearing in late September [revealed that Trump's](#) continued contestation of the election kept tensions with China high, with Milley placing a second call in the wake of the January 6, 2021, insurrection at the US Capitol to again reassure Beijing that no strike was imminent. Milley also coordinated with US intelligence leaders, including at the CIA

and NSA, to get advance warning about any potential coup by Trump, and he instigated a snap review of the nuclear launch process with his senior generals to ensure Trump didn't try and order an "illegal" launch, he said.

Need for a Triad

However, American antagonism of China didn't begin in late 2020, it has built over several years, since early in the Trump administration Washington's strategic orientation began to shift away from the War on Terror and toward "great power competition" with Russia and China. Throughout Trump's presidency and into US President Joe Biden's, the US has staged provocative actions in the South China Sea and near Taiwan, including [dramatically increasing](#) support for Taiwan's military, and opened an [all-out economic](#) and ideological offensive aimed at demonizing China and cutting off its political and economic growth.

The Pentagon's report notes that it was in October 2019 that the PLA Air Force (PLAAF) introduced a new version of his Xi'an H-6 bomber, the H-6N, that provides "a platform for the air component of the PRC's nascent nuclear triad."

The massive bomber, a heavily modified version of Tupolev's Tu-16 strategic bomber built for the former Soviet Union, has [exterior missile mounts](#) and an indentation under its belly for carrying an air-launched ballistic missile (ALBM). The unusual design allows for the PLAAF to deploy nuclear weapons from an aircraft without having to design a new nuclear gravity bomb, which China has never seen as a valuable part of its small nuclear deterrent.

When combined with its submarine-launched ballistic missiles and land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles, the H-6N and its ALBMs give China a "nuclear triad," or a guaranteed second-strike capability that only Russia and the United States also enjoy.

Expanding Nuclear Stockpile

According to the Pentagon, the PRC is expanding its nuclear warhead stockpile, as well. At present, China only maintains a small collection of between 200-350 nuclear warheads sufficient to deter an attack, and has implemented a [no-first-use policy](#) to further clarify that the weapons are purely defensive. However, US pressure has accelerated expansion of that force, with the Pentagon projecting perhaps a doubling of China's stockpile to 700 warheads by 2027 and 1,000 by 2030.

By comparison, the US and Russia have several times the number of warheads as China. [According to a report](#) released last month by the US State Department, as of September 2020, the US had about 3,750 active nuclear warheads and another 2,000 in storage. [Russia is estimated](#) to have a total of 6,250 warheads, of which about 1,600 are deployed.

While the US is dismantling older warheads, it's also pouring [more than \\$1.2 trillion](#) into modernizing its nuclear strike force, which includes several new lines of nuclear warheads. In July, [the first W88 Alt 370](#) thermonuclear gravity bomb rolled off the proverbial assembly line at the Pantex Plant in northern Texas, while the [small W76-2 warhead](#) was produced in recent years and several other overhauls are planned.

Other nuclear-armed states include Pakistan, India, France, the UK, Israel, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, all of which maintain only small arsenals.

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Democratic Governor Phil Murphy Wins Re-election in New Jersey - Reports
By - Morgan Artyukhina

After a day of tallying straggling ballots, New Jersey's gubernatorial race has reached a point where the Associated Press felt it safe to mark down incumbent Phil Murphy as the victor. However, an official statement by the state's electoral commission has not yet been made. Murphy's lead over Republican challenger Jack Ciattarelli on Wednesday was razor-thin, despite opinion polls going into Tuesday's vote showing the Garden State chief with a sizeable lead. Murphy's victory is the first time in 44 years a Democrat has won re-election in the state, which tends to vote liberal.

On Wednesday evening, Murphy had 50.0% of the vote and Ciattarelli had 49.2%, with Murphy leading by just under 20,000 votes and 87% of ballots counted.

Shortly after the AP called the election in Murphy's favor, the incumbent governor issued his victory speech in Asbury Park, New Jersey, telling supporters that "if you want to know where America is headed, look to New Jersey."

Civil rights groups [sued on Tuesday](#) to get New Jersey's voting hours extended past 8 pm after several localities reported delays and technical difficulties, including getting voting tablets connected to the internet. However, a state Supreme Court judge [declined their request](#), saying there was no evidence of voter disenfranchisement caused by the delays.

"We want every legal vote counted," the GOP candidate [told his supporters](#) late on Tuesday evening. "And you all know the way the VBMs (vote by mail) work and the provisionals work; we've gotta have time to make sure that every legal vote is counted."

However, Ciattarelli has not yet conceded the race, nor has the New Jersey Division of Elections declared Murphy the victor.

Elsewhere on Election Day, Democrats have not fared so well. In Virginia, former Governor Terry [McAuliffe lost a tight race](#) against Republican challenger Glenn Youngkin. Politicos supporting both sides cast the competition [as a "referendum"](#) on the [Biden administration's](#) agenda nine months into his presidency.

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US Congress Passes RENACER Act to Sanction Nicaragua Ahead of Elections Sandinistas
Expected to Win
By - Morgan Artyukhina

The US House of Representatives passed by a wide margin on Wednesday a bill intended to hit Nicaragua with crippling sanctions like those already in place against Venezuela, another country where the US is pushing regime change through coercive measures. The Reinforcing Nicaragua's Adherence to Conditions for Electoral Reform (RENACER) Act passed by a vote of 387-35. It was previously passed by the Senate and now heads to the

White House, where US President Joe Biden is likely to sign it before the Nicaraguan elections on Sunday.

Once signed into law, RENACER will impose sanctions on members of Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega's administration, including police and military officials, as well as Ortega's family. Other targets include officials at Nicaragua's central bank, members of the Supreme Electoral Council, members of the ruling Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), and their family members, as well.

The structure is not unlike those sanctions imposed on Venezuela in the wake of former US President Barack Obama's 2015 labeling of the South American nation as an "unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States." While appearing limited in form, their impact was extensive, as investment or even trade with Venezuela became a risky maneuver, and overcompliance in enforcing the sanctions reigned. In April 2019, the Center for Economic and Policy Research ([CEPR](#)) [think tank reported](#) that two years of sanctions had caused 40,000 excess deaths in Venezuela and warned that hundreds of thousands of vulnerable people with diseases requiring regular treatment, such as HIV, diabetes, cancer, and hypertension, lacked access to necessary medication as a result.

'Making the Economy Scream'

Code Pink, a US-based antiwar group, [urged its supporters](#) ahead of the vote to pressure their representatives to oppose the RENACER Act, calling it "a blueprint for regime change in Nicaragua by making the economy scream. If passed, it would give future administrations the legal framework for imposing broad sectoral sanctions and the justification for more coup attempts."

RENACER also asks Biden to reconsider Nicaragua's membership in the CAFTA-DR regional trade agreement, which lowered trade barriers to Nicaragua's exporting to the United States. The 1990s-era deal dates to the period after US-backed Contra guerrillas forced the Sandinistas out of office in 1990 but before Ortega's return to power in 2006 elections. It created free trade zones in which [up to one-sixth](#) of Nicaragua's formal sector workforce is employed by local contractors who sell their manufactured goods to [US corporate buyers](#) like Wal-Mart, VF Jeans, Levi Strauss, Tommy Hilfiger, Nike and the Gap.

Roughly 60% of Nicaragua's exports go to the United States, most of which are apparel, rolled tobacco, and produce such as raw sugar and coffee, [according to data](#) collected by the OEC. Removing the Central American nation from CAFTA could deal a devastating blow to its economy and the social programs the FSLN government has put in place to help its poorest citizens.

Rep. Maria Salazar (R-FL), who introduced RENACER into the House, said Wednesday after the passing vote that what she was most proud of was introducing the free trade agreement reconsideration into the bill.

"The message now for Daniel Ortega is that making a commercial treaty or having a commercial exchange with the United States is not a right, it is a privilege that you will no longer have," she said.

"Nicaraguans have people who are defending them. That is why today is a glorious day for the Nicaraguan people, the Nicaraguan people who want freedom, democracy and progress in their country and that a little dictator like Ortega and Murillo does not come to steal the country that

belongs to everyone, to all Nicaraguans,” Salazar added, referring to Nicaraguan Vice President Rosario Murillo, who is also Ortega’s wife.

Figures Behind 2018 Riots Arrested Before Election

In April 2018, US-backed protests erupted in Nicaragua driven by anger over reforms to the nation’s pension plan. While the proposed changes were quickly revoked, the demonstrations quickly grew into an uprising as armed gangs joined the opposition, set up roadblocks, and targeted police and FSLN members. They were heavily supported by the US Agency for International Development (USAID), a US State Department agency, and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a CIA front group.

Several hundred people were killed during the riots, which lasted into the summer, but as Nicaraguan academics demonstrated, the numbers given to foreign press were [inflated by a variety](#) of measures, giving a false impression that Ortega’s government has massacred its way through the protests. In fact, more were killed by the opposition, and most of the deaths attributed to government repression had no connection to the protests at all.

While many of the movement’s [leading figures](#) went into hiding for a time, they later re-emerged and formed a new opposition movement, and several attempted to run for election in the elections scheduled for Sunday.

More than two dozen have been arrested, including Lester Alemán, a former student leader; Juan Sebastian Chamorro, a US-trained economist and head of the FUNIDES think tank who heads the group Civic Alliance for Justice in Democracy, which [united with other](#) opposition groups, including Alemán’s, last year to “reinvigorate the fight” and “rebuild the country;” and Cristiana Chamorro Barrios, whose Violeta Barrios de Chamorro Foundation for Reconciliation and Democracy has long served as a third-party [“pass-through” for CIA money](#) to cultivate an anti-Sandinista opposition movement in Nicaragua.

Demonization Campaign

Since the 2018 riots, which took place amid a widespread anti-leftist US offensive in Latin America that engulfed Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia, and El Salvador, Washington has ramped up its demonization of Nicaragua, the FSLN, and Ortega, casting the country as sliding toward dictatorship and becoming puppets of Caracas and Moscow.

As [MintPress News](#) has demonstrated, Western-friendly NGOs have produced reports claiming the country’s indigenous population is under attack by Ortega instead of the [self-rule they enjoy](#); that deforestation is increasing [instead of decreasing](#); and that Ortega’s government is as kleptocratic as the [US-backed Somoza family](#) who ruled Nicaragua before the FSLN overthrew them in 1979.

A senior Biden administration official [told Politico](#) last week that the arrests were a “very grave and very disturbing” development that “fundamentally alters” how the FSLN government should be seen.

“Before it was a hybrid type of regime where there were elements of democracy,” such as opposition candidates being allowed to run for the presidency, the official said. “But what you’re essentially getting there is something that no longer really has the characteristics of anything really resembling a democracy.”

In fact, the ballots on Sunday will have [six candidates for president](#). In addition to the FSLN, whose candidate is Ortega, there is a right-wing evangelical party, and several varieties of liberal parties.

However, with recent [opinion surveys](#) showing roughly 70% support for the FSLN, it seems likely the democratic socialist group will prevail. In Washington, an FSLN victory has already been defined as a sham.

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House Dems Put Paid Family Leave Back in Spending Bill After Biden Removed It to Assuage Right Wing

By - Morgan Artyukhina

The latest development in negotiations for the Democrats' massive spending package has seen lawmakers rebel against a plan put forth by US President Joe Biden, returning to the bill a provision for paid family leave the president had taken out to ease its passage.

US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) announced the move in a [Wednesday letter](#) to her colleagues, saying it had been done "at the urging of many members of the caucus."

When Biden announced the [American Families Plan](#) in May, a social spending plan intended to serve as one component of a larger post-pandemic economic restart, it included 12 weeks of paid family leave. However, through months of compilation and negotiation, the resultant Build Back Better Act bill had been whittled down to providing just four weeks of leave.

"The reason it's down to four weeks is I can't get 12 weeks," Biden said at a [CNN-hosted town hall](#) on October 21. However, in the [framework the White House](#) released a week later, paid family leave was totally absent.

The US is the only industrialized nation without a national statutory paid maternity, paternity or parental leave. Some federal programs offer limited paid or unpaid leave, and some states offer their own paid leave programs, as well.

Pelosi [said on Tuesday](#) she believed all outstanding concerns about the bill, which totals some \$1.75 trillion over the next decade, could be resolved by the end of the day, a timeline that would have allowed for a vote by the end of the week. However, House Dems won't hold a vote on the bill unless they know they have 50 votes in the Senate - something not yet guaranteed, due to the continued intransigence of moderate Sen. Joe Manchin (D-WV), who has used his leverage as a deciding vote to force more than a trillion dollars out of the bill's provisions thus far.

Manchin [made clear on Wednesday](#) his continued opposition to paid family leave, telling reporters that the bill is "the wrong place to put it because it's a social expansion ... let's get our financial house in order and then be able to tackle all of these."

He said earlier this week they are "not in a rush right now" and that negotiations will take "quite a while" to settle.

House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD) told reporters on Wednesday afternoon that he thinks Democrats have the votes in both houses of Congress to pass the Build Back Better Act. [Politico reported](#) on Wednesday that among those putting pressure on senators to support the bill has been Meghan Markle, the California-born former Duchess of Sussex, who, along with

her husband Prince Harry, stepped down from their British royal duties last year and moved to the United States.

Sen. Shelley Capito, Manchin's Republican colleague from West Virginia, described the situation.

"I'm in my car. I'm driving. It says caller ID blocked. Honestly ... I thought it was Sen. Manchin. His calls come in blocked. And she goes 'Sen. Capito?' I said, 'Yes.' She said, 'This is Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex.'"

Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME) also got a call from the royal, [telling Politico](#), "I was happy to talk with her, but I'm more interested in what the people of Maine are telling me about it." Markle lives in Montecito, California.

The UK offers [12 weeks of full-rate equivalent](#) paid leave and a total of 52 weeks of maternity leave, although the stipend given each week steadily declines. After birth, a two-week leave is compulsory for all women workers, or four weeks for women factory workers.

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Iran to Resume JCPOA Negotiations in Vienna on Nov 29 - Iranian Deputy FM
By - Evan Craighead

Earlier Wednesday, Ali Shamkhani, the head of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, warned Washington that the outcome of Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) negotiations with Tehran will be "clear," unless the US is "ready to give some guarantees." Following a Wednesday call with the European Union's Enrique Mora, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri took to social media to announce that JCPOA negotiations are set to resume on November 29 in Vienna, Austria.

Bagheri noted that [Tehran will be seeking the removal of "unlawful and inhumane sanctions"](#) placed on Iran.

US Department of State spokesperson Ned Price told reporters on Wednesday that US Special Envoy for Iran Rob Malley has been appointed to lead US participation during the November 29 talks.

The State Department communicated that it is confident that it can quickly reach an understanding regarding a mutual return to compliance with the JCPOA.

Price added that the US is hoping Iran is coming ready to negotiate "quickly and in good faith as well."

The concrete date puts an end to months of speculation over whether the two nations would abandon stalled negotiations on whether both Washington and Tehran would rejoin the international nuclear pact, and the removal of sanctions on Iran, one of the world's biggest oil extractors.

In May 2018, then-US President Donald Trump pulled the US out of the JCPOA - also known as the Iran nuclear deal - and reimposed sanctions that crippled the Iranian economy. Soon after, Tehran also abandoned its commitments under the agreement.

Negotiations between the two nations initially kicked off in April, but stalled in June.

Being that Iran, following consultations with a number of entities - including China, has agreed to return to negotiations, it is now a question of how Tehran and Washington will make concessions.

While the US, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom have said that Iran must return to the agreement before sanctions are lifted, Tehran has demanded that Washington lift its sanctions before Iran resumes its JCPOA commitments.

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Diva Defence: Lady Gaga Reveals She Wore Bulletproof Dress to Biden Inauguration
By - Evan Craighead

Back in January, Grammy-award-winning singer-songwriter Lady Gaga, real name Stefani Germanotta, donned a custom Schiaparelli Haute Couture look, accented with a gilded dove of peace brooch and a simple pair of Cornelia James leather gloves for her performance of the national anthem at US President Joe Biden's presidential inauguration ceremony.

Lady Gaga is no stranger to eclectic fashion choices, but according to the "Bad Romance" singer, her dress - made by American fashion designer and Schiaparelli creative director Daniel Roseberry - for Biden's January 20th inauguration was high-end, fashion-forward, and functional.

"That has to be one of the proudest days of my whole life", said the 35-year-old singer and actor, recounting the event to [British Vogue in an interview published on Tuesday](#). "Like many people in America, I felt a deep fear when Trump was president, and ushering 45 out and 46 in is something I'll be able to tell my children all about".

"Singing in a Schiaparelli bulletproof dress", she revealed. "I don't know if people know this about me, but if I weren't who I am today, I would have been a combat journalist. That was one of my dreams".

"When I was at the Capitol, the day before the inauguration, I remember walking around and looking for evidence of the insurrection", she said, referring to the January 6th storming of the US Capitol building, which immediately resulted in five deaths.

Roseberry, who designed the French Haute Couture look, called it a "love letter" to America.

"As an American living in Paris, this ensemble is a love letter to the country I miss so dearly and to a performer whose artistry I have so long admired", Roseberry said in a [statement obtained by Harper's Bazaar](#).

We will have to assume his love letter referred not only to the bulletproof lining of the garment.

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Pentagon Watchdog Reportedly Finds No Misconduct in US Strike That Killed 10 Civilians in Kabul

By- Evan Craighead

Marine Gen. Frank McKenzie, head of US Central Command, admitted in September that the US had made a "tragic mistake" in firing a Hellfire missile at a white sedan driven by Zemari Ahmadi in Kabul, Afghanistan. A total of 10 members of the Ahmadi family were killed in the August 29 strike, which the US initially claimed was carried out correctly.

An independent review conducted by the US Department of Defense has concluded that misconduct and/or negligence were not factors in the US drone strike that killed civilians, including children, on August 29, according to a [new Associated Press report](#) citing an unnamed senior US defense official.

However, the Pentagon report did find that US forces had issues during the process of identifying and confirming the strike's target. The report also found general breakdowns in communication among those involved.

Air Force Lt. Gen. Sami Said, an inspector general of the service, led the review after he was found to be an independent party regarding Afghan operations.

Said's review reportedly takes into consideration that, at the time, US forces were operating under a number of stressors amid the rushed US withdrawal from the Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul, Afghanistan.

It was also noted that US forces received intelligence on the car's perceived threat shortly after a Daesh-K* suicide bomber killed 13 US troops and 169 Afghans near an airport gate.

Based on the factors raised, it was concluded that the US forces believe they were engaging a genuine threat when they fired on a white Toyota Corolla sedan operated by Ahmadi, an employee of a US humanitarian organization. The strike killed Ahmadi and nine of his family members.

While no charges have been announced in connection with the review, a number of recommendations were included and passed on to leadership in both the US Central Command and US Special Operations Command.

One recommendation calls for the US military to have so-called "red team" personnel accompanying strike teams to question the outcome of situations. The practice would theoretically reduce "confirmation bias" among troops and lessen civilian casualties, according to the review.

News of the internal review comes shortly after the [US announced a commitment to offering cash condolence payments](#) to relatives of the Ahmadi family. However, an amount was not provided, as those plans have been finalized.

The US Departments of State and Defense are also assisting in efforts to relocate surviving members of the Ahmadi family to the US, according to Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby.

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FAA Chief: Boeing Has 'More Work to Do' After Resetting Relationship With Federal Aviation Admin

By - Evan Craighead

Earlier this year, the US Department of Justice fined Boeing \$2.5 billion and criminally charged the company with conspiracy to defraud the Aircraft Evaluation Group of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). The feds alleged that Boeing hid information from investigators probing the two Boeing 737 MAX crashes that killed a combined 346 people.

FAA Administrator Stephen Dickson told members of the US Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation that [Boeing is not yet out of the woods](#) concerning safety reform and transparency with the federal agency.

"Boeing is not the same as it was two years ago but they have more to work to do", [Dickson told the US senate committee](#) on Wednesday, emphasising that the FAA has "reset the relationship with Boeing in no uncertain terms".

Dickson's comments came as part of the committee's hearing on the "Implementation of Aviation Safety Reform".

During his oral testimony, Dickson revealed that the FAA is promoting the use of its new safety management systems, or SMS, which allows an organisation to actively search and identify safety issues and address the root cause.

"Currently, four design and manufacturing organisations, including Boeing, have voluntarily adopted SMS, with six others in progress", [he said in remarks provided to the FAA](#).

The FAA chief told lawmakers that he had "made it clear internally that we always do the right thing when it comes to safety — and that I have the workforce's back on that".

Dickson received some pushback from committee members, including Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-WA), who did not appear convinced that Boeing had made safety advancements across the board. She also referenced the concerns of aviation whistleblowers.

"Line engineers had early warnings, whether it's the [Boeing] 787 battery issue, or whether it was this issue related to synthetic airspeeds or the complexity of automation and overload of pilots in the system", Cantwell said. "Those line engineers weren't listened to".

Cantwell noted that she intends to release a report on aviation whistleblowers before the year ends.

She also pressed Dickson about deadlines, noting that the FAA had failed to reach a September 2021 deadline on a workforce review that was previously recommended by the US Department of Transportation Inspector General in 2015.

"We want to get on the same page about needs", Cantwell said, warning that oversight will suffer and could receive less vital funding when deadlines are not met.

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5.7-Magnitude Earthquake Strikes Indonesia, USGS Reveals

By - Gaby Arancibia

Indonesia experienced one of its worst earthquakes in late 2004, when a 9.1-magnitude quake struck the region and later triggered a series of devastating tsunamis that grew some 30 feet. Casualties ranged in the hundreds of thousands.

A powerful 5.7-magnitude earthquake rattled Indonesia early Thursday, the United States Geological Services (USGS) has reported.

The quake struck at a depth of 10 kilometres within central Indonesia, some 65 kilometres northeast of the village of Amahai.

Details [released](#) by the USGS indicate that while the powerful earthquake was significant enough to have been felt by residents, the incident was unlikely to have caused any significant amount of structural damage.

Readings [released](#) by the EMSC reveal that at least three additional earthquakes struck the same region after the 5.7-magnitude tremor was recorded. The aftershocks were recorded as being 4.2, 3.1, and 3.0 on the Richter scale.

Reports of fatalities or injuries have not yet been issued. Additionally, no tsunami warning has yet been filed for the region.

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Political Waves: What the Virginia Governor Race Means for the Democratic Agenda
By - Nevin Brown

Glenn Youngkin defeated incumbent Terry McAuliffe on Tuesday to secure the Virginia governorship, a move that has excited Republican candidates across the country. The win could have far-reaching consequences for the 2022 midterm elections and has sent a clear signal to Democrats in Washington.

Terry McAuliffe's failure to secure the Virginia governorship was unexpected. In the 2020 presidential election, US President Joe Biden, then the Democratic candidate, [won the state by 10 points](#). Now, only a year later, [Democrats lost the governorship by 2.5 points](#).

The question Democrats need to ask themselves is how did the Virginia GOP swing 12 points so quickly?

[According to a Washington Post-Schar School Poll](#), in the weeks leading up to the election, 53% of Virginians disapproved of Biden's job performance, with 46% approving. The poll also uncovered that education topped the economy as the most important issue for voters.

Glenn Youngkin was able to use mask mandates in schools and critical race theory, among other education-related grievances, to swing Virginia's suburbs red enough to flip a state that has had a Democratic governor for 16 of the past 20 years.

Democrats in Congress will take notice. Cultural issues can still lead to gains in the suburbs, and pushing more progressive policies could have major consequences in 2022.

Alex Keena, assistant professor at the Department of Political Science, Virginia Commonwealth University summed another issue that Dems should be concerned about: the turnout.

"For the Democrats, they chose a candidate who was unable to inspire Democratic voters to show up and vote, Keena said, adding that, "in some ways, this reflects national politics -- President Joe Biden has had trouble getting his agenda passed by Congress"

In the 2020 US presidential election, an estimated 4.3 million Virginians voted. In the 2021 gubernatorial election, 3.2 million people voted. McAuliffe sought to energize the Democratic base by comparing Youngkin to Donald Trump. The strategy did not pay off and Democratic organizers believe the party's inability to pass legislation in Washington may be hurting Democrats at the state level.

Adrienne Shropshire, the executive director of BlackPAC, [said voters of color](#) are disappointed that Democrats have not yet passed laws on issues including voting rights and criminal justice. "People don't want to be gaslighted about what's not happening and why, by being told that everything is great," she said.

"Among Democrats, there is disappointment that President Biden has not been able to deliver on some of his campaign promises, due to infighting among the Democratic Party in the US Congress," Keena added.

Virginia wasn't the only governor's race this week. New Jersey's gubernatorial race also saw a Republican candidate perform much better than expected, which George Washington University professor Gary Nordlinger believes is the more tell-tale sign.

Nordlinger wrote through email, "The bigger shock is New Jersey. Polling showed a tie between the candidates in Virginia. However, while polling showed the race was tightening in New Jersey, it was still a 5% (or so) margin for Democratic Gov. Murphy in New Jersey." The New Jersey race was narrowly won by incumbent Democratic Governor Phil Murphy on Wednesday. The Virginia and New Jersey gubernatorial election results are ringing alarm bells among Democrats in Washington and across the country. Their inability to pass legislation has left their base lethargic, their progressive members' rhetoric is thought by some to be scaring off some swing suburban voters, and trying to make an election about Trump when he's on the political sideline are all costly errors.

A Democrat agenda will need to start producing results in order to avoid a political red wave.

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3 Women Dead, 2 Injured After 'Mass Shooting' in Norfolk, Virginia
By - Nevin Brown

Three women were killed and two others injured in a mass shooting in Norfolk, Virginia. Norfolk Police Chief Larry Boone described the incident as a "mass shooting." The suspect is not in custody but is known. The two women who were injured were taken to the hospital. The severity of their injuries is not yet known.

Boone told reporters, "The suspect shot one victim and as the community was trying to render aid, this coward shoots them."

Emergency dispatchers said they received a call about the incident at 6:02 p.m. It is suspected that the initial shooting was domestic in nature.

The event transpired in the Young Terrace neighborhood on the 800 block of Whitaker lane.

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American Footballer Henry Ruggs Was Driving 156 MPH in Crash That Killed Woman And Dog
By - Nevin Brown

Las Vegas Raiders wide receiver Henry Ruggs was driving his Chevrolet Corvette at 156 miles per hour (MPH) seconds before he crashed into a RAV4 SUV, instantly killing a 23-year-old woman and her dog.

Ruggs was found to have a blood alcohol content of .161%, just over twice Nevada's legal limit of .08%. He has been charged with a felony DUI resulting in death, and felony reckless driving. He appeared in court on Wednesday and posted \$150,000 bail on the strict condition that he remained confined at home, is electronically monitored, consumes no alcohol, does not drive and surrenders his passport.

The crash occurred approximately at 3:40 a.m. local time on Tuesday, several miles west of the Las Vegas strip. Computer records from Ruggs' vehicle indicate that he slowed from 156 mph to 127 mph just before ramming into the back of the victim's car. The collision ruptured the vehicle's fuel tank which caused it to become engulfed in flames.

Ruggs' and his girlfriend, Kiara Je'nai Kilgo-Washington, who was also in the vehicle, were taken to the hospital to be treated for non-life-threatening injuries. Ruggs' apparently suffered a leg injury and appeared in court with a neck brace and in a wheelchair. Kilgo-Washington apparently suffered a serious arm injury.

Steve Wolfson, a Clark County prosecutor, [has said that he intends](#) to file a second felony DUI charge against Ruggs related to the injuries suffered by Kilgo-Washington. Ruggs could also potentially face a weapons charge.

In Nevada, probation is not an option in the event of a conviction for a DUI causing death or substantial bodily injury. Between the two felony DUI charges and the reckless driving charge, Ruggs could face up to 46 years in prison.

The Las Vegas Raiders did not wait for the justice system to come to a verdict, releasing Ruggs from his contract Tuesday night. The second-year wideout was selected in the 12th pick of the 2020 NFL draft, after a stellar college career at Alabama, and later posted the fastest 40-yard sprint time at the 2020 NFL combine.

Ruggs was enjoying a breakout second season with 24 catches for 469 yards. His 19.5 yards per reception was second in the NFL through seven games.

Little information has been made available about the two victims.

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Ancient Exploding Comet Created Glassy Rock Patches in Chilean Desert
By - Nevin Brown

A new study published in the journal *Geology* suggests that the mystery of the glassy rock patches in Chile's Atacama Desert has been solved.

[Researchers believe](#) that an exploding comet fused sand into silicate glass across some 75 kilometres. Occurring about 12,000 years ago, early human inhabitants may have witnessed the event.

The glassy patches have long perplexed researchers. Some believed that a widespread grassland fire or possibly a volcanic eruption had caused the event. The study was able to conclusively rule out those two options, however, and found compelling evidence to support an extraterrestrial explanation.

The desert glass is dark green and black, and contains tiny fragments of minerals that are usually found in rocks of extraterrestrial origin.

The glass exhibits signs of having been turned, wrapped, rolled, and thrown while in molten form, lending credence to the likelihood of a large meteor and airburst explosion creating and dispersing the material.

Further analysis uncovered minerals called zircons that had thermally decomposed to form baddeleyite, which typically only happens at temperatures in excess of 3,000 degrees Fahrenheit.

Adding another layer of intrigue is that the general date of the blast is very close to the time that large mammals disappeared in the area. Further studies are expected to be conducted to determine the age of the glass which will help date when the blast occurred.

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Researchers Discover COVID Proteins That Cause Strokes and Heart Attacks
By - Nevin Brown

A team of researchers in Israel have pinpointed the proteins in COVID-19 that cause heart attacks and strokes, an accomplishment that the researchers hope will help spur the development of new drugs.

[According to Dr Ben Maoz of Tel Aviv University](#), one of the authors of the study, the "coronavirus isn't the purely respiratory disease we first thought, and we have identified the proteins that put patients at increased risk of stroke, heart attack, and other problems associated with the vascular system".

COVID-19, or SARS-CoV-2, is comprised of 29 proteins, of which five lead to vascular issues. To discover this, the [researchers created a simulation of a human vascular system](#) and observed the impact of all 29 proteins. From there, they were able to determine which proteins interacted with the vascular system and how.

"What we found is these specific proteins make your vasculature more leaky", Maoz said in a description of how the five proteins interfere with the normal function of the vascular system. "The tubes become more porous and cannot hold liquid as you would hope".

The discovery could lead to new therapeutics and treatments for patients suffering from the deadly respiratory disease.

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Turkey Probes Twitter Posts Suggesting Erdogan Died After Viral Video Raises Speculations
By - Adriana Montes

Turkish authorities initiated legal action Wednesday against 30 people over a series of Twitter posts suggesting that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had died — after a viral video of the president seen shuffling and having difficulty walking circled the web.

The 30 suspects are under investigation, accused of allegedly sharing “disinformation and manipulative content” and insulting Erdogan for sharing posts on Twitter using the hashtag “olmus,” which translates to “is said to be dead,” according to a police [statement](#) Wednesday obtained by Bloomberg.

The “olmus” hashtag was briefly trending on Turkish Twitter, with one user [tweeting](#), “Turkish news networks, if someone bites in the street, they will report immediately until nightfall... In the last 24 hours, Erdogan's death has been deafening on social media. All news networks sleep. They do not confirm or deny. They do not say anything,” referring to the speculation of the death of the Turkish President.

In recent months evidence is growing that Turkey's president is ailing after a series of videos have surfaced in which the Turkish leader has not looked well.

In recent [footage](#) shot Friday at the 98th-anniversary commemoration of the founding of the Turkish Republic, Erdogan is seen walking and looking unstable on his feet, which raised more obvious concerns that ignited the conspiracy of an alleged death.

His office, however, denied any health issues and launched legal proceedings against the individuals that spread the alleged rumors.

Fahrettin Altun, Communications Director of the Republic of Turkey, posted a [video](#) on Twitter Wednesday of Erdogan walking more robustly after a plane journey from Istanbul to Ankara, with the caption “Trust the friend, fear the enemy.”

Twitter user, Yakup Ozturk, [commented](#) on the video saying, “Even the fake news about his health, the Istanbul Stock Exchange crashes, the Turkish Lira loses its value. Everyone should understand!”

President Erdogan made a [statement](#) to the press on Wednesday, after receiving the Ambassador of Ukraine Vasyl Bodnar at the Presidential Complex. He followed that with a [tweet posted](#) on his Twitter account reading:

“As we have done since November 3, 2002, #MilleteHizmetYolunda We will continue to work non-stop and walk the path with our Nation.” The hashtag translates to “on the way of service to the nation.”

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'Absolutely Totally False': Pentagon Refutes Iranian Claim That US Forces Attempted to Seize Oil

By - Adriana Montes

The US Department of Defense sternly rejected claims on Wednesday that American naval forces ever attempted to seize a vessel carrying Iranian oil, an allegation that was earlier pushed by Iran.

The condemnation was aired by Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby, who told reporters during a news briefing that claims made by Iranian officials were "absolutely totally false and untrue."

"I've seen Iranian claims they are absolutely totally false and untrue," Kirby said Wednesday.

"There was no such effort by US naval assets to seize anything."

"It's a bogus claim," the official underscored.

Kirby subsequently followed up his remarks by explaining that the allegations stemmed from an October 24 incident in which the US claims involved Iranian forces seizing a Vietnamese-flagged oil tanker.

"What this refers to is back on the 24th of October, US Navy assets did monitor Iranian forces, illegally boarding and seizing a merchant vessel in international waters in the Gulf of Oman," Kirby said during at the briefing.

Washington has maintained that it had only monitored the incident, and that US forces had acted in accordance with international law. "The only seizing that was done was by Iran," Kirby emphasized.

Kirby's commentary surfaced after Iranian media issued a series of contradictory [reports](#) on Wednesday that detailed it was US military personnel who "confiscated the Iranian tanker loaded with crude oil in the Sea of Oman," where members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy "reacted promptly" and gained control of the vessel, directing it back towards Iran's territorial waters.

"The United States stopped a tanker exporting Iranian oil and transferred its cargo to another tanker which it directed towards an unknown destination," the state media had earlier reported. Tensions between the two nations have remained heated over the last several months as Iran has repeatedly warned the US against its military presence in the Gulf, highlighting that Iranian forces have conducted increased patrols of the region to ensure safe passage of Iranian vessels.

The latest spate unfolded just as Iran [announced](#) that it would be returning to stalled negotiations to revive the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in the hopes of easing restrictive sanctions. Talks are expected to resume on November 29.

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ICC Launches Investigation Against Venezuela Over Crimes Against Humanity

By - Adriana Montes

The International Crime Court (ICC) is launching a formal probe — a first in Latin America — into allegations of crimes against humanity committed in Venezuela under the rule of President Nicolas Maduro.

International Criminal Court chief prosecutor Karim Khan said Wednesday that he was determined to open an investigation to "establish the truth" amid a preliminary examination into abuse in 2018, according to an agreement signed by Khan and Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.

The ICC, urged by multiple Latin American nations opposed to Maduro, raised concerns of allegations of officials in Maduro's government who have taken part in crimes against humanity. The memorandum, shared by the government on Wednesday, indicated that Caracas does not think the situation in the country "justifies the movement from the preliminary examination phase to a investigation phase."

"The preliminary examination that opened in 2018 is nothing more than a filtering stage as we move into this new stage," Khan said during an event broadcast on state television.

The British prosecutor said he was aware of the political "fault lines" and "geopolitical divisions" that surround Venezuela, but vowed to not tolerate interference in the investigation.

Joe Miguel Vivanco, director of Human Rights Watch's Americas division, shared the news on [Twitter](#) Wednesday saying that the decision gave "hope of justice to the hundreds of victims of brutal repression by the Maduro regime."

During the ICC's visit to the South American nation, small demonstrations have broken out over the last few days outside of the intelligence services headquarters in Caracas, demanding an audience with Khan, and following Amnesty International's earlier remarks that a delayed probe put "victims, survivors, and human rights defenders at greater risk of retaliation."

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Biden: Passage of Social Spending Bill Could Have 'Maybe' Helped McAuliffe Win in Virginia
By - Adriana Montes

US President Joe Biden told reporters at a Wednesday speaking event that the passage of his hefty spending bill could've "maybe" helped elect Democrat Terry McAuliffe in the Virginia gubernatorial race.

Biden revealed [during remarks](#) on the pandemic that his "Build Back Better" agenda and bipartisan infrastructure bill should have been approved before the polls opened on Tuesday in the Old Dominion, but he wasn't entirely convinced it would have changed the minds of Trump voters who supported Republican Glenn Youngkin.

"I think [the spending package] should've passed before Election Day but I'm not sure it would have been able to change the very conservative folks who turned out in red districts who were Trump voters", Biden admitted. "But maybe. Maybe".

Youngkin's victory makes him the first member of the Republican Party elected to statewide office in Virginia since 2009 - a big blow to Biden and the Democratic Party.

When asked if he took responsibility in McAuliffe's crushing defeat, Biden gave his reasons for the loss and why he continues to push the Democratic Party to pass the infrastructure bill. "People want to see change... and are upset about COVID and the price of gasoline", Biden commented.

Amid the election, Youngkin focused on issues that dealt with crime and the economy, as well as how schools handle race, gender, and mask mandates. While McAuliffe campaigned on cultural issues that related to abortion rights and voting reform.

Biden said he spoke to McAuliffe to congratulate him despite his defeat, and boasted the former governor's 600,000 votes, which the commander-in-chief said were the most votes that any Democrat has ever obtained in the state.

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US Actress Jennifer Garner Sparks Engagement Rumours After Sporting Diamond Ring on Instagram Live

By - Adriana Montes

American actress Jennifer Garner has fans wondering if she's engaged to longtime boyfriend John Miller after being seen wearing a staggering ring on her finger in her latest Instagram live video.

The actress appeared along with former co-star Judi Greer in a lengthy [conversation](#) to discuss sobriety, but fans didn't take long to notice she was wearing a delicate gold ring with a stunning circular design embellishment on her ring finger.

Garner first began dating CaliGroup CEO John Miller in 2018, a few years after her split with former husband and fellow actor Ben Affleck, with whom she shares three kids.

After differing views on marriage that led to a break-up in 2020, the couple [reportedly](#) rekindled their romance earlier in 2021 and has since been going strong, according to US Weekly. Meanwhile, Affleck has been trending after reigniting his relationship with former partner Jennifer Lopez after almost 20 years apart.

Garner has not confirmed the rumours surrounding the engagement.

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US to Require Large Businesses to Get Employees Vaccinated by January 4 - White House

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - The US Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) will require businesses with more than 100 employees to get their personnel vaccinated by January 4, the White House announced on Thursday.

"New Vaccination Requirement for Employers With 100 or More Employees: OSHA is issuing a COVID-19 Vaccination and Testing Emergency Temporary Standard (ETS) to require employers with 100 or more employees (i.e., "covered employers") to: Get Their Employees Vaccinated by January 4th and Require Unvaccinated Employees to Produce a Negative Test on at Least a Weekly Basis," the statement said.

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US Trade Deficit Reaches Record \$80.9Bln in September - Commerce Department

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - The deficit in US advance international trade, which accounts for payments done ahead of shipment, rose by 11% to reach a record \$80.9 billion in September, the Commerce Department announced on Thursday.

"The US Census Bureau and the US Bureau of Economic Analysis announced today that the goods and services deficit was \$80.9 billion in September, up \$8.1 billion from \$72.8 billion in August, revised," the department said in a statement.

The bureau estimated that September exports were \$207.6 billion, which was \$6.4 billion less than those in August, while imports in September reached \$288.5 billion, \$1.7 billion more than in August.

"The September increase in the goods and services deficit reflected an increase in the goods deficit of \$8.9 billion to \$98.2 billion and an increase in the services surplus of \$0.8 billion to \$17.2 billion," it added.

Year-to-date, the international trade deficit was up \$158.7 billion or 33.1 percent, from 2020 as imports rose by \$432.8 billion or 21.1 percent, versus exports at \$274.1 billion or 17.4 percent.

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US Weekly Jobless Claims Reach New Pandemic Low of 269,000 - Labor Department

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - US jobless claims fell to a new low of 269,000 last week in a sign of continued economic recovery from the nearly two-year-long coronavirus crisis, the Labor Department said on Thursday.

"In the week ending October 30, the advance figure for seasonally adjusted initial claims was 269,000, a decrease of 14,000 from the previous week's revised level. This is the lowest level for initial claims since March 14, 2020 when it was 256,000," the statement said.

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RPT - FDA Says Fully Confident in Pfizer Vaccine Data Despite Reports of Integrity Issues

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has full confidence in Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine data, despite reports of poor practices during a pivotal phase 3 trial, FDA spokesperson Alison Hunt told Sputnik.

"Although the agency cannot comment further at this time in this ongoing matter, FDA has full confidence in the data that were used to support the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine authorization and the Comirnaty approval," Hunt said.

On Tuesday, The BMJ peer-reviewed journal reported that researchers involved in the clinical trials for Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine engaged in poor scientific practices that compromised the integrity of the data.

The Ventavia Research Group falsified data, unblinded patients, employed inadequately trained vaccinators and was slow to follow up on adverse events reported in Pfizer's pivotal phase 3 trial, former regional director Brook Jackson said, according to the report.

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RPT: ANALYSIS - Dem Loss in Virginia Governor Race Hurts Biden's Image, Shows Voters Disillusioned

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - Democrats lost control of the governorship and both legislative chambers in the US state of Virginia because of the focus on irrelevant wedge issues in a setback that will hurt public perception of President Joe Biden, political analysts told Sputnik.

The governor race in Virginia held on Tuesday was one of the most watched with many feeling it could serve as a referendum on Biden's performance to date, and could set the tone for next year's midterm elections.

Earlier on Wednesday, former Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe finally conceded after losing by a narrow margin to Republican candidate Glenn Youngkin, who focused on educational issues such as parents having more control of school curricula. Meanwhile, Democratic New Jersey incumbent Governor Phil Murphy held on by the narrowest of margins over underdog Republican Jack Ciattarelli.

WIDESPREAD DISILLUSION

Earlier this year, former President Donald Trump publicly endorsed Youngkin while Biden was campaigning hard on behalf of McAuliffe just days and weeks in the run up to Tuesday's vote. Although only a few states went to the polls to choose new governors and state legislatures, some experts say the patterns of voting clearly bode ill for both the Democrats overall and especially Biden.

"On the larger scale, it shows how disillusioned the general public is with Joe Biden," Trend Research Institute Director Gerald Celente told Sputnik.

The setbacks, Celente added, will also make it more difficult for Democrats and the administration to push through their agenda.

New York City-based political commentator Jillian Jonas agreed that the outcome of the governor's races, especially in Virginia, would prove damaging to the president less than a year into his first term.

"It has hurt the perception of Biden," Jonas said.

Moreover, McAuliffe was a Democratic Party insider and intimate of former president Bill Clinton and his wife, former secretary of state and failed 2016 Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton, Jonas pointed out.

Those well-known associations and McAuliffe's lucrative ties to huge mega-corporations damaged him with independent voters and helped mobilize the Republican base against him, Jonas explained.

"Corporatist Terry McAuliffe was never a strong candidate, even for a more moderate state like Virginia," Jonas added.

WEDGE ISSUES

Jonas also said Youngkin ran a divisive campaign focusing on narrow wedge issues like Critical Race Theory despite it "being irrelevant," Jonas said.

University of Houston Professor of African-American History Gerald Horne found the election outcome in Virginia troubling given a key subtext of the race was Republican efforts to discredit initiatives to reduce or end racism.

"Worrisome results especially in Virginia where Biden won by 10 points a year ago and a Republican running a proxy campaign against antiracism 'Critical Race Theory' - which is not taught in schools as he suggested - was able to prevail," Horne said.

Celente said the Democrats have to get more coordinated with messaging among other things. However, aside from wins and losses, there is a much deeper message the election itself sends, Celente said.

"The only lesson to learn is that two political mobs control America's government and if you don't have mega-corporate money and the media behind you when running for office, you lose," Celente said.

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Democratic New Jersey Governor Murphy Wins Re-Election in Tight Race

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - Democratic New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy barely won his reelection bid, AP reported.

Murphy's victory allows the Democrats to avoid another crushing upset, coming just hours after Terry McAuliffe conceded to Trump-backed Republican candidate Glenn Youngkin in the state of Virginia gubernatorial contest.

Earlier in the day, Murphy had a lead of less than one percent over his Republican rival Jack Ciattarelli, according to the report on Wednesday.

Murphy is the state's first Democratic governor to secure two straight terms in 44 years.

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Blinken Spoke With Australian Counterpart About Joint Indo-Pacific Efforts - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne about their countries' joint efforts in the Indo-Pacific region, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said in a readout of the conversation.

"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken spoke today with Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne to continue our ongoing efforts to ensure a peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific following September's Australia-United States Ministerial (AUSMIN) meetings in Washington," Price said on Wednesday.

The two leaders also discussed the trilateral Australia-United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS) partnership and its efforts to uphold a free and open Indo-Pacific, Price said.

Blinken and Payne renewed their pledge to collective work in the region to "build back better" from the COVID-19 pandemic, Price added.

The United States recently agreed to sell Australia nuclear-powered submarines as part of the AUCUS partnership's efforts in the Indo-Pacific, prompting a diplomatic feud with France, who had a previous agreement with Canberra to provide submarines.

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US Special Envoy to Visit Middle East Thursday for Talks With Yemen Government

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking will be in the Middle East on Thursday to meet with government officials to discuss issues related to the ongoing conflict in Yemen, the State Department said.

"US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking will return to the Middle East on November 4 for continued conversations with the Republic of Yemen government, Yemeni civil society representatives, senior regional government officials, and other international partners," the State Department said in a press release on Wednesday.

Lenderking will focus talks on Houthi attacks and the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, the release said.

Moreover, Lenderking will emphasize the United States' commitment to work with the international community to press the warring parties to implement crucial economic reforms, secure regular imports and distribution of fuel, and resume commercial flights to the Sana airport, the release said.

Since February 2020, the Houthi rebels have been conducting a large-scale military operation to seize the oil-rich Marib province, which is an important political, military and economic center that hosts the defense ministry's headquarters.

Yemen's conflict between government forces and the Houthis has been ongoing since 2014.

The situation in the country was further complicated after Saudi Arabia joined the conflict on the side of the Yemen's government in 2015 and began conducting air, land and sea operations against the Islamist rebel movement.

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Google Chasing New Giant Joint Warfighting Cloud IT Contract With Pentagon - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - The Google Company is pursuing a gigantic new information technology (IT) contract to provide the Defense Department with advanced cloud computing for its warfighting capabilities, the New York Times reported.

The project is planned to expand the Defense Department's use of cloud technology and expand its use of artificial intelligence. It will replace a planned development with Microsoft scrapped earlier this year after a complicated legal dispute that also involved Amazon, the report said on Wednesday.

The expanded cloud and AI systems are planned to give the US armed forces a clear advantage over any opponents on battlefields, the report said.

In September, Google's cloud unit made the project a priority and announced an emergency "Code Yellow" to divert many of its engineers from other missions and gather them to prepare for this one, the report added.

In 2018, Google withdrew from a Defense Department project after some of its own employees objected to it. The new project is known as the Joint Warfighting Cloud Capability, according to the report.

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US Authorizes Boeing to Build Internet Network in Space With 132 Satellites - Regulator

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - The US Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has authorized Boeing's project to build a broadband internet network in space by way of placing 132 satellites into low Earth orbit, the agency said in a press release.

"The Federal Communications Commission today approved an application from The Boeing Company for a license to construct, deploy, and operate a satellite constellation. As detailed in its FCC application, Boeing plans to provide broadband and communications services for residential, commercial, institutional, governmental, and professional users in the United States and globally," the press release said on Wednesday.

The project was proposed by Boeing in 2017 and involves placing 132 satellites into low Earth orbit at an altitude of 1,056 kilometers (656 miles) with additional 15 satellites will be installed to "non geostationary orbit" at an altitude between 27,355 (17,000 miles) and 44,221 km (27,600 miles), the release said.

With 147 satellites in space, Boeing will be able to offer internet and communications services to residential consumers, government and businesses in the US, Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands while is being built with plans to become global one it is complete, the release added.

Boeing is not the first US company interested in exploring space technologies to offer a range of internet services. Elon Musk's Starlink network project kicked off in February 2018. Its goal is

also to ensure access to high-speed Internet anywhere in the world with plans to launch close to 1,500 satellites into space.

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Too Early to Assess Reputational Damage From US Fed Officials' Trading - Chair Powell

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - The US Federal Reserve is still assessing the damage to its reputation from criticism that its top officials were trading stocks and bonds while making policies that directly or indirectly affected such assets, Chairman Jerome Powell told reporters. "I think it's too soon to say what the reputational damage is," Powell said after chairing the Fed's policy meeting for October on Wednesday. "We need to make sure we do whatever it takes to make sure nothing like this happens again."

Regional Fed presidents Robert Kaplan of Dallas and Eric Rosengren of Boston were in the news recently over reports that they were involved in financial markets' trading that could be influenced at least indirectly by their policy decisions.

A preliminary Fed probe found that Rosengren, Kaplan and any other Fed officials did not violate the central bank's laws or policies on securities trading. But public criticism, especially on the apparent conflict of interest among the central bank's top officials, has persisted.

Powell said he had been clear from the outbreak of the controversy in September that the Fed needed to be impartial over the conduct of its officers.

"From the beginning, my reaction is we need to deal with this straightforwardly, transparently and that is what we did," he said. "I like to think we made a good start on this. I would just say this system has been in place for decades. It was in place when I took over. It was in place for at least the last three or four chairs. And you know, it was what it was. It proved to have weaknesses in it."

He said part of the problem was there was no uniformity in some regulations enforced across the dozen regional banks of the Fed.

"You had 12 different officers at 12 different banks and officers here. Compliance wasn't always the same. It was a little different and uneven. They are not in compliance with the part of our rules that said don't do anything that would create a bad appearance. That is clear: that this was a bad appearance."

Since the controversy erupted, the Fed's board has announced that it will make appropriate changes to its Reserve Bank Code of Conduct to ensure such conflicts of interest do not recur.

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UPDATE - Republicans Block Senate Bill Giving US Justice Dept. Control of Some Election Laws

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - Senate Republicans used a procedural vote on Wednesday to block a bill that would restore a requirement for state and local governments with a history of discrimination to first get approval from the US Justice Department when redrawing boundaries from congressional districts and changing other voting laws.

With a 50-49 vote, the Senate failed to reach the 60 vote threshold needed to end a Republican filibuster blocking the chamber from taking up the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, named for the late congressman and civil rights activist.

The act seeks to restore parts of the 1965 Voting Rights act that required Justice Department approval for states to impose election rules.

A prominent example is a spate of recent laws in some states that require voters to show identification before casting ballots - a measure that Democrats claim suppresses minority voting and Republicans say is needed to guard against fraud.

A 2013 US Supreme Court decision freed nine states, mainly in the south of the United States, from Justice Department control of voting rules. In a split decision, the court ruled that racial minorities no longer faced barriers to voting in those states, striking down a key part of the 1965 law. The John Lewis bill is distinct from the Freedom to Vote Act, which Republicans also blocked amid criticism the measure would have resulted in a federal takeover of elections, traditionally administered by state and local governments.

President Joe Biden issued a statement in response to the legislation getting blocked in which he called on Republicans to allow debate and a vote on the bill. Provisions of the legislation have been passed by the Senate with bipartisan support five times, mostly recently in 2006, Biden said.

The right to vote is sacred and constitutional, and the "soul of America is at stake" over the issue, Biden added.

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Biden Says US to Have Enough COVID-19 Vaccines for All Children Ages 5-11 Next Week

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - The United States will have enough COVID-19 vaccine doses to immunize all American children ages 5 to 11 years old as soon as next week, President Joe Biden said.

"As soon as next week, we will have enough vaccines and enough places, and parents will be able to schedule appointments to get kids their first shot," Biden said at the White House on Wednesday. "We have already secured enough vaccine supply for every single child in America ages 5 through 11."

Biden said that by approving the COVID-19 vaccine for children ages five through 11, the United States made a giant step forward toward accelerating the path out of the pandemic.

The US president noted that additional 28 million children in the United States are now eligible for vaccination.

On Tuesday, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices voted unanimously to recommend the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine for children between five and 11 years old.

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US Special Envoy to Visit Middle East Thursday for Talks With Yemen Government

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking will be in the Middle East on Thursday to meet with government officials to discuss issues related to the ongoing conflict in Yemen, the Department of State said in a press release.

"US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking will return to the Middle East on November 4 for continued conversations with the Republic of Yemen government, Yemeni civil society representatives, senior regional government officials, and other international partners," the release said on Wednesday.

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Biden Says Over 20M In Americans Received Pfizer COVID-19 Booster Vaccine Shot

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said that more than 20 million Americans have received Pfizer booster COVID-19 vaccine shots.

"Over 20 million Americans now received the booster. In fact, in just six weeks, we have already gotten boosters to about half of eligible seniors who received the Pfizer vaccine," Biden said at the White House.

Biden also said the United States has enough supply of the booster shots.

The US president also urged every senior American to receive a vaccine booster shot.

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Federal Reserve Starts Stimulus Tapering But Holds Off Interest Rate Hikes

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - The Federal Reserve announced that it was rolling back its long-running pandemic-era stimulus for the United States but held back from raising interest rates, which it said required more labor market and economic progress.

"We don't think it's time to raise rates now," Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell told reporters after chairing the central bank's policy meeting for October on Wednesday.

US interest rates have been held at between zero and 0.25% by the Federal Reserve since the first major outbreak of the COVID-19 in March 2020.

The Federal Reserve said it will begin reducing immediately the \$120 billion it has spent each month since last year to buy bonds and other assets to support the economy through the pandemic. Under the plan, the central bank will reduce by \$10 billion its monthly purchase of Treasury securities and by \$5 billion its commitment for agency mortgage-backed securities. As for a rate hike, if the Federal Reserve decided it was the only way to cool price pressures, then it will carry out one, he said. "We will be patient, but we won't hesitate."

The US economy shrank by 3.5% for all of 2020 due to shutdowns and other disruptions caused by the COVID-19 crisis. Growth this year has been spotty, with an annualized 3.5% expansion in the first quarter, 3.6% in the second and 2% in the third.

The Federal Reserve announced in March that it has targeted a 6.5% economic expansion for all of 2021. The problem for the Federal reserve is inflation as wages and the prices of almost everything have soared from the lows of the coronavirus pandemic, especially prices of gasoline that have hit seven-year highs.

Powell referred to the challenges posed by the Fed's dual mandate of capping inflation at 2% per annum while ensuring there was "maximum employment" - a measure defined by a jobless rate of less than 4% among working Americans. The rate currently stands at 4.8%.

The United States lost more than 21 million jobs between March and April 2020, at the height of business lockdowns forced by the coronavirus. About 5 million of those jobs have yet to return due to conditions forced by the pandemic, officials say. For the vacancies that were filled, employers had to pay more wages than previously.

"The inflation we are seeing is not due to a tight labor market," Powell said. "It's due to shortages and due to very strong demand in meeting those. We have to make policy in a world where the two goals are intentional. It's difficult. What it boils down to is common sense. It's risk management."

The Federal Reserve's closely-watched core PCE index, which excludes volatile food and energy prices, remained at a 30-year high in September, expanding at an annualized rate of 3.6%.

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Wall Street Hits Record High 4th Straight Day Despite US Stimulus Taper

NEW YORK, November 3 (Sputnik) - Wall Street hit record highs for a fourth day in a row as investors celebrated the sterling US economy and third-quarter profits for most publicly-traded corporations, even as the Federal Reserve announced it was rolling back its long-running pandemic-era stimulus.

All three of the major US equity indexes - the Dow Jones Industrial Average, the S&P 500 and the Nasdaq Composite - hit all-time highs, extending their peaks since Friday as the nation's central bank maintained there would be no rate hikes for now.

Earlier on Wednesday, the Federal Reserve said it will begin reducing immediately the \$120 billion it has spent each month since last year to buy bonds and other assets to support the economy through the pandemic. Under the plan, the central bank will reduce by \$10 billion its monthly purchase of Treasury securities and by \$5 billion its commitment for agency mortgage-backed securities.

But in spite of soaring inflation, the Federal Reserve held off from raising interest rates, which it said required more labor market and economic progress. "We don't think it's time to raise rates now," Fed Chairman Jerome Powell told reporters after chairing the central bank's policy meeting for October.

"The Fed tapering announcement went as planned, while Fed Chair Powell stuck to the argument that inflation is 'transitory,'" Ed Moya, analyst at online trading platform OANDA, said. "The Fed might be misreading inflation, but all that means is more accommodation for the economy, which is good news for stocks. The Fed could finish tapering by June and that is currently when markets are expecting them to increase rates."

Stocks, already bolstered over the past week by blockbuster profits for most American corporations in the banking to healthcare, auto, technology and entertainment sectors, rallied further in response to the Fed decision and a robust US services sector report released on Wednesday.

The Dow, a blue-chip index which groups mostly industrial stocks, closed up 105 points, or 0.3%, at 36,157, after a record high at 36,178.

The S&P 500, which represents the top 500 US stocks, rose 30 points, or 0.7%, to finish at 4,660 after peaking at 4,663.

Nasdaq, which groups Big Tech names such as Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix and Google, finished up 162 points, or 1%, at 15,812 after an all-time high at 15,822.

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US Unveils 7 Question App to Tell Users When to Test for COVID-19 - Health Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - A series of questions on topics such as vaccination status, mask wearing habits and attendance at social gatherings form the basis of a new app intended to tell users if and when they should be tested for COVID-19, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) said.

"By responding to just a few prompts, the new individual impact calculator indicates whether a person should get a test - now or soon," NIH said in a press release on Wednesday.

The app requires users to answer seven questions, beginning with the state and county where they live, followed by vaccination status, facemask use, most recent test, the average number of people in close contact with on a daily basis and social event attendance, the press release said.

A test by one fully vaccinated user in a high-transmission area, who has never been tested, has sloppy facemask habits and regularly interacts with others without social distancing offered advice to "consider getting tested today."

The test concluded with a warning that the user has high risk of either having COVID-19 or contracting the disease in the future and a low risk of spreading the coronavirus to others.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY
WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) -

US-RUSSIA TALKS

- * Moscow and Washington have shown that they are ready to take responsibility and agree on the most pressing issues, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Oleg Syromolotov said in an interview with Sputnik on Wednesday.
- * The United States has witnessed a reduction in cyberattacks coming from Russia since the summit between Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President Joe Biden in Geneva, Executive Office of the President National Cyber Director Chris Inglis said.
- * Russian Special Presidential Representative on Climate Issues Ruslan Edelgeriyev told Sputnik that he intends to discuss the lifting of sanctions from climate projects with US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry.
- * Four foreign companies, including Russia's Positive Technologies, have been added to the US Entity List over their alleged involvement in activities threatening national security, the Department of Commerce said.

PENTAGON REPORT ON CHINA

- * China is actively investing into expansion of its nuclear arsenal and plans to acquire up to 700 warheads by 2027 and 1000 warheads by 2030, the US Department of Defense (DoD) said in a new report published on Wednesday.
- * China may already possess a nascent "nuclear triad," including a nuclear capable air-launched ballistic missile as well as technological improvements of its ground and sea nuclear capabilities, the Pentagon said.

ENERGY SITUATION IN EUROPE

- * Gazprom is not interested in record high gas prices in Europe, as they lead to degradation of demand, the company's deputy board chairman and the head of Gazprom Export, Elena Burmistrova, said.
- * Gazprom considers allegations that its actions lead to higher gas prices in Europe strange, especially amid decrease of supplies from other sources, Burmistrova, said.
- * The energy security in Germany remains on a high level and there is no deficit, German Economy Ministry spokeswoman Beate Baron said.

SUDAN DEVELOPMENTS

* The US, UK, UAE and Saudi Arabia called for the restoration of the Sudanese government after a military takeover of the country in October, the countries said in a joint statement on Wednesday.

* The Sudanese military council will meet on Wednesday to determine the political future of ousted Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, a military source told Sputnik.

* Hamdok did not give his final consent to head a new government because of the pressure exerted by opposition forces, a senior military source told Sputnik.

AIRPLANE CRASH IN RUSSIA

* All people aboard the An-12 aircraft that went missing on Wednesday in Russia's Irkutsk region died during the crash, the regional governor, Igor Kobzev, said.

* According to preliminary data, two Ukrainians were aboard the An-12 plane that crashed in Russia, and the Ukrainian consulate in Novosibirsk has contacted the Russian Emergencies Ministry, Ukrainian Foreign Ministry spokesman Oleg Nikolenko said.

* Three Belarusians died during the crash of the An-12 plane in Russia's Irkutsk region, the Belarusian embassy to Russia told Sputnik.

* Russia's An-12 plane could crash near Irkutsk due to a technical failure or poor weather conditions, a spokesman for emergency services told Sputnik.

CHANGES IN UKRAINE GOVERNMENT

* The Ukrainian parliament dismissed First Deputy Prime Minister and Economy Minister Oleksiy Lyubchenko, as 320 lawmakers supported this decision on Wednesday, with the required minimum of 226 votes.

* The Ukrainian parliament dismissed Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories Oleksii Reznikov, who filed a letter of resignation and who is a possible candidate to head the defense ministry.

* The Ukrainian parliament dismissed Defense Minister Andriy Taran.

IRAN TALKS

* Iran will return to negotiations in Vienna on the restoration of the JCPOA and the lifting of US sanctions on November 29, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani said on Wednesday.

* Special Envoy for Iran, Robert Malley, will head the US delegation to the next round of talks on the Iran nuclear deal in late November, State Department spokesman Ned Price said.

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Biden Refutes Reports About Payments of \$450,000 to Separated Illegal Immigrant Families

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden on Wednesday has denied recent reports claiming that his administration was considering to compensate the illegal

immigrants who were separated with their families after being apprehended with up to \$450,000.

"That's not going to happen," Biden said when asked to confirm the recent reports.

Last week, the Wall Street Journal reported that the US departments of Justice, Homeland Security and Health and Human Services are considering the proposal to resolve lawsuits filed on behalf of parents and children who allegedly suffered psychological trauma as a result of family separation.

According to the report, the payouts could come close to \$1 million per impacted family, with a total payout of more than \$1 billion to roughly 5,500 children who were separated from their families after crossing the US border with Mexico.

The settlement discussions have been the subject of backlash with government lawyers viewing the payouts as excessive for people who broke the law by illegally crossing the US border. Some lawyers involved in the discussions have said the payouts could be greater than those received by some of the families of September 11, 2001, terror attacks victims.

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US House Approves Bill to Pave Way for New Nicaragua Sanctions

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives on Wednesday approved a Senate-passed bill that given the Biden administration authority to implement new sanctions against Nicaragua in order to support fair elections.

The House of Representatives passed the legislation with a 387-35 vote and it now heads to President Joe Biden's desk to be signed into law.

The legislation could impose sanctions on officials in Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega's administration, his family members as well as senior officials in Nicaragua's police and armed forces.

Other potential targets for sanctions may also include officials of Nicaragua's central bank, members of the Supreme Electoral Council, party members and elected officials from the Sandinista National Liberation Front and their family members.

Individuals and businesses accused of engaging in corruption in Nicaragua could also be designated.

The presidential election in Nicaragua is scheduled for this Sunday, with over ten political parties fielding their candidates. The ruling Sandinista National Liberation Front has confirmed longtime President Ortega and his wife, Vice President Murillo, as their candidate and running mate, respectively.

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Fed Chairman Vows to Keep US Inflation Under Control for Those Living Paycheck-to-Paycheck

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - The Federal Reserve on Wednesday vowed to keep inflation under check for Americans living paycheck-to-paycheck, with Chairman Jerome Powell assuring them the US central bank has the tools, including rate hikes, to subdue price pressures.

"We understand completely that it's particularly people who are living paycheck to paycheck that are seeing higher grocery and gas costs, and when winter comes, higher heating (bills) for their homes," Powell told reporters after chairing the Federal Reserve's policy meeting for October. "We understand what they are going through. We will use our tools over time to make sure that doesn't become a permanent feature of life. That is one of our principal jobs, along with achieving maximum employment. That is our commitment."

The US economy shrank by 3.5% for all of 2020 due to shutdowns and other disruptions caused by the COVID-19 measures. Growth this year has been spotty, with an annualized 3.5% expansion in the first quarter, 3.6% in the second and 2% in the third.

The Federal Reserve announced in March that it has targeted a 6.5% economic expansion for all of 2021. The problem for the central bank though is inflation as wages and the prices of almost everything have soared from the lows of the pandemic, especially pump prices of gasoline that have soared to seven-year highs.

Powell referred to the challenges posed by the Federal Reserve's dual mandate on capping inflation at 2% per year while ensuring there was "full employment" - a measure defined by a jobless rate of less than 4% among working Americans. The current rate is at 4.8%.

The United States lost more than 21 million jobs between March and April 2020, at the height of business lockdowns forced by the coronavirus. About 5 million of those jobs have yet to return due to conditions forced by the pandemic, officials say. For the vacancies that were filled, employers had to pay more wages than previously.

"The inflation we are seeing is not due to a tight labor market," Powell said. "It's due to shortages and due to very strong demand in meeting those. We have to make policy in a world where the two goals are intentional. It's difficult. What it boils down to is common sense. It's risk management."

Powell said the Fed saw no immediate need to raise US interest rates despite deciding to roll back its long-running pandemic-era stimulus of \$120 billion a month for the economy.

But if the Fed decided a rate hike was the only way to cool price pressures, then it will carry out one, he said. "We will be patient, but we won't hesitate," added.

US interest rates have been held at between zero and 0.25% by the Fed since the first major outbreak of the COVID-19 in March 2020.ect: Fed Vows to Keep US Inflation Under Control for Those Living Paycheck-to-Paycheck

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US Envoy to Hold Talks With Ethiopian Officials During Visit This Week - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - US Special Representative for the Horn of Africa Jeffrey Feltman will visit Ethiopia on Thursday and Friday to continue talks with government

officials about the ongoing conflict, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Wednesday.

"Ambassador Feltman will be traveling to Ethiopia on November 4 and November 5," Price said during a press briefing. "He will be traveling there because we are increasingly troubled by the expansion of combat operations, intercommunal violence in parts of Ethiopia and we are closely monitoring the situation."

Price said the United States urges all warring parties in Ethiopia to commit to peace and dialogue to resolve the conflict. The United States is in talks with partners in the region to address the crisis, Price added.

On Tuesday, the Ethiopian government declared a national state of emergency as part of measures to protect the population from the advance of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).

The Ethiopian government and the TPLF rebels have been engaged in year-long hostilities over control of the norther part of the country. The rebels are moving southward, having taken control of the town of Kombolcha on October 31, located less than 370 kilometers (230 miles) north of the capital of Addis Ababa. This development was one of the factors prompting Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed to declare a state of emergency in the Ethiopia as the rebels gradually advance toward the capital.

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The House of Representatives passed the legislation with a 387-35 vote and it now heads to President Joe Biden's desk to be signed into law.

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Regional Health Dept. Warns Against Complacency as COVID-19 Cases in Americas Drop

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - Nations in the Americas need to keep pushing COVID-19 vaccinations until everyone in the region is inoculated against the disease, despite a drop in infections for the past eight weeks, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) said on Wednesday.

"Progress in our region is not a reason to become complacent or discontinue the public health measures that help keep us safe," PAHO Assistant Director Jarbas Barbosa told reporters

during a weekly press conference. "It is critical for all of us to stay the course until everyone is vaccinated and protected from the virus."

In the last week, countries reported more than 745,000 new cases and just over 18,000 deaths, despite a drop in infections for the previous eight weeks. The United States, Canada and Mexico all reported drops in cases and deaths and there have been similar declines across most countries in Central and South America, a PAHO press release summarizing the event said.

At least 32 countries in the region have reached the World Health Organization (WHO) target of 40 percent vaccination coverage by the end of 2021 and several more are on track, the release said.

However, many continue to face delays, and coverage in Haiti, Nicaragua, Jamaica, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Guatemala remains below 20 percent, the release added.

To address inequity, allocations of vaccines from the global distribution organization COVAX are expected to accelerate in the coming weeks. COVAX has already delivered 64.3 million doses to the region, according to the release.

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Probe Into US Strike That Killed 10 Afghan Civilians Found No Violations of Law - Pentagon

(Corrects lede to say 'seven' instead of 'three' children, adds details in paras 3-6)

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - The Pentagon probe into an August airstrike in Afghanistan that killed 10 civilians, including seven children, concluded that the military action did not violate any law, the Defense Department said on Wednesday in a fact sheet about the classified investigation report.

"The independent investigation conducted by Lt Gen Said, the Department of the Air Force Inspector General, carefully reviewed all the evidence and interviewed 29 individuals, including 22 directly involved in the strike, under oath... The investigation found no violation of law, including the Law of War. Execution errors combined with confirmation bias and communication breakdowns led to regrettable civilian casualties," the fact sheet said.

The interpretations of the intelligence used to make the determination to strike were inaccurate, US Air Force Inspector General Sami Said, who led the investigation, told reporters during a press briefing at the Pentagon on Wednesday.

The context in which the strike occurred – three days after a suicide bombing attack killed 13 US service members – made for a unique threat environment, Said said. Those involved with the strike truly believed they were striking a threat at the time, he added.

Said's investigation resulted in several recommendations for the refinement of time-constrained strike scenarios, including implementing procedures to mitigate the risk of confirmation bias, enhancing sharing of overall mission situational awareness during execution, and reviewing pre-strike procedures used to assess the presence of civilians, the Pentagon fact sheet said.

The results of the investigation do not eliminate the possibility of accountability just because they did not find any violations of the law, and commanders can still make disciplinary decisions based on the event, according to Said.

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UN Security Council Extends EU-Led Stabilization Force in Bosnia-Herzegovina for 1 Year

UNITED NATIONS, November 3 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council on Wednesday unanimously supported the adoption of a draft resolution renewing the authorization of the European Union Force (EUFOR ALTHEA) in Bosnia and Herzegovina for another year. "The [UN Security] Council decided to renew the authorization... for a further period of twelve months starting from the date of adoption of this resolution," the resolution said.

The military deployment was decided in 2004 to oversee the implementation of the Dayton Peace Accords that ended the 1992-95 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Following the dissolution of Yugoslavia in 1992, Bosnia and Herzegovina proclaimed independence amid a civil war between Bosnian Muslims, Serbs and Croats. The war ended as the United States led an effort to conclude the Dayton Peace Accords, which formed two autonomous entities within the country - Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The two are governed by a collective presidency that is formed by three members representing the country's Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian populations.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is headed by one of the collective presidency's members on a rotational basis.

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Federal Reserve Does Not See Need to Raise US Interest Rates Now - Powell

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - The Federal Reserve sees no immediate need to raise US interest rates despite deciding to roll back its long-running pandemic-era stimulus for the economy, Chairman Jerome Powell said on Wednesday.

"We don't think it's time to raise rates now," Powell told reporters after chairing the Federal Reserve's policy meeting for October. "If we do conclude it's necessary to do so, we will be patient, but we won't hesitate."

US interest rates have been held at between zero and 0.25% by the Federal Reserve since the first major outbreak of the novel coronavirus in March of 2020.

Earlier on Wednesday, the Federal Reserve said it will begin reducing immediately the \$120 billion it has spent each month since last year to buy bonds and other assets to support the economy through the coronavirus pandemic. Under the plan, the US central bank will reduce by

\$10 billion its monthly purchase of Treasury securities and by \$5 billion its commitment for agency mortgage-backed securities.

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US Charges Lab Owner With \$100M in Fake Billings For COVID-19, Other Tests - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - The US authorities charged the owner and manager of multiple diagnostic testing laboratories with healthcare fraud over a scheme that generated more than \$100 million in false billings for COVID-19 tests, urine drug testing and other procedures, the Justice Department said on Wednesday.

"Billy Joe Taylor, 42, engaged in a scheme between February 2017 and May 2021 in connection with diagnostic laboratory testing, including urine drug testing and tests for respiratory illnesses during the COVID-19 pandemic, that were medically unnecessary, not ordered by medical providers, and/or not provided as represented," the Justice Department said in a press release. The indictment alleges that Taylor obtained medical information and private personal information for Medicare beneficiaries, and then misused that confidential information to repeatedly submit fake claims to Medicare for diagnostic tests, the release said.

Taylor then used proceeds from the \$100 million fraud to live a lavish lifestyle, including purchasing numerous luxury automobiles, including a Rolls Royce, real estate, jewelry, guitars, and other luxury items, the release added.

Taylor is charged with 16 counts of health care fraud, and one count of engaging in a monetary transaction in criminally derived property. Each count carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison, according to the release.

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Iranian Claims That They Prevented US From Capturing Its Oil Totally False - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - Tehran's claims that the US Navy attempted to seize a vessel with Iranian oil are "false and untrue" and the US destroyer ship was acting in accordance with international law, Defense Department spokesperson John Kirby said on Wednesday.

"I've seen Iranian claims they are absolutely totally false and untrue. There was no such effort by US naval assets to seize anything. What this refers to is back on the 24th of October, US Navy assets did monitor Iranian forces, illegally boarding and seizing a merchant vessel in international waters in the Gulf of Oman," Kirby said during a press briefing.

Kirby also said the United States acted in accordance with the international law while the actions of Iran undermine freedom of navigation and the free flow of commerce.

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Probe Into US Strike That Killed 10 Afghan Civilians Found No Violations of Law - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - The Pentagon investigation into an August airstrike in Afghanistan that killed 10 civilians, including three children, concluded that the military action did not violate any law, the Defense Department said on Wednesday in a fact sheet about the classified investigation report.

"The independent investigation conducted by Lt. Gen. Said, the Department of the Air Force Inspector General, carefully reviewed all the evidence and interviewed 29 individuals, including 22 directly involved in the strike, under oath ... The investigation found no violation of law, including the Law of War. Execution errors combined with confirmation bias and communication breakdowns led to regrettable civilian casualties," the fact sheet said.

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Republicans Block Senate Bill Giving US Justice Department Control of Some Election Laws

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - Senate Republicans used a procedural vote on Wednesday to block a bill that would restore a requirement for state and local governments with a history of discrimination to first get approval from the US Justice Department when redrawing boundaries from congressional districts and changing other voting laws.

With a 50-49 vote, the Senate failed to reach the 60 vote threshold needed to end a Republican filibuster blocking the chamber from taking up the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, named for the late congressman and civil rights activist.

The act seeks to restore parts of the 1965 Voting Rights act that required Justice Department approval for states to impose election rules.

A prominent example is a spate of recent laws in some states that require voters to show identification before casting ballots - a measure that Democrats claim suppresses minority voting and Republicans say is needed to guard against fraud.

A 2013 US Supreme Court decision freed nine states, mainly in the south of the United States, from Justice Department control of voting rules. In a split decision, the court ruled that racial minorities no longer faced barriers to voting in those states, striking down a key part of the 1965 law. The John Lewis bill is distinct from the Freedom to Vote Act, which Republicans also blocked amid criticism the measure would have resulted in a federal takeover of elections, traditionally administered by state and local governments.

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Special Envoy Malley to Lead US Participation in Iran Talks in Vienna - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - Special Envoy for Iran, Robert Malley, will head the US delegation to the next round of talks on the Iran nuclear deal in late November, State Department spokesman Ned Price said in a press briefing on Wednesday.

"We understand that the European External Actions Service, of course, has been coordinating with the Iranians on their stated intent to resume negotiations before the end of this month. This appears to have just taken place," Price said. "We do welcome the EU's announcement that they have coordinated with all participants and that talks on the mutual return to compliance with the JCPOA will resume for a seventh round on Monday, November 29. Special Envoy Malley will again lead US participation in these talks."

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US to Issue COVID-19 Vaccine Mandate for Private Sector in Days – White House

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - The US government will release a COVID-19 vaccine and testing mandate for the private sector in the coming days, White House COVID-19 advisor Jeff Zients told reporters on Wednesday.

"The OSHA rule will be coming quite soon, in a matter of days," Zients told a virtual press briefing.

In September, President Joe Biden announced that the United States is introducing compulsory vaccination against COVID-19 for all employees of federal agencies. He also pledged to order the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to issue rules for private businesses with over 100 employees to get vaccinated.

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UNGA Adopting US-Russia Cyberspace Draft Resolution Shows They Can Cooperate - Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, November 3 (Sputnik) - The adoption of a jointly drafted resolution by Russia and the United States on cyberspace at the UN General Assembly (UNGA) indicates that the countries are able to cooperate on issues they both find important, US Special Representative for Nuclear Nonproliferation Jeffrey Eberhardt said on Wednesday.

Earlier in the day, the UN General Assembly First Committee adopted a draft resolution submitted jointly by Russia and the United States that emphasizes it is in the interests of all member states to promote the use of information and communication technologies for peaceful purposes.

"It points out where we can cooperate, we cooperate. That's important," Eberhardt said during a press conference.

The adopted draft resolution also recognizes that a number of countries have developed technology capabilities for military purposes and their use in various conflicts is becoming more likely.

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US Open to Questions From Russia on AUKUS Submarine Deal - Nonproliferation Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, November 3 (Sputnik) - The United States is open to questions from Russia regarding the Australia-United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS) partnership and the deal it reached to supply Canberra with submarines, US Special Representative for Nuclear Nonproliferation Jeffrey Eberhardt said on Wednesday.

"We have been very clear about what this is about. If they [Russia] have questions, they can ask them and we'll answer," Eberhardt said.

In September, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russia was thoroughly studying information about the AUKUS as it is necessary to understand its goals and objectives, adding that little information was available at that stage.

AUKUS was announced in mid-September and spurred backlash from the European Union, especially from France, which lost a multi-billion dollar contract on supplying submarines to Australia.

Under the new deal, Australia will obtain US technology to develop its own nuclear-powered submarines, sparking concerns about the future of the non-proliferation regime in the region.

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US Air Force Nears 97% COVID-19 Vaccination Rate at Deadline for Active Duty Members

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - The vaccination rate for US airmen and Space Force guardians neared 97 percent with the arrival of this week's deadline for active duty forces to be inoculated against the novel coronavirus, the Air Force said on Wednesday.

"Yesterday marked the Department of the Air Force's deadline for active duty component Airmen and Guardians to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. As of publication, nearly 97% of Airmen and Guardians on active duty have received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine," the Air Force said in a press release.

The mandate announced in August prompted Military Treatment Facilities to scale up efforts to meet the November 2 deadline for an initial dose of a two-jab vaccine, often with procedures able to administer thousands of shots a day, the release said.

As of Wednesday, the Air Force reported that 8,486 active duty airmen and guardians had yet to receive a vaccine, including 4,933 who had applied for a religious exemption.

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US Federal Reserve Starts Tapering Bond-Buying Stimulus - FOMC

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - The US Federal Reserve announced on Wednesday the long-awaited rollback of its pandemic-era stimulus, saying it will begin reducing immediately the \$120 billion it has spent each month since last year to buy bonds and other assets to support the economy through the COVID-19 crisis.

"The Committee decided to begin reducing the monthly pace of its net asset purchases by \$10 billion for Treasury securities and \$5 billion for agency mortgage-backed securities," the Fed's FOMC, or Federal Open Market Committee, said in a statement.

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US, UK, Saudi Arabia, UAE Call for Restoration of Sudanese Government - Joint Statement

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - The US, UK, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia called for the restoration of the Sudanese government after a military takeover of the country in October, the countries said in a joint statement on Wednesday.

"The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, the United States of America, and the United Kingdom affirm their countries' stance with the people of Sudan and emphasize the importance of supporting their aspirations for a democratic and peaceful nation... We call for the full and immediate restoration of its civilian-led transitional government and institutions," the joint statement said.

The countries stressed in the joint statement the importance of commitment to the Constitutional Document and Juba Peace Agreement as the foundations for further dialogue about how to uphold a military-civilian partnership for the remainder of the transitional period prior to elections in Sudan.

The joint statement also condemned violence between the parties in Sudan and encouraged effective dialogue that ensures peace and security in the country.

The Sudanese military council will meet on Wednesday to determine the political future of Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, a military source told Sputnik. Hamdok was previously detained by military forces during the takeover of the transitional government.

The UN Security Council on Thursday similarly adopted a statement on the situation in Sudan that called on the country's military leadership to restore the civilian-led transitional government.

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"The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, the United States of America, and the United Kingdom affirm their countries' stance with the people of Sudan and emphasize the importance of supporting their aspirations for a democratic and peaceful nation... We call for the full and immediate restoration of its civilian-led transitional government and institutions," the joint statement said.

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FDA Says Fully Confident in Pfizer Vaccine Data Despite Reports of Integrity Issues

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has full confidence in Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine data, despite reports of poor practices during a pivotal phase 3 trial, FDA spokesperson Alison Hunt told Sputnik on Wednesday.

"Although the agency cannot comment further at this time in this ongoing matter, FDA has full confidence in the data that were used to support the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine authorization and the Comirnaty approval," Hunt said.

On Tuesday, The BMJ peer-reviewed journal reported that researchers involved in the clinical trials for Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine engaged in poor scientific practices that compromised the integrity of the data.

The Ventavia Research Group falsified data, unblinded patients, employed inadequately trained vaccinators and was slow to follow up on adverse events reported in Pfizer's pivotal phase 3 trial, former regional director Brook Jackson said, according to the report.

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US Supreme Court Hears Arguments in Major Gun Rights Case on New York Concealed Carry Law

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - The US Supreme Court heard oral arguments on Wednesday in a major gun rights case challenging New York's laws on the issuance of concealed carry licenses, which currently require applicants to convince the state that they have an actual need for self-defense.

The men challenging the law, Robert Nash and Brandon Koch of the New York State Rifle and Pistol Association, were issued licenses for hunting and target practice, but not everyday concealed carry in public spaces. They are suing New York in an attempt to receive the right to

concealed carry in public, arguing that the current law violates their Second Amendment rights to keep and bear arms.

Chief Justice John Roberts questioned New York's Solicitor General, Barbara Underwood – who is responsible for defending the state's law in court – about the state's policy of more freely giving the unrestricted concealed carry licenses to applicants in rural areas than urban ones. "How many muggings take place in the forest?" Roberts asked Underwood in regards to the policy.

The men's lawsuit has made its way in front of the Supreme Court, which has a six to three conservative majority, after being rejected by lower courts. Having concluded oral arguments, the court will soon deliver a written decision on the case.

The decision could be one of the most substantial gun rights cases since the District of Columbia v. Heller decision in 2008, which struck down Washington, DC's handgun ban and affirmed the right of individuals to keep and bear arms.

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UN Prepares to Protect Its Staff in Ethiopia As Rebels Advance Toward Capital - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, November 3 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is taking steps to ensure the protection of its personnel working in Ethiopia amid the state of emergency declared in the country that was prompted by advancements by rebel forces' from the Tigray region to the capital of Addis Ababa, UN spokesperson Farhan Haq said on Wednesday.

On Tuesday, the Ethiopian government declared a national six-month-long state of emergency as part of measures to protect the population from the advance of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).

"We are aware of the situation on the ground and, as with all of our various duty stations, we're taking steps to make sure that our staff are protected," Haq said during a press briefing.

The Ethiopian government and TPLF rebels have been engaged in year-long hostilities over control of the norther part of the country.

The rebels are now moving southward and took control of the town of Kombolcha on October 31, less than 370 kilometers (230 miles) north of Addis Ababa. The authorities have called on the Addis Ababa residents to use weapons to defend their neighborhoods.

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China May Have 'Nuclear Triad' With Air-Launch Capability - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - China may already possess a nascent "nuclear triad," including a nuclear capable air-launched ballistic missile as well as technological improvements

of its ground and sea nuclear capabilities, the Pentagon said in a new report published on Wednesday.

"The PRC has possibly already established a nascent "nuclear triad" with the development of a nuclear capable air-launched ballistic missile (ALBM) and improvement of its ground and sea-based nuclear capabilities," the report prepared for Congress said.

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Cybersecurity Agency Orders US Government to Enforce New Precautions - Directive
WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - All US government departments and agencies must enforce new hardware and software security regulations within 60 days, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) announced in a new directive issued on Wednesday.

"Within 60 days of issuance, agencies shall review and update agency internal vulnerability management procedures in accordance with this Directive," the directive said. "These required actions apply to any federal information system."

All the government entities must establish a process for ongoing remediation of vulnerabilities that CISA will identify as carrying significant risk to the federal enterprise within a timeframe set by it, the directive said.

"[Each agency or department must] remediate each vulnerability according to the timelines set forth in the CISA-managed vulnerability catalog. The catalog will list exploited vulnerabilities that carry significant risk to the federal enterprise with the requirement to remediate within 6 months for vulnerabilities," the directive added.

In line with requirements for the Continuous Diagnostics and Mitigation (CDM) Federal Dashboard deployment and other requirements, agencies are expected to automate data exchange and report their respective directive implementation status through the CDM Federal Dashboard, according to the directive.

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China Accelerates Nuclear Expansion, Plans to Acquire 700 Warheads By 2027 - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - China is actively investing into expansion of its nuclear arsenal and plans to acquire up to 700 warheads by 2027 and 1000 warheads by 2030, the US Department of Defense (DoD) said in a new report published on Wednesday.

"The accelerating pace of the PRC's [China's] nuclear expansion may enable the PRC to have up to 700 deliverable nuclear warheads by 2027. The PRC likely intends to have at least 1,000 warheads by 2030, exceeding the pace and size the DoD projected in 2020," the report said.

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US Charges 'Plugwalk Joe' in \$784,000 Hacking, Cryptocurrency Plot - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - The US authorities have charged United Kingdom citizen Joseph James O'Connor, also known as "Plugwalk Joe," in a \$784,000 cryptocurrency and computer hacking fraud case, the Justice Department said on Wednesday.

"[US law enforcement officials] announced today the unsealing of an Indictment charging ... O'Connor with conspiracy to commit computer hacking and other crimes in connection with a SIM swapping scheme that resulted in the theft of approximately \$784,000 worth of cryptocurrency," the Justice Department said in a press release.

The US government is also pursuing O'Connor's extradition from Spain on the charges in the case, the release said.

"Between [March and May 2019] ... O'Connor and his co-conspirators perpetrated a scheme to use SIM [subscriber identity module] swaps to conduct cyber intrusions in order to steal approximately \$784,000 worth of cryptocurrency from a Manhattan-based cryptocurrency company," the release added.

The Stolen Cryptocurrency was worth at least approximately \$784,000 at the time of the theft and included approximately 770 Bitcoin cash, approximately 6,363.490509 Litecoin, approximately 407 Ethereum, and approximately 7.456728 Bitcoin, according to the release.

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Woman Deported From Indonesia Charged in US on Mother's Murder Plot - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - The US authorities have arrested an Illinois woman for plotting to murder her own mother seven years ago in Indonesia, the Justice Department said on Wednesday.

"An Illinois woman was arrested today when she arrived at O'Hare International Airport in Chicago, for allegedly murdering her mother on August 12, 2014, while on vacation in Bali, Indonesia," the Justice Department said in a press release.

Heather Mack, 26, is alleged to have conspired with her boyfriend, Tommy Schaefer, 28, to kill her mother Sheila Von Weise, while Mack and Von Weise were on vacation in Bali, the release said.

"According to court documents, Mack and Schaefer discussed how and when to kill Von Weise, arranged for Schaefer to travel to Bali, committed the murder, and then placed Von Weise's body inside a suitcase which they loaded into the trunk of a taxi," the release added.

Mack and Schaefer were convicted in Indonesia in 2015 for Von Weise's murder. Mack was sentenced to ten years and Schaefer to 18 years in prison. Mack was released on October 29

and deported to the United States. If convicted, she faces a maximum statutory penalty of life imprisonment, according to the release.

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Attorney for 'Rust' Armorer Suggests Someone Mixed Live Rounds With Dummy Ammo as Sabotage

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - Someone may have put live rounds in a box of dummy ammo on the set of the movie "Rust" in an act of sabotage, leading to the fatal shooting of cinematographer Halyna Hutchins by actor Alec Baldwin, an attorney for armorer Hannah Gutierrez-Reed said on Wednesday.

"There was a box of dummy rounds labeled 'dummy.' We don't know whether the live round came from that box. We're assuming somebody put the live round in the box," attorney Jason Bowles told NBC in an interview.

Bowles speculated that someone who would "want to sabotage the set, want to prove a point, want to say they're disgruntled, they're unhappy" could have done it.

Such actions could have led to the incident in which Baldwin accidentally shot cinematographer Halyna Hutchins and director Joel Souza, killing the former and wounding the latter on the set of "Rust" at Bonanza Creek Ranch near Santa Fe, New Mexico last month.

Union members of the film crew were reportedly replaced with non-union workers in the hours leading up to the fatal shooting, following complaints of poor working conditions and unsafe practices, including accidental weapons discharges.

Law enforcement are still actively conducting investigations into the shooting, and have yet to rule out the possibility of criminal charges in the case, Santa Fe County Sheriff Adan Mendoza said during a recent update on the matter.

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US Charges Honduras MS-13 Leader With Racketeering, Drug Trafficking - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - The US authorities have charged Yulan Andony Archaga Carias, the leader of the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) criminal organization in Honduras with racketeering and narcotics trafficking, the Justice Department said on Wednesday.

"[US law enforcement officials] announced the unsealing of a Superseding Indictment in Manhattan federal court charging ... Carias, aka 'Alexander Mendoza,' aka 'Porky,' and David Campbell, aka 'Viejo Dan,' aka 'Don David,' with ... racketeering, narcotics trafficking, and firearms offenses," the Justice Department said in a press release.

Carias, a Honduran national, remains at large and has been added to the FBI's Ten Most Wanted Fugitives List, the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA)'s Most Wanted Fugitives List and the Homeland Security Investigations' Most Wanted Fugitives List, the release said.

"Yulan Andony Archaga Cariñas is MS-13's highest-ranking member in Honduras, responsible for trafficking multi-ton shipments of cocaine into the US and ordering... the multiple violent acts carried out to make those shipments happen. These allegedly included numerous murders of rivals," the release added.

Campbell, a Honduran national, is currently in custody in Nicaragua and now a reward is offered for information leading to the arrest of Carias, according to the release.

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US Crude Stockpiles Up 5th Week in Six as High Prices Keep Refiners Away - Energy Agency

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - US crude stockpiles rose again last week, resuming their uptrend for a fifth time in six weeks, the Energy Information Administration (EIA) reported as raw oil prices standing at seven-year highs slowed purchases by refiners who buy the material to make fuel products such as gasoline and diesel.

Crude stockpiles rose by 3.29 million barrels during the week to October 29, after the previous week's rise of 4.27 million, the EIA's Weekly Petroleum Status Report showed. Crude inventories have risen some 20 million barrels over the past six weeks, EIA historical data showed.

Analysts polled by US media had expected crude stocks to build by just around 2.25 million barrels in the latest week.

The refinery utilization rate for last week remained at below 90% to capacity as crude prices for deferred delivery remained at a discount to prompt oil.

"The refiners are certainly contributing to the crude build by trying to lock in barrels for later delivery at a more economical rate," John Kilduff, founding partner of energy hedge fund Again Capital, said.

On the fuel products side, distillates, which include diesel, saw their first build in ten weeks, growing by 2.16 million barrels versus forecasts for a draw of 1.25 million.

To offset the distillates build, gasoline drew down by 1.49 million barrels versus an expected decline of just 1.25 million. Gasoline inventories have fallen by a total of 11 million barrels over the past four weeks.

Crude prices tumbled on the build reported by the EIA, with West Texas Intermediate, the US benchmark, down \$2.96, or 3.5%, at \$80.95 per barrel by 12 noon on Wednesday. WTI hit seven-year highs above \$85 last week.

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UN in Touch With Taliban to Ensure Foreign Currencies Ban Has No Impact on Aid - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, November 3 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is in touch with the Taliban (banned in Russia) to ensure that the recent ban on the use of foreign currencies will not disrupt its humanitarian operations in Afghanistan, UN spokesman Farhan Haq said on Wednesday. "We are in touch with the de-facto authorities and we're working to maintain our operations on the ground and make sure that we can keep up the humanitarian efforts on the ground," Haq said during a press briefing. "What we're trying to do is make sure that it does not have any impact on our operations."

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US Sees 'Discernible Decrease' in Cyberattacks From Russia - National Cyber Director

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - The United States has witnessed a reduction in cyberattacks coming from Russia since the summit between Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President Joe Biden in Geneva, Executive Office of the President National Cyber Director Chris Inglis said on Wednesday.

When asked whether a number of hacking attacks has decreased since the Geneva summit, Inglis said, "I think that, answering the question head on, we have seen a discernible decrease." "It's too soon to tell whether that is because of the material efforts undertaken by the Russians or the Russian leadership. It may well be that the transgressors in this space have simply kind of laying low, understanding that this is for the moment a very hard time for them. We need to make sure that that continues to be the case."

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Senate Committee Approves Biden's Nominees for US Ambassadors to China, Japan

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - The Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Wednesday voted to advance a list of 14 nominations to State Department positions, including those of Nicholas Burns and Rahm Emanuel, who are to serve as US ambassadors to China and Japan, respectively.

"Majority of the members present have voted in the affirmative. The nominees are reported favorably to the Senate," Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Menendez said.

US Senator Marco Rubio voted against all 14 nominees while Senators Jeff Merkley and Edward Markey voted against the nomination of Emanuel.

A career diplomat, former Under State Secretary for Political Affairs

Nicholas Burns, a career diplomat, was nominated by President Joe Biden to be US ambassador to China in August. Following the nomination, China expressed hope the new envoy will play a constructive role in improving of the significantly deteriorated bilateral relations. On October 20, Burns named China the "greatest threat" to the United States and the democratic world.

Emanuel advised former President Barack Obama on all key national security decisions during his first two years in office. From 2003 to 2009, Emanuel served in the US House of Representatives and earlier served as Assistant for Political Affairs and Senior Advisor for Policy and Strategy to President Bill Clinton. He was a mayor of Chicago from 2011 to 2019.

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US Sends 31 Migrants Intercepted at Sea Back to Cuba - Coast Guard

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - The United States returned to Cuba 31 migrants apprehended in four at-sea interdictions since late October, the US Coast Guard said on Wednesday.

"We will continue to put a high priority on patrolling offshore to prevent illegal migration, save lives by removing migrants from unsafe environments and deterring dangerous illegal migrant activity," Master Chief Petty Officer Jeremy Weaver said in a press release explaining the interdictions.

The first encounter took place October 27 about 43 miles south of Key West, the southernmost point of the United States in the state Florida. That was followed by three interdictions last week near the Florida coast, the release said.

In addition to the 31 repatriated migrants, two suspected smugglers were transferred to the Customs and Border Protection agency, the release added.

In fiscal 2021, which ended September 30, the Coast Guard intercepted 838 Cuban migrants compared with 49 in fiscal 2020, according to the release.

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'Bad Things' Could Happen on Korean Peninsula on Relatively Short Notice - Milley

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - The situation on the Korean peninsula can quickly turn bad and that is why the United States, together with South Korea, maintain a high degree of military readiness, US Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Mark Milley said on Wednesday.

"[Seventy percent] of North Korean military is within miles of the DMZ [Demilitarized Zone]. So, bad things could happen on the Korean peninsula on relatively short notice. So, we always maintain a very, very high state of readiness," Milley said during an Aspen Forum discussion.

Milley noted that the US and South Korean militaries are capable of dealing with any threat that North Korea can pose on the peninsula.

At the same time, Milley said he believes the North Korean leadership is stable at present and maintains good control over its military that makes it improbable Pyongyang will resort to aggressive action.

The United States and South Korea have said they remain committed to a complete denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. In October, US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield reiterated that Washington was open to dialogue with Pyongyang without any conditions and held no hostile intent. However, the US ambassador called on North Korea to refrain from further provocations after Pyongyang recently tested a submarine-launched ballistic missile.

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Americans Warm to Telehealth, 2 in 5 Prefer Virtual Healthcare Over Office Visits - Poll

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - A 45 percent plurality of US Adults who tried telehealth during the pandemic prefer to remotely access healthcare in the future over traditional in person visits with a doctor or other provider, a Morning Consult poll said on Wednesday.

"[Fifty-three percent] of US adults said they'd rather use in-person health care than telehealth moving forward, but that share fell to 45% among those who have used telehealth in the past," a press release explaining the poll said.

Some 40 percent of telehealth users want to continue contacting providers virtually and another 14 percent say they have no preference between the two options, the release said.

Nearly nine in ten telehealth users describe their experience as friendly, easy and affordable, if not always pleasant. Nearly one-in three also view their experience as both rushed and stressful, the release added.

The survey of 2,200 US adults was conducted October 21-23, according to the release.

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Democratic Candidate Terry McAuliffe Concedes Defeat in Virginia Governor Race - Statement

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - Democratic candidate for governor in the US state of Virginia Terry McAuliffe on Wednesday conceded defeat in the race and congratulated his Republican opponent Glenn Youngkin on his victory.

"Congratulations to Governor-Elect Glenn Youngkin on his victory," McAuliffe said in a statement.

McAuliffe said that serving as Virginia's 72nd governor was the highest honor. He emphasized the necessity to protect public education, health care coverage, rising minimum wage and voting rights in Virginia.

On Tuesday, Virginia residents voted in the election for governor in a race that has also been considered to be a referendum on the performance of President Joe Biden during his first year in office.

Youngkin was 2.1 points ahead of McAuliffe, with 99% of the votes counted, which made him the first Republican to become the governor of Virginia since 2009.

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US Has Great Concerns About Authoritarian Regulatory Responses in Digital Economy - Tai

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - The United States and its allies have significant concerns about authoritarian regulatory responses to various challenges posed by the digital economy in non-democratic countries like China, US Trade Representative Katherine Tai said on Wednesday.

"US government and countries who have similar economic and political values are having significant concerns, particularly as we see non-democratic countries expressing their regulatory responses to these challenges presented by the digital economy," Tai said during a virtual discussion hosted by Georgetown University.

Tai said it is necessary for the US authorities to think and examine how countries like China may harm US workers and businesses through unfair competition.

The US Trade Representative also warned that digital authoritarianism, which includes intrusive surveillance and censorship, can influence the ability of Americans to enjoy civil liberties in the United States.

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Global Airlines Report Moderate Rebound in Passenger Loads in September - Trade Group

WASHINGTON, November 4 (Sputnik) - Global demand for air travel in September, while down 53.4 percent from pre-coronavirus pandemic levels, nevertheless represented a modest improvement from August's 56 percent decline, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) said on Wednesday.

"September's performance is a positive development but recovery in international traffic remains stalled amid continuing border closures and quarantine mandates. The recent US policy change to reopen travel from 33 markets for fully vaccinated foreigners from 8 November is a welcome, if long overdue, development. Along with recent re-openings in other key markets like Australia, Argentina, Thailand, and Singapore this should give a boost to the large-scale restoration of the

freedom to travel," IATA's Director General Willie Walsh said in a press release explaining the latest survey.

Domestic air travel was down 24.3% compared to September 2019, a significant improvement from August 2021, when traffic was down 32.6% versus pre-pandemic levels, with the recovery in domestic markets aided by China's decision to lift some travel curbs, the release said.

All domestic markets showed improvement with the exception of Japan and Russia, although the Russian market remained in solid growth territory compared to 2019, the release added. International passenger demand in September was 69.2 percent below September 2019, fractionally worse than the 68.7 percent decline recorded in August, according to the release.

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NSA Says 'Too Early to Tell' if Russia Responding to Pressure to Crack Down on Ransomware

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - It is still too early to say whether Russia is responding to the US pressure to crack down on ransomware, US Army Gen. Paul M. Nakasone, commander at the US Cyber Command and director of the National Security Agency, said on Wednesday.

"It's too early to tell" if Russia is responding to the pressure of the Biden administration to crack down on criminal ransomware, Nakasone told the Aspen Security Forum.

"Let's let this play out," he added.

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US Private Employers Added 43% More Jobs Than Forecast in October - Surveyor

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - Private employers in the United States added 571,000 jobs in October, some 43% more than predicted by economists, as the world's largest economy continued to improve in hiring despite facing COVID-19-related challenges, data from private payrolls surveyor ADP showed on Wednesday.

"The labor market showed renewed momentum last month, with a jump from the third quarter average of 385,000 monthly jobs added, marking nearly 5 million job gains this year," ADP Chief Economist Nela Richardson said in a statement. "Service sector providers led the increase and the goods sector gains were broad based, reporting the strongest reading of the year."

Economists polled by US media had forecast an addition of 400,000 private sector jobs in September.

Richardson said large companies helped fuel the stronger labor market trend in October, marking the second straight month of impressive growth.

"The job market is revving back up as the Deltawave of the pandemic winds down. Job gains are accelerating across all industries, and especially among large companies," Moody's

Analytics Chief Economist Mark Zandi said. "As long as the pandemic remains contained, more big job gains are likely in coming months.

It was the second month in a row where private payrolls had come in above forecasts, after September's beat of 568,000 that came in about 30% higher to expectations.

The ADP data came ahead of Friday's scheduled US non-farm payrolls report for October from the Labor Department, which will measure employment in both the private and government sectors. Economists have forecast payrolls to have grown by a total of 450,000 last month, after an anemic 194,000 in September.

Nearly two years into the COVID-19 crisis, restoring job growth remains one of the main concerns of US policymakers. The United States lost more than 21 million jobs between March and April 2020, at the height of business lockdowns forced by the coronavirus. About 5 million of those jobs have yet to return, officials say.

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US Federal Reserve Pledges to Address Financial, Economic Impact of Climate Change

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - The US Federal Reserve on Wednesday vowed to join other central banks in "greening" the global financial system and apply potential solutions to economic policy in the United States.

"While the primary responsibility for addressing climate change itself rests with elected officials, the Federal Reserve is committed to working within our existing mandates and authorities to address the implications of climate change, particularly the regulation and supervision of financial institutions and the stability of the broader financial system," the Federal Reserve said in a statement.

The statement was issued in support of a declaration by central banks at the climate summit in Glasgow for "Greening the Financial System," the Federal Reserve said.

The US central bank offered no details on potential policies that it and other central banks could use to mitigate climate-warming emissions, but agreed to join other central banks to identify solutions that are relevant to them and to other financial authorities.

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US Joint Chiefs Chairman Says Taliban Will Be Challenged in Governing Afghanistan

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - The Taliban (terrorist group, banned in Russia) will be challenged in governing Afghanistan, US Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Mark Milley said on Wednesday.

"My estimate is that the Taliban are going to be challenged whether they could govern adequately [in Afghanistan]," Milley told the Aspen Security Forum.

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US Adds Russian Firm Positive Technologies to Entity List Over National Security Concerns

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - Four foreign companies, including Russia's Positive Technologies, have been added to the US Entity List over their alleged involvement in activities threatening national security, the Department of Commerce said on Wednesday.

"The four entities are added based on ... license requirements that apply to entities acting contrary to the national security or foreign policy interests of the United States of the EAR [Export Administration Regulations]. The four entities are located in Israel, Russia, and Singapore," the press release read.

"Positive Technologies (Russia), and Computer Security Initiative Consultancy PTE. LTD. (Singapore) were added to the Entity List based on a determination that they traffic in cyber tools used to gain unauthorized access to information systems, threatening the privacy and security of individuals and organizations worldwide," it said.

The other two companies on the list are NSO Group and Candiru (Israel).

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World Becoming Tripolar With US, Russia, China as Main Powers - Top US General

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) - The world is now becoming tripolar, with the United States, Russia and China being its main great powers, US Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Mark Milley said on Wednesday.

"We are entering into a tripolar world with United States, Russia and China, being all great powers," Milley told the Aspen Security Forum.

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Top US General Says 'Nothing Overtly Aggressive' in Russian Troop Movement Near Ukraine

WASHINGTON, November 3 (Sputnik) – The United States sees “nothing overtly aggressive” in the recent movements of Russian troops near the border with Ukraine, but will continue to monitor the situation, Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Mark Milley said on Wednesday.

"What we're seeing is a significant amount of military movements on the Russian side of the Ukrainian border. Nothing overtly aggressive, per se. We've seen this before," Milley said during Aspen Forum. "Last April, Russians ran a very, very large exercise somewhere in between

50,000 of troops or so. What does this mean? We don't know yet, too early to tell. But we're continuing to monitor with all of our capabilities."