

11/8/21 Monday

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Superyacht Sales Surged in 2021 as Billionaires Added Trillions in Wealth Amid Pandemic - Report
By - Morgan Artyukhina

Sales of massive luxury superyachts spiked in 2021 compared to 2019, an industry publication revealed on Monday. The COVID-19 pandemic and its associated economic crisis has seen an incredible transfer of wealth into the coffers of the world's richest people.

The Superyacht Group reported on Monday that sales of luxury vessels longer than 30 meters (98 feet) increased by 8% between January and October of 2021 as compared to the same period in 2019.

That translates to more than 200 new boats hitting the water in 2021, as compared to 165 in 2019. On top of that, another 330 have been ordered to be ready before the end of next year.

"Some have seen that their ultra-rich friends who own yachts had a nice time during the pandemic, while they had to lock themselves at home," Pepe Garcia, chairman of Spanish shipyards MB92, the world's leading superyacht refit firm, [told Reuters](#). "I think this phenomenon is going to last for a few years."

Brokers Fraser Yachts told Reuters that "2021 is significantly outperforming any of the last 12 years."

Owning such a vessel, which can cost up to \$500 million, is a mark of the world's richest humans, placing you among the ranks of Jeff Bezos, Jack Ma, and David Geffen, the lattermost of whom drew no shortage of resentment by the world proletariat after announcing at the start of the pandemic that [he was "self-isolating"](#) on his superyacht "Rising Sun" in the Grenadines, a Caribbean island chain.

Helping drive the massive purchases has been a huge upward transfer of wealth since March 2020, when the spread of COVID-19 became a global pandemic, bringing mass social lockdowns and demand for a host of new goods ranging from electronics to facilitate distance working, learning and socializing, to delivery services like DoorDash, to medical safety items like masks, swabs and gowns, and the most notorious investment project: COVID-19 vaccines. By April of 2021, the world's billionaires had collectively increased their wealth by \$5 trillion, with 493 new [billionaires on Forbes'](#) annual list. [According to Oxfam](#), nine of them came just from vaccine research profits.

However, Italian yacht builder Azimut Benetti told Reuters that it's US clients driving the demand, which has soared past €1.2 billion.

[Wall Street created](#) 56 new American billionaires in the first nine months of the pandemic, and by August of 2021, the Institute for Policy Studies [think tank reported](#) that US billionaires had seen their wealth increase collectively by 62% since the start of the pandemic - an increase of \$1.8 trillion.

The biggest winner was technologist Elon Musk, whose massive portfolio includes SpaceX, The Boring Company and Tesla, and increased by 600%, or \$150 billion.

However, as American founding father Benjamin Franklin once wryly observed, "in this world, nothing can be said to be certain except death and taxes." Musk owes a massive capital gains tax for the spike in his net worth, calculated to be [some \\$15 billion](#). On Saturday, he hosted a [poll on Twitter](#) as to whether he should sell off 10% of his Tesla stock to pay his tax bill - 57.9% of the roughly 3.5 million people who voted said he should.

The glut in wealth at the top has only amplified calls for taxing the wealthy in order to fund government programs like paid medical leave and parental leave or infrastructure investment projects. Both and more can be found in the [massive spending plan](#) Democrats have been slowly working through Congress.

At the same time, at the bottom of the social pecking order, as many as 15 million Americans were behind on rent at the end of July, when Democrats allowed the [eviction moratorium](#) to expire, collectively owing between \$20 and \$73 billion, depending on various estimates. By the end of September, 1.4 million Americans said they [expect to be evicted](#) in the next two months, with another 2.3 million saying it was "somewhat likely" they would soon lose their homes. While the federal government set aside \$46 billion to aid in bailing out landlords on behalf of struggling tenants, those funds have [struggled to get paid out](#) amid burdensome bureaucracy and other issues.

Other pandemic-era aid programs have been allowed to expire as well, including a boosted [federal unemployment benefit](#) that disappeared amid a Delta-variant-induced economic turndown.

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Incumbent President Ortega Took 76% of Vote in Nicaragua's Elections, Preliminary Results Show

By - Morgan Artyukhina

According to updated preliminary results from Sunday's presidential election, incumbent candidate President Daniel Ortega has handily won, taking 76% of the vote.

The level of support shown for Ortega in the Sunday vote seems to be only slightly higher than in the 2016 elections, when he triumphed with 72.44% of the vote, and is roughly in line with [opinion polls](#) conducted several weeks before the election.

The US and its allies denounced the election as a sham even before it began, pointing to the arrest over the summer of more than two dozen opposition figures who were candidates in the election but had also played key roles in the [2018 anti-government riots](#) that killed hundreds. Despite the arrests, five other candidates from across the political spectrum ran against Ortega, who was the candidate for the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), a democratic socialist party that has opposed US intervention in Nicaraguan affairs for more than four decades.

In the lead-up to the election, the US Congress passed the Reinforcing Nicaragua's Adherence to Conditions for Electoral Reform ([RENACER Act](#)), which laid out a framework for crippling the Central American nation's economy by sanctioning its leaders and encouraging US President Joe Biden to remove Nicaragua from the CAFTA free trade agreement.

A senior US State Department [official also pledged](#) that the US would "maintain its presence" in Nicaragua after the Sunday election and expand its support for FSLN groups. The US has a long history of arming and funding anti-FSLN parties and militia groups, from the Contra guerilla fighters of the 1980s to the opposition parties [that receive aid](#) from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

Social media giant Meta also suspended [more than 1,000 accounts](#) on Facebook and Instagram early last week, claiming they were part of a "cross-government troll operation" by Ortega's government. Following their suspension, several of the account owners, who were journalists and Sandinista activists, [spoke out](#), condemning the takedowns as meddling in their country's affairs and attempts to silence pro-Sandinista voices. Many of the leading internet security figures at Meta have deep connections to the US National Security State, including having been academics at US policy think tanks or former White House advisers.

Ortega's FSLN first came to power in 1979 at the head of a popular revolution that threw out the US-backed Somoza dictatorship. However, facing US encirclement and a proxy war with the Contras inside the country, Nicaraguans voted Ortega out of office in 1990 in an attempt to escape US strangulation. Instead, 16 years of neoliberal rule dismantled the Sandinistas' welfare state and welcomed US foreign direct investment in local companies that made cheap goods for export in special free trade zones. By 2006, voters brought the Sandinistas back, and Ortega has won two reelections since then, not counting Sunday's vote, which is not yet official.

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'Hands Off Ethiopia' Protests in Washington DC, Addis Ababa Urge No US Interference in Civil War

By - Morgan Artyukhina

Protests in Washington, DC on Monday and Addis Ababa over the weekend urged the US not to get further involved in Ethiopia's civil war. As the Biden administration makes the case for increasing pressure on the government for a solution, rebel Tigrayan forces and their new Oromo allies are threatening to march on the capital.

Organizers of a large pro-government rally outside the White House on Monday told Sputnik they expected up to 10,000 to attend. Waving Ethiopian national flags, they carried signs that read "No More," "USA Hands off Ethiopia," "TPLF is a Killer" and "CNN, Stop Assisting the Terrorist TPLF."

"As you can see people are very upset and frustrated about Biden's foreign policy on Ethiopia, so we are here to protest and to tell the Biden Administration to stop forcing Ethiopian government and sit down and negotiate and we want them to support the current

democratically-elected Prime Minister,” Gennet Negussie, one of the DC rally organizers and an advocate for GLEAN (Global Ethiopian Advocacy Nexus), told Sputnik on Monday.

The rally followed a weekend in which pro-Tigray demonstrators also held a demonstration in Washington, DC, and massive rallies in Addis Ababa expressed their support for the Ethiopian government.

On Saturday, the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) [announced it had joined](#) with eight other regional groups to form a United Front of Ethiopian Federalist and Confederalist Forces (FEFCF), with the group saying they aimed to overthrow Ethiopia President Abiy Ahmed and form a transitional government “by force or by negotiation.”

The news came as TPLF forces advanced southward out of the northern Tigray region state and linked up with the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) to seize several towns about 250 miles from Addis Ababa. Last Tuesday, Abiy declared a six-month state of emergency and called on citizens to rally in defense of the capital.

“We don’t recognize that,” Negussie said of the TPLF-led united front.

“We are surprised that the US would be supporting when over 40 million people voted for the current Prime Minister. The majority of the Ethiopian people support him. The diaspora supports him,” she said. “It is very odd. It seems like the US government is trying to overthrow the democratically-elected government and create a transitional government ... The US should support the Ethiopian government to bring these terrorist groups to justice and that’s the only time they can end conflict. We cannot negotiate with any terrorist group.”

In 1991, the TPLF led a similar alliance of liberation groups from Ethiopia’s many nationalities, called the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), in a movement that forced the Marxist Derg military government to relinquish power. The TPLF dominated Ethiopian politics for the three decades that followed, ceding few democratic concessions while working to keep the country’s many ethnic groups off-balance in a federal system run by TPLF-dominated parties.

After Abiy rode a wave of discontent by the non-Tigrayan ethnic groups to become president in 2018, he attempted to change this setup by merging the various ethnic parties into a single Prosperity Party. The TPLF objected to this arrangement and rejected it as illegal, and in September 2020, held regional elections in Tigray that Abiy’s government decried as illegal. By late November of that year, a shooting war had erupted in Tigray and neighboring Eritrea had entered the conflict on the side of Abiy.

While the Tigray capital of Mek’ele was captured early in the conflict, TPLF guerrilla forces in rural areas launched a counteroffensive, leading to their invasion in September of Afar and Amhara states that stand between Tigray and the capital.

Amid a massive flight of refugees from the region and the onset of famine, a humanitarian crisis has taken shape and the US has called on Abiy’s government to end the conflict, threatening to use sanctions to coerce them into peace with the TPLF.

Speaking to CNN on Tuesday, US Agency for International Development (USAID) chief [Samantha Power said](#) “fundamentally, responsibility lies with the government and with the rebels who are now advancing out of Tigray and moving toward Addis Ababa.” However, she added that Ethiopia is “an incredibly important partner on the continent” with whom the US wants a strong relationship.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) [reported on Thursday](#) that hundreds of aid trucks are stuck in Semera, the capital of Afar, unable to proceed to Mek'ele due to airstrikes. The UN has said the TPLF is the primary cause, as does the government, while the TPLF blames the government.

A bipartisan group of US senators last week also [introduced a bill](#) to sanction anyone whose dealings with the Ethiopian, Eritrean, or Tigray governments “undermines efforts with respect to a peaceful negotiated settlement to end hostilities in northern Ethiopia” and to block loans from financial institutions to Ethiopia and Eritrea. It follows a [September executive order](#) by Biden ordering the Treasury to explore similar actions.

Mekdes Tefera told Sputnik at the rally on Monday that she had come to oppose US sanctions. “We are here to show that we are in support of the government that we have and we don't want the US interference,” she said. “We want them to stop sanctioning the country when we have the government that has already been selected, that the people chose.”

Dagm Kabeta, an Ethiopian national who has been living in the United States for 15 years, told Sputnik that people have also come to protest the false coverage by the major US media outlets of the Ethiopian crisis.

“The reason why we came here is because the United States and the US media have been attacking Ethiopia to divide the nation,” Kabeta said. “That's why we came here to tell CNN and others to stop giving false information to the world ... What we want right now is to be the voice of the Ethiopian people to say that we have our own voted government, we don't want other people to be involved in this situation.”

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Report Names Finding Earth-Twin Exoplanet Among Top Astronomical Priorities For 2020s
By - Morgan Artyukhina

A new report by academics on what they feel are the “key scientific challenges for astronomy and astrophysics in the next decade” says that finding an Earthlike planet is among the most important, and the US space agency NASA is going to need a big new space telescope for the job.

Titled “Pathways to Discovery in Astronomy and Astrophysics for the 2020s,” the report by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine is a once-in-a-decade look forward in an attempt to lay out research - and spending - priorities for US lawmakers in the coming years.

The latest report, [released on November 4](#), names three areas of inquiry: finding a habitable, Earthlike world; answering key fundamental questions about so-called dark matter and dark energy; and the origin and evolution of galaxies using new electromagnetic observation tools. So far, humans have found about 4,500 planets beyond our own solar system, but most of them are so-called “hot Jupiters,” or massive gas giants that orbit extremely close to their parent star. Spotting a rocky, Earthlike planet a tiny fraction of the size of a Jupiter-like planet poses a daunting challenge, and we have found only about 160 of them.

Fiona Harrison, a Caltech astrophysicist who co-chaired the academic committee behind the report, [told NPR on Thursday](#) that "The most amazing scientific opportunity ahead of us in the coming decades is the possibility that we can find life on another planet orbiting a star in our galactic neighborhood."

However, with the 31-year-old Hubble Space Telescope steadily aging, NASA is going to need a newer, bigger one in order to carry this research to the next level. It's going to have to have infrared, optical and ultraviolet sensors, as well as a coronagraph that can block out a star's direct light in order to see dimmer objects next to it, [according to Axios](#).

The catch? Some of those technologies don't even exist yet; inventing them are among the tasks that lay ahead. Such a device might cost \$11 billion, the outlet noted. Such technology would theoretically be able to spot elements in a distant rocky planet's atmosphere that we find in our own, like oxygen, nitrogen and carbon, that are necessary to support life.

The James Webb Space Telescope, due to be [launched next month](#), will offer a marked improvement to the Hubble's capabilities, but it will be posted at Earth's L2 Lagrangian Point, far from the orbital spot the Hubble occupies.

As of November 2021, no planet other than Earth has ever been found to be capable of supporting life.

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Bezos Responds to Video of Girlfriend Drooling Over Leonardo DiCaprio
By - Adriana Montes

The awkward encounter showed Bezos' girlfriend brushing up against the actor and smiling at something he said, while Bezos looked on. The three were attendees at the 10th Annual Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) Art and Film Gala presented by Gucci on Saturday. Jeff Bezos has responded to viral footage of his girlfriend Lauren Sánchez's mesmerized reaction to meeting Leonardo DiCaprio at an event Saturday.

You can watch the moment below.

Now with over 7.6 million views on the Twitter video alone, online users couldn't help but laugh at the shocking scenario, with comments such as, "Leo is about to lose his Prime membership." Another said: "Find somebody who looks at you the way Jeff Bezos' gf looks at Leonardo DiCaprio."

In response to a question asking what DiCaprio had said to the couple in the video, a user named @BrooksRyun used a "Great Gatsby" reference to imply that Sanchez is for the streets. On Monday, Bezos took to Twitter to respond with a picture where he is seen posing behind a sign reading, "Danger! Steep cliff. Fatal drop."

He joked in the tweet: "Leo, come over here, I want to show you something..."

After the event, Sanchez shared a [picture](#) to Instagram where she's seen gazing at her multi-billionaire partner to put the crowd at ease. She did, however, take the time to thank DiCaprio in her caption, writing "Beautiful evening last night at the @LACMA Art + Film Gala hosted by the amazing @1evachow and @leonardodicaprio."

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China's Military Buildup is Triggering Growing Fears in US Military
By - Adriana Montes

China's military buildup has seen it develop nuclear-capable missiles and mock-ups of US ships while massively expanding its armed forces, triggering growing fears in Washington.

As tensions rise in the South China Sea, satellite [images](#) captured by Maxar Technologies on Sunday show China has built mock-ups of US aircraft carriers and at least one destroyer on what appears to be a military firing range.

Beijing's 'rapid growth and military upgrade' has led to fears that the country is gearing up for a confrontation with America.

"We're witnessing one of the largest shifts in global geo-strategic power the world has witnessed," Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley said Wednesday when speaking about China's recent military advances at a [security forum discussion](#) aired by NBC News.

"They are clearly challenging us regionally and their aspiration is to challenge the United States globally."

China's advancements include recent hypersonic missile tests, an expanding nuclear arsenal, strides in space and cyber, and seemingly daily threats to Taiwan.

The Pentagon this month issued an [annual report](#) to Congress saying China is expanding its nuclear force much faster than US officials predicted just a year ago.

During the forum discussion, Milley called the launch indicative of "a much, much broader picture of a military capability with respect to the Chinese."

"Today, [China] has capabilities in space and cyber, land, sea, air, undersea, and they are clearly challenging us regionally.... So, we have a case here of a country that is becoming extraordinarily powerful, that wants to revise the international order to their advantage. That's going to be a real challenge over the coming years. In the next 10, 20 years. That's going to be really significant for the United States."

Meanwhile, President Joe Biden has emphasized that he had "no intention of starting a new Cold War" with China after UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres asked the two countries to shun the volatile dynamics of hostility back in September.

Biden further decried military conflict and stressed the urgency of working together.

China's ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian has previously denied claims of its nuclear capabilities, after reports of a tested nuclear-capable hypersonic missile earlier this year, insisting that it was a routine spacecraft test to reduce the cost of spacecraft and to provide a more "convenient method for humans to travel to and from space."

International

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Alyssa Milano Says Thought Two Miscarriages Were 'Punishment' for Abortions in Her 20s
By - Adriana Montes

Milano, who shares two children with husband David Bugliari, said she miscarried twice along the way and going to therapy helped her work through the guilty feelings she was experiencing. Alyssa Milano has revealed that in the past, she believed her two miscarriages were a form of “punishment” for terminating two pregnancies in her 20s and feared a “karmic resolution” on her kids.

In an interview this week with People’s new [podcast](#) “Me Becoming Mom,” the 48-year-old actress admitted that for a time, part of her believed that her two miscarriages were a form of karma after the pair of pregnancies she chose to terminate years ago.

“I definitely had this moment of, “Well, we’re being punished, basically, for abortions in my 20s.” And it took me — I didn’t realize that at the time,” she said in an interview with People’s new [podcast](#) this week “Me Becoming Mom”. “It took a while in therapy to realize that that was something that I was putting on myself.”

Milano has spoken candidly in the past about her experience getting two abortions when she was in her early 20s, more specifically in a 2019 episode of her podcast, “Alyssa Milano: Sorry Not Sorry.”

“I knew at that time, I was not equipped to be a mother, and so I chose to have an abortion. I chose. It was my choice. And it was absolutely the right choice for me,” she [said](#) about deciding to have her first procedure.

“It was not an easy choice. It was not something I wanted, but it was something that I needed, like most health care is,” she added.

Raised in a Catholic household, Milano was “devastated” because she felt like her decision was in conflict with her faith.

After continuing to use birth control, she became pregnant again months later — and opted for a second abortion.

Despite the guilt of her two ended pregnancies, Milano says she still stands by the choices she made in her 20s.

“My inability to not be a selfish 20-year-old was reason enough,” she told People this week. “But then there was a lot that I wanted to do before I had children. And the point was, I was given a choice to control my life, to control my own destiny.”

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US Lifts Travel Ban: Here’s What to Know & Who’s Allowed to Enter
By - Nevin Brown

The United States will lift its ban on travelers from foreign countries on November 8, after 21 months. The Biden administration has been under pressure from foreign leaders and business to rescind the ban.

According to the new guidelines, travelers will have to show proof that they are fully vaccinated and show a negative COVID-19 test before boarding their flight. Only vaccines approved by the United States and the World Health Organization will qualify an individual as 'fully vaccinated'. The new rules will not require foreign visitors to quarantine.

[The ban will be lifted from 26 countries](#), including France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and Greece, as well as Britain, Ireland, China, India, South Africa, Iran and Brazil.

Travel by land into the United States from Canada and Mexico will face similar vaccination guidelines for entry, but individuals will not have to show proof of a negative COVID-19 test. Some details, such as exemptions, have not yet been made public. It is expected that individuals under the age of 18 will not have to be fully vaccinated.

The opening of US borders to international travel is expected to spark a surge in demand. A Biden administration official said there will be "pent-up demand for travel, which means longer than normal wait times for travelers," and that, "long lines are expected in the initial days following pent-up demand."

For Americans traveling domestically, November through the holiday season could be as congested as it was pre-pandemic. The news and expected surge in demand has sparked gains for airlines, hotels, and the cruise ship industry on Wall Street.

The US Travel Association estimates the drop in international travel over the past 21 months has resulted in an income loss of over \$250 billion.

The new rules are intended in part to restore some normalcy to travel. Unfortunately that probably also means crowded planes, long lines, and the inevitable delays.

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White House Expects Russia to Take Action Based on Cybercrime Data US Shared

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - Russia has promised to take action based on information Washington would transfer to Moscow on cybercrime, so the latest data on cybercriminals will be a "test" for the dialogue which the two countries have on cybersecurity, Deputy National Security Advisor for Cyber Anne Neuberger said at a briefing on Tuesday. "We've shared information with the Russians, this will be a test. [They said] that they were committed to act on the information we've shared," she told journalists.

On Monday, the US unsealed indictments against Russian national Yevgeniy Polyandin and Ukrainian national Yaroslav Vasinskyi over their alleged involvement in a July ransomware attack. The FBI has put Polyandin on its wanted list.

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CIA Chief Visited Moscow to Discuss Range of Topics, Including Cybersecurity - White House

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) – CIA Director William Burns traveled to Moscow last week to discuss a range of issues, including cybersecurity, US Deputy National Security Advisor for Cyber, Anne Neuberger, said on Tuesday.

"Director Burns went to discuss a range of topics, including cybersecurity, and within the context of our ongoing discussions with Russia about the need for Russia to address malicious ransomware activity coming from within its borders," Neuberger said during a virtual press briefing.

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RPT - CIA Chief Talks With Russia Could Set Stage for More Dialogue on NATO, Ukraine - Experts

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - CIA Director William Burns' recent talks with top Russian intelligence and security officials could set up communications channels to defuse tensions over NATO expansion threats and the situation in Ukraine, analysts told Sputnik. On Monday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russian President Vladimir Putin and Burns in a phone call discussed Russia-US relations and regional conflicts. The call comes after Burns met with Russian intelligence officials in Moscow last week.

US media on Friday reported that Biden sent Burns to Moscow for the purpose of warning Russia over its military activity near Ukraine.

On Monday, however, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Burns during the visit confirmed the importance of implementing the Minsk agreements on ending the conflict in Ukraine.

"US-Russian relations have been so bad, a meeting of security personnel can be significant, especially since President Putin was once in the intelligence services and likely values this channel of communication," Independent Institute Center for Peace and Liberty Director Ian Eland told Sputnik about the talks and meetings.

Eland said Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin resurrecting the "bad idea" of admitting Ukraine and Georgia into NATO last month would also need to be addressed in any future dialogue.

"Ukraine and NATO expansion would likely be areas of confluence of interests and would probably ease the transition to the many tough issues to follow," Eland said. "These are the toughest issues between the two countries."

Putin warned that Austin's vocal support for Kiev joining the alliance could be interpreted as "opening the doors" for Ukraine to enter NATO.

Former CIA officer Phil Giraldi, however, told Sputnik it is difficult to imagine what bridges the US and Russia could possibly build going forward given the White House's "take" on what is going on in the world.

On November 3, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said that western media reports about Russia pulling troops to the Ukrainian border do not correspond to reality.

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RPT: PREVIEW - Harris Heads to Paris to Follow Up on Biden Meeting With Macron After AUKUS Row

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - Vice President Kamala Harris begins a five-day visit to Paris on Tuesday that will include bilateral talks with French President Emmanuel Macron in the wake of his recent meeting with US counterpart Joe Biden, as the two countries work to mend relations after a dispute related to the AUKUS pact.

The US sparked a diplomat feud with France by agreeing to sell nuclear-powered submarines to Australia as part of the new AUKUS partnership, which negated a deal Paris had with Canberra. Biden during talks with Macron at last month's G20 summit conceded that the US handled the situation clumsily and the two leaders agreed to launch new initiatives to boost ties.

"This visit from the Vice President [Harris] really signals the strength of our alliance as our nations work together to advance prosperity, security and stability as we take on multiple existential threats and seize new opportunities," a senior administration official told reporters last week. "The Vice President will speak to many of those during her trip."

Harris will participate in several key events throughout the week, including in a bilateral meeting with Macron, but will also join the Paris Peace Forum as well as the Paris Conference on Libya. On Tuesday, Harris is scheduled to tour the world renowned Institute Pasteur where she will meet US and French scientists working on the novel coronavirus and on global pandemic preparedness.

The following day, Harris and Macron will hold a bilateral meeting at the Elysee Palace where they are expected to discuss a wide-range of issues pertaining to bilateral relations, European security, the Indo-Pacific, global health and space.

On Thursday, Harris will attend the opening ceremony of the fourth annual Paris Peace Forum hosted by Macron. This year, the forum will focus on existing global health gaps, the post-COVID-19 recovery and will consider "new principles of action" for the post-COVID-19 world.

At the end of her stay on Friday, Harris is scheduled to participate in the Paris Conference on Libya, co-hosted by Macron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi and UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. More than 20 heads of state and government from throughout the region and the world are expected to attend the event.

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UPDATE - US Senators Push Amendment in Defense Bill to Stop Nord Stream 2 Project - Statement

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - A group of Republican Senators introduced an amendment in the 2022 US defense policy bill that would impose mandatory sanctions on Nord Stream 2 AG, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Ranking Member Jim Risch's office said in a press release.

"US Senator Jim Risch, ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, last week led Senators Rob Portman, John Barrasso, Ron Johnson, Tom Cotton, and Ted Cruz in introducing an amendment to the FY2022 National Defense Authorization Act to stop the Nord Stream 2 (NS2) pipeline project," the release said on Monday.

The amendment would impose mandatory sanctions on Nord Stream 2 AG, the release said. In September, the House of Representatives passed the legislation on a 316-113 vote.

The \$768 billion US defense policy bill has bipartisan support and is expected to pass the Senate with easy approval once Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer schedules a vote.

The Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline was completed on September 10 and will deliver gas from Russia to Germany via the Baltic Sea. The process of certifying Nord Stream 2 AG as the pipeline's independent operator is currently underway to ensure the project complies with the conditions of the February 12 EU Gas Directive.

The German regulator has to make a decision on certification by January 2022.

Ukraine, which currently has a gas transit agreement with Russia, has been a vocal opponent of the pipeline, fearing revenue losses after its commissioning, and claims that the pipeline threatens the energy security of Ukraine and Europe.

Moscow, however, has repeatedly said that it would continue relying on Ukraine's transport capacities to pump gas to Europe in the coming years despite building additional pipelines.

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The \$768 billion US defense policy bill has bipartisan support and is expected to pass the Senate with easy approval once Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer schedules a vote.

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Police Say Found No Hazardous Material at Israeli Embassy in US After Possible Bomb Threat

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - Police officers in the US capital found no hazardous material at the Israeli embassy following a report of a suspicious package and the scene is being cleared, a DC Metropolitan Police Department spokesperson told Sputnik.

"We're actually clearing the scene right now, no hazardous material found," the spokesperson said on Monday.

Earlier on Monday, US media said local authorities were assisting the US Secret Service with a suspicious package at the Israeli Embassy in Washington, DC.

A Sputnik correspondent reported seeing a heavy police presence near the Israeli embassy, including US secret service personnel. Several streets near the embassy were closed as well, the correspondent reported.

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Nuland Says Held Productive Talks With UK Counterpart to Discuss Russia, Ukraine

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland said she had a productive meeting with UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) Political Director Tim Barrow to discuss Russia, Ukraine, Africa, and the G7.

"Productive discussion today with [FCDO] Political Director Sir Tim Barrow on a number of regional and global issues including Russia, Ukraine, G7, and Africa," Nuland wrote on Twitter on Monday.

Nuland said she had a meeting earlier this month with government officials from Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Iceland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to discuss matters concerning the Arctic, Africa, Middle East, Russia and China.

Nuland also visited Russia in October to discuss a range of bilateral and global issues.

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Virgin Galactic Sells 700 Tickets for Commercial Space Flights, Service to Begin Late 2022

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - Virgin Galactic has sold some 700 tickets for commercial space flights on its VSS Unity spacecraft and service is expected to begin late next year, the company said in a press release.

"In August 2021, opened sales to our Spacefarer community... The Company announced a target of 1,000 reservations prior to the launch of private astronaut commercial service," the release on Monday. "Approximately 700 of these 1,000 have been sold to date. Current pricing of \$450,000 per seat has been well received."

Virgin Galactic said it is on track to begin private astronaut commercial service in late 2022.

On September 30, the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) said Virgin Galactic could resume flight operations after it concluded its investigation of the Unity 22 launch mishap, which was carrying owner Richard Branson.

The FAA said it determined that Virgin Galactic's Unity 22 launch on July 11 deviated from its assigned airspace when it descended from space and the company failed to notify the agency about the incident as required.

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CIA Chief Talks With Russia Could Set Stage for More Dialogue on NATO, Ukraine - Experts

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - CIA Director William Burns' recent talks with top Russian intelligence and security officials could set up communications channels to defuse tensions over NATO expansion threats and the situation in Ukraine, analysts told Sputnik. On Monday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russian President Vladimir Putin and Burns in a phone call discussed Russia-US relations and regional conflicts. The call comes after Burns met with Russian intelligence officials in Moscow last week.

US media on Friday reported that Biden sent Burns to Moscow for the purpose of warning Russia over its military activity near Ukraine.

On Monday, however, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Burns during the visit confirmed the importance of implementing the Minsk agreements on ending the conflict in Ukraine.

"US-Russian relations have been so bad, a meeting of security personnel can be significant, especially since President Putin was once in the intelligence services and likely values this channel of communication," Independent Institute Center for Peace and Liberty Director Ian Eland told Sputnik about the talks and meetings.

Eland said Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin resurrecting the "bad idea" of admitting Ukraine and Georgia into NATO last month would also need to be addressed in any future dialogue.

"Ukraine and NATO expansion would likely be areas of confluence of interests and would probably ease the transition to the many tough issues to follow," Eland said. "These are the toughest issues between the two countries."

Putin warned that Austin's vocal support for Kiev joining the alliance could be interpreted as "opening the doors" for Ukraine to enter NATO.

Former CIA officer Phil Giraldi, however, told Sputnik it is difficult to imagine what bridges the US and Russia could possibly build going forward given the White House's "take" on what is going on in the world.

On November 3, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said that western media reports about Russia pulling troops to the Ukrainian border do not correspond to reality.

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Soaring US Risk Assets Could See 'Outsized Drops' if Economy Fumbles - Federal Reserve

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - The Federal Reserve is worried about the surge in risky asset prices in the United States and the crash they could set investors up with if the economy suddenly fumbles, the central bank said in its Financial Stability Report.

"Elevated valuation pressures are signaled by asset prices that are high relative to economic fundamentals or historical norms and are often driven by an increased willingness of investors to take on risk," the report said on Monday. "As such, elevated valuation pressures imply a greater possibility of outsized drops in asset prices."

The caution came as the S&P 500 index of the top 500 US stocks registered a 2% rise within its first week of November after making non-stop record highs for seven straight trading days. This was right after the index posted a near 7% surge for November - its highest monthly gain in a year. Year-to-date, the S&P 500 has risen more than 25%.

The report, meant to shine a light on risks that could pull down the financial system, cited "structural vulnerabilities" in money market funds, the investor mania over cryptocurrencies as well as the dramatically higher price volatility and intra-day trading flows for "meme stocks" - or equities that became popular through social media.

The Federal Reserve cited in the report the impact a COVID-19-dependent recovery could have on markets trading at sky-high valuations.

"Asset prices remain vulnerable to significant declines should investor risk sentiment deteriorate, progress on containing the virus disappoint, or the economic recovery stall," the report said.

In contrast to the S&P 500, US economic growth has been spotty this year, expanding by an annualized 3.5% in the first quarter, 3.6% in the second and 2% in the third.

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Sherman Discusses Aid for Venezuelan Migrants During Meeting in Uruguay - US State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman discussed ways to assist Venezuelan migrants during a meeting with civil society and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Uruguay, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said in a readout of the meeting.

"Deputy Secretary of State Wendy R. Sherman met today with representatives of the International Organization for Migration and Uruguayan civil society to discuss assistance to Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Montevideo, Uruguay," Price said on Monday.

Sherman also thanked leaders of the Uruguayan government and civil society for their work to assist Venezuelan migrants, Price said. She also highlighted how US funding of IOM supports its work in Uruguay, Price added.

Sherman is traveling around Uruguay and Peru this week to discuss a range of issues with senior government officials, including human rights, migration and the climate. She is expected to meet with representatives of the indigenous community during her trip as well, according to the State Department.

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US Urges Probe of Rights Violations in Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - The United States continues to press Armenia and Azerbaijan to release any prisoners still detained since the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict intensified a year ago and urges an investigation into alleged human rights abuses, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said.

"This week, the United States and the international community recognize the one-year anniversary of the ceasefire declaration that ended 44 days of intense fighting between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces in the South Caucasus," Price said in a press release on Monday. "We call for the return of all remaining detainees, a full accounting of missing persons, the voluntary return of displaced persons to their homes, comprehensive humanitarian de-mining of conflict-affected areas, and access by international humanitarian organizations to those in need."

Price said the Biden administration urges Armenia and Azerbaijan to intensify their negotiations to resolve their issues related to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, including under the auspices of the Minsk Group Co-Chairs.

The United States also calls for an investigation into alleged human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law, Price added.

The conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh intensified in September 2020, and the region experienced the most serious escalation of the lengthy standoff in years. The hostilities ended with a Russia-brokered trilateral truce in which Azerbaijan and Armenia agreed to a ceasefire and exchanged prisoners and bodies of the dead. In addition, the Kalbajar, Lachin and part of the Agdam District were handed over to Azerbaijan. Russian peacekeepers have been stationed in the region to oversee the implementation of the truce.

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Wall Street Closes at Record Highs After Lawmakers Agree to \$1 Trillion Infrastructure Deal

NEW YORK, November 8 (Sputnik) - Wall Street continued with its streak of record highs on Monday after lawmakers in Congress agreed to the Biden administration's plan to spend more than \$1 trillion to upgrade bridges, roads and other aging infrastructure in the United States. All three of the major US equity indexes - the Dow Jones Industrial Average, the S&P 500 and the Nasdaq Composite - closed at their highest levels ever, extending a bull run of epic peaks that has held for over a week now.

"The US stock market rally is showing signs of exhaustion, but the catalysts remain mostly bullish after the House passed Biden's infrastructure plan," Ed Moya, analyst at online trading platform OANDA, said.

The Dow, a blue-chip index which groups mostly industrial stocks, closed up 104 points, or 0.3%, at a record high close of 36,432.

The S&P 500, which represents the top 500 US stocks, gained 4 points, or 0.01%, at an all-time high finish of 4,702.

The Nasdaq, which groups Big Tech names such as Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix and Google, climbed 11 points, or 0.1%, for a record high settlement of 15,982.

Stocks rose after congressional Democrats aligned with Biden managed to pass with bipartisan support from Republicans an infrastructure package worth more than \$1 trillion package to upgrade the United States' transportation, broadband and utilities. Democrats' next challenge is to enact a \$1.75 trillion deal on social safety and climate policy.

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Sanctions Threats on Ethiopia Counterproductive, Will Hurt People - Russian Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, November 8 (Sputnik) - Russia believes that the threats of imposing unilateral sanctions against Ethiopia and the refusal to provide aid are counterproductive and will only exacerbate the already difficult humanitarian situation there, Russian Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Anna Evstigneeva said during UN Security Council meeting.

"We are confident that the imposition of illegal unilateral sanctions, threats to use them and refusal to provide economic assistance are highly counterproductive and will only lead to the worsening of the situation of ordinary people who are already suffering, and by no means it will lead to reconciliation," Evstigneeva said on Monday.

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US, Romania Agree to Collaborate on Black Sea Security Issues, Russia - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Romanian Foreign Minister Bogdan Aurescu agreed that the two countries will work together to address

security issues in the Black Sea and matters concerning Russia, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said.

"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken met with Romanian Foreign Minister Bogdan Aurescu today in Washington, DC... Both agreed to collaborate on Black Sea security issues and Russian aggression against Ukraine and others on NATO's Eastern Flank," Price said in a press release on Monday.

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US Special Envoy Returns to Ethiopia to Press for Cessation of Hostilities - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - US Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa Jeffrey Feltman returned to Ethiopia this week to continue to press the warring parties there to negotiate a ceasefire, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said in a press briefing.

"When it comes to Ambassador Feltman's activity in the region, he returned to Ethiopia today from Kenya to continue to urgently press the parties to de-escalate the conflict and negotiate a cessation of hostilities," Price said on Monday.

Moreover, Feltman may have a small opportunity to work with the African Union High Representative for the Horn of Africa Olusegun Obasanjo to address the crisis in Ethiopia and the two are expected to meet in Addis Ababa.

On Thursday, the Ethiopian parliament declared a six-month state of emergency throughout the country to protect the population from the rebels of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Tigray who are advancing upon the country's capital. This development prompted several countries to start evacuating their diplomatic missions.

Northern Ethiopia has been engulfed by the internal conflict since October of last year, when the central government accused the PNLF of attacking a military base and launched a counter operation in Tigray. The hostilities have been going on since despite a June ceasefire.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) -

US-RUSSIA TALKS

* Russian President Vladimir Putin and CIA Director William Burns discussed over the telephone US-Russia relations and regional conflicts, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Monday.

* Burns confirmed the importance of implementing the Minsk agreements and observation of Donbas' special status, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said.

BELARUS-POLAND BORDER CRISIS

- * Poland has closed the Kuznitsa checkpoint on the border with Belarus on Tuesday in connection with the migration crisis, the country's border guard force said.
- * Minsk is certainly doing everything possible to keep the situation with migrants influx at the border with Poland under control and is taking into consideration Moscow's concerns regarding their potential crossing into Russia, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.
- * The United States is concerned about reports of irregular migration of refugees from Belarus across the border to Poland and condemns the Lukashenko government's handling of the situation, US State Department spokesman Ned Price said.
- * European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen called on the EU countries to agree on the expansion of the sanctions regime against the Belarusian authorities amid the situation on the border with Poland and said that the possibility of introducing sanctions against airlines of third countries would also be considered.

US DESIGNATES POLYANIN, VASINSKIY

- * US Attorney General Merrick Garland announced on Monday the unsealing of an indictment against Russian citizen Yevgeniy Polyanin, charging him for allegedly obtaining \$13 million through REvil cyber attacks against companies and other entities throughout the United States.
- * The US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) on Monday added Russian citizen Yevgeniy Polyanin and Ukrainian citizen Yaroslav Vasinskyi to their list of sanctioned nationals over their criminal cyber activities.
- * US prosecutors indicted Vasinskyi for his alleged involvement with the Sodinokibi/Revil ransomware group and are seeking his extradition from Poland, according to court filings.

SITUATION IN IRAQ

- * The UN Security Council said in a statement on Monday that it condemns the terrorist attack targeting Iraq's Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi.
- * Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov and Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein discussed over the telephone the assassination attempt on al-Kadhimi, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.
- * Russia condemns the recent assassination attempt against Al-Kadhimi and believes it was aimed at undermining national security and stability, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said

INTERNATIONAL TALKS ON AFGHANISTAN

- * The new US special envoy for Afghanistan, Thomas West, plans to visit Moscow on November 15, Russian Special Presidential Representative for Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov told Sputnik.
- * The meeting of the "expanded troika" - Russia, the United States, China and Pakistan - on Afghanistan will take place on November 11 in Islamabad, Kabulov told Sputnik.
- * The United States is not taking the step to reopen its embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan, at the present time, US Special Representative for Afghanistan Thomas West told reporters.
- * The United States is preparing for a new round of negotiations with the Taliban (under UN sanctions over terrorist activities), but no date has been set yet, West said.

ENERGY SITUATION IN EUROPE

* There is no timeline for launching the Nord Stream 2 project yet, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Monday.

* Questions about gas pumping into European underground storage facilities should be addressed to Russia's Gazprom, Peskov said.

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PREVIEW - Harris Heads to Paris to Follow Up on Biden Meeting With Macron After AUKUS Row

WASHINGTON, November 9 (Sputnik) - Vice President Kamala Harris begins a five-day visit to Paris on Tuesday that will include bilateral talks with French President Emmanuel Macron in the wake of his recent meeting with US counterpart Joe Biden, as the two countries work to mend relations after a dispute related to the AUKUS pact.

The US sparked a diplomat feud with France by agreeing to sell nuclear-powered submarines to Australia as part of the new AUKUS partnership, which negated a deal Paris had with Canberra. Biden during talks with Macron at last month's G20 summit conceded that the US handled the situation clumsily and the two leaders agreed to launch new initiatives to boost ties.

"This visit from the Vice President [Harris] really signals the strength of our alliance as our nations work together to advance prosperity, security and stability as we take on multiple existential threats and seize new opportunities," a senior administration official told reporters last week. "The Vice President will speak to many of those during her trip."

Harris will participate in several key events throughout the week, including in a bilateral meeting with Macron, but will also join the Paris Peace Forum as well as the Paris Conference on Libya. On Tuesday, Harris is scheduled to tour the world renowned Institute Pasteur where she will meet US and French scientists working on the novel coronavirus and on global pandemic preparedness.

The following day, Harris and Macron will hold a bilateral meeting at the Elysee Palace where they are expected to discuss a wide-range of issues pertaining to bilateral relations, European security, the Indo-Pacific, global health and space.

On Thursday, Harris will attend the opening ceremony of the fourth annual Paris Peace Forum hosted by Macron. This year, the forum will focus on existing global health gaps, the post-COVID-19 recovery and will consider "new principles of action" for the post-COVID-19 world.

At the end of her stay on Friday, Harris is scheduled to participate in the Paris Conference on Libya, co-hosted by Macron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi and UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. More than 20 heads of state and government from throughout the region and the world are expected to attend the event.

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US House Panel Subpoenas Jason Miller, Michael Flynn in January 6 Capitol Riot Probe

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - The US House Select Committee investigating the events at the Capitol on January 6 on Monday said that it has subpoenaed six former Trump administration officials, including Jason Miller, Michael Flynn and John Eastman.

"The Select Committee issued subpoenas to the following individuals for records and subpoena testimony: William Stepien... Jason Miller... Angela McCallum... John Eastman... Michael Flynn... Bernard Kerik," Select Committee Chairman Bennie Thompson said in a statement.

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Pentagon Says Concerned by Intimidation, Coercive Behavior of China in Indo-Pacific

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - The United States is concerned with the "intimidation" and "coercive behavior" of China in the Indo-Pacific, Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby said on Monday, commenting on media reports of Chinese using mock-ups of American ships for missile target practice.

"What we are concerned [about] is the increasing intimidation, coercive behavior of the Chinese military in the Indo-Pacific," Kirby told journalists.

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Ethiopia Must Fully Protect UN National Staff in Tigray - UN Political Affairs Chief

UNITED NATIONS, November 8 (Sputnik) - Ethiopia must provide full protection to the UN national staff delivering humanitarian assistance to the vulnerable civilians trapped in the conflict in the embattled Tigray region, UN Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, Rosemary DiCarlo, said on Monday.

"The UN is steadfastly committed to stay and deliver in Ethiopia in support of all the people of the country," DiCarlo told a Security Council meeting. "We continue our work there, including thanks to the dedication of our Ethiopian national staff, who must be provided full protection by national authorities, regardless of their background."

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Biden Says US Bringing Full Strength of Federal Gov't to Disrupt Malicious Cyber Activity

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden said on Monday that the United States is using the full capability of the federal government to disrupt malicious cyber activity.

"We are bringing the full strength of the federal government to disrupt malicious cyber activity and actors, bolster resilience at home, address the abuse of virtual currency to launder ransom

payments, and leverage international cooperation to disrupt the ransomware ecosystem and address safe harbors for ransomware criminals," Biden said in a press release.

The statement comes after the US unsealed indictments against Russian national Yevgeniy Polyanin and Ukrainian national Yaroslav Vasinskyi over a July ransomware attack.

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Biden Says Charges on Russian, Ukrainian Hackers Fulfill Vow to Putin to Tackle Cybercrime

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden said on Monday that the unsealed US indictments announced against Russian national Yevgeniy Polyanin and Ukrainian national Yaroslav Vasinskyi for alleged cybercrimes in the United States fulfill his pledge to Russian President Vladimir Putin to hold cybercriminals accountable.

"When I met with President Putin in June, I made clear that the United States would take action to hold cybercriminals accountable. That's what we have done today," Biden said in a press release.

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UN Political Affairs Chief Urges Immediate Cessation of Fighting in Ethiopia's Tigray

UNITED NATIONS, November 8 (Sputnik) - The UN under-secretary-general for political and peacebuilding affairs has called on all parties in Ethiopia to immediately cease hostilities in the northern region of Tigray as the ongoing war threatens the future of the wider Horn of Africa.

"The year-long conflict in the Tigray region of Ethiopia has reached disastrous proportions. The fighting places the future of the country and its people, as well as the stability of the wider Horn of Africa region, in grave uncertainty," Rosemary DiCarlo told a UN Security Council meeting on the situation in the East African country.

"There must be an immediate cessation of hostilities," DiCarlo stated.

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Talks Underway to Confirm Details of Biden-Xi Summit By Year-End - White House

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) – The United States and China are continuing "working-level discussions" to finalize the details for a planned summit between Presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping to take place by the end of the year, White House spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre said on Monday.

"Working-level discussions are underway to confirm details, but I do not have updates at this time," Jean-Pierre told a scheduled press briefing.

The upcoming meeting is part of ongoing efforts to "responsibly manage" the competition between the two countries, she said.

Jean-Pierre declined to say if the meeting might take place in November. "All we have, before the end of the year," she noted.

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US to Waive Fees, Streamline Entry Process for Afghans Resettling in Country - DHS

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) – The United States is going to waive fees and streamline entry process for Afghans resettling in the country, the Department of Homeland Security said in a statement on Monday.

"Today, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced that it will exempt filing fees and streamline application processing for Afghan nationals who were paroled into the United States for humanitarian reasons on or after July 30, 2021," the statement read.

This move will help facilitate Afghans' resettlement in the US by streamlining the processing of requests for work authorization, Green Cards, and associated services, it added.

Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas said that approximately 70,000 Afghans have arrived in the United States as part of Operation Allies Welcome. "Following the biggest airlift in U.S. history, DHS exercised its discretion to parole many Afghan nationals, on a case-by-case basis, into the United States for urgent humanitarian reasons," he said.

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White House Says Has No Information on Next Biden-Putin Meeting

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) – The White House said on Monday it has no information on a possible meeting between presidents Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin.

"I do not have anything to preview on any meeting," spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters when asked about the chance of a virtual or in-person meeting between the two leaders before the end of the year.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov told Sputnik earlier on Monday that there is no exact information regarding the possible new meeting between Putin and Biden.

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US Concerned by Reports From Belarus-Poland Border, Condemns Lukashenko - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - The US is concerned about reports of irregular migration of refugees from Belarus across the border to Poland, and condemns the Lukashenko government's handling of the situation, State Department spokesman Ned Price said on Monday.

"We are concerned with disturbing images and reports emanating from the Belarus-Poland border this weekend. The United States strongly condemns the Lukashenko regime's political exploitation and coercion of vulnerable people, and the regime's callous and inhumane facilitation of irregular migration flows across its borders," Price told a press briefing.

The US calls on Minsk to stop its campaign of orchestrating and coercing irregular migrant flows across its borders into Europe, Price said. As long as Belarus refuses to respect international obligations and commitments, the US will continue to pressure Alexander Lukashenko, Price added.

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US Likely to See Higher Inflation From Housing 'For a While' - Federal Reserve Governor

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - The United States is likely to see greater inflation risks from record-high housing prices as demand continues to outstrip the number of newly-built homes while bottlenecks in supply chains slow construction, Federal Reserve Governor Michelle Bowman said on Monday.

"I anticipate that these housing supply issues are unlikely to reverse materially in the short term, which suggests that we are likely to see higher inflation from housing for a while," Bowman said. Sales of new single family houses in the United States jumped 14% in the month to September as buyers tried to beat a potential hike in interest and mortgage borrowing rates despite record high home prices, Commerce Department data showed.

The median selling price for existing-homes in the United States rose 17.8% in July from a year earlier to hit a record high of \$359,900, according to the National Association of Realtors.

The S&P CoreLogic Case-Shiller US National Home Price Index said its 20-city indicator showed a 19.7% year-over-year gain in August, barely changed from the 20% reading in the previous month.

"Because housing costs are a large share of living expenses for most people, these increases are adding to current inflationary pressures in the economy," Bowman said. "Indeed, we are already seeing sizable increases in rent and owners' equivalent rent in many parts of the country."

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 2.0% in the third.

Besides uneven economic growth, the Federal Reserve has faced three other problems. The first is inflation as wages and the prices of almost everything have soared from the lows of the coronavirus pandemic, especially pump prices of gasoline now at seven-year highs. The second

is slower-than-expected employment growth, with at least 5 million of the about 21 million jobs lost last year not having returned due to conditions forced by the pandemic. The third is the continuous disruption in supply chains as the output of building materials and electronic components remains challenged.

"Before this past year, the pace of construction of new homes was below its long-run average for more than a decade," Bowman said. "The supply chain bottlenecks ... are slowing down construction further. These issues affect the rental market too: The multifamily rental market is at historic levels of tightness, with over 95 percent occupancy in major markets."

Dire housing shortages in the United States since the financial crisis of 2007-2008 and last year's coronavirus outbreak have sent home prices to record highs.

Despite the grossly inflated market and a huge mismatch of demand versus supply, many buyers remain hopeful of locking in before the Federal Reserve raises interest rates sometime next year in what would be its first hike since the COVID-19 outbreak in March 2020.

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Romania Discusses With US Increase in NATO Presence at Black Sea - Foreign Minister

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - Romania is holding consultations with the United States on the enhancement of NATO's presence in the eastern part of the Alliance, especially at the Black Sea, Romanian Foreign Minister Bogdan Aurescu said on Monday.

"First, we will discuss... how to deepen our excellent political and security cooperation while emphasizing the importance of close coordination for the negotiation of the new strategic concept of NATO, for consolidating further the deterrence and defense posture on the whole eastern flank, especially at the Black Sea," Aurescu said before his meeting with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

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SpaceX Dragon Craft Undocks From ISS, Begins 4-Person Crew Descent to Earth – NASA

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - SpaceX's Dragon Endeavour spacecraft undocked from the International Space Station (ISS) on schedule to start the journey of its four Crew-2 astronauts back to Earth, NASA reported in a live podcast.

"Two good undocking burns ... God Speed," a NASA official monitoring the undocking and firing launch procedures said.

NASA astronauts Shane Kimbrough and Megan McArthur, Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) astronaut Aki Hoshide and European Space Agency (ESA) astronaut Thomas Pesquet completed 199 days in space and are returning with 530 pounds (about 1,159 kilos) of hardware and data, the space agency said.

The Endeavor is scheduled to splash down in the Atlantic Ocean around 10:30 p.m. ET on Monday and NASA's next SpaceX Crew-3 mission is still planned to start no earlier than 9:03 p.m. on Wednesday night on a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida, the space agency said.

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FBI Puts Alleged Russian Cybercriminal Yevgeniy Polyanin on Wanted List

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - The FBI has put Russian national Yevgeniy Polyanin on its wanted list for his alleged involvement in major ransomware attacks and money laundering activities.

"Yevgeniy Igoryevich Polyanin is wanted by the #FBI for his alleged involvement in ransomware attacks and money laundering activities. Polyanin is believed to be in Russia, possibly in Barnaul, and is one of many Sodinokibi/REvil ransomware affiliates," the FBI said in a tweet containing the wanted poster.

Polyanin is described as a 28-year old white male of Russian origin. He is alleged to have left electronic notes on victims' computers with links to the ransom demands and instructions, the FBI said.

Polyanin and fellow alleged REvil cybercriminal Yaroslav Vasinskyi had their criminal indictments unsealed by US officials on Monday. The men are being charged with crimes including conspiracy to commit computer fraud and conspiracy to commit money laundering. Vasinskyi is currently being held in Poland, while he awaits extradition to the US for trial. State Department spokesperson Ned Price on Monday announced that the US will give up to \$10 million for information leading to the identification or location of a REvil leader like Polyanin, and up to \$5 million for information leading to the arrest of any individual attempting to participate in one of the group's ransomware attacks.

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US Unseals Charges Against Polyanin, Says Russian Citizen Got \$13M In Through REvil Hacks

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - US Attorney General Merrick Garland announced on Monday the unsealing of an indictment against Russian citizen Yevgeniy Polyanin, charging him for allegedly obtaining \$13 million through REvil cyber attacks against companies and other entities throughout the United States.

"Polyanin, who we also charged by indictment, is alleged to have conducted approximately 3,000 ransomware attacks," Garland said during a press briefing. "Polyanin's ransomware attacks affected numerous companies and entities across the United States, including law

enforcement agencies and municipalities throughout the state of Texas. Polyanin ultimately extorted approximately 13 million dollars from his victims."

Garland explained that the indictment against the 28-year-old Polyanin has been unsealed, charging him with conspiring to commit intentional damage to protected computers and to extort in relation to that damage, causing intentional damage to protected computers and conspiring to commit money laundering.

Garland also announced the unsealing of charges against Ukrainian citizen Yaroslav Vasinskyi, 22, for allegedly conducting ransomware attacks against multiple victims in the United States, including the July 2021 attack against the information technology software company Kaseya. He faces charges including conspiracy to commit money laundering and conspiracy to commit computer fraud.

Vasinskyi and Polyanin, if convicted of all counts, face 115 and 145 years in prison, respectively, according to the Justice Department.

Vasinskyi is currently held in Poland awaiting extradition to the United States is approved by the Polish authorities. The US government is seeking to arrest Polyanin and is offering up to \$10 million for information leading to the identification or location of any REvil leaders.

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Only Surviving Person in Rittenhouse Shooting Case Gaige Grosskreutz Testifies at Trial
WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - Gaige Grosskreutz - one of three men who survived being shot by Kyle Rittenhouse during the August 2020 riots in Kenosha, Wisconsin - testified at Rittenhouse's trial at the Kenosha County Circuit Court on Monday.

Rittenhouse is facing six charges, including first-degree reckless homicide with a dangerous weapon and recklessly endangering safety with a dangerous weapon for shooting three men, killing two, during the riots that followed the police shooting of Jacob Blake.

Grosskreutz, who was injured by a gunshot wound to his right arm, took the stand and was questioned by both the prosecution and defense teams.

The prosecution team focused on Grosskreutz's background as an emergency medical technician, who claimed, like Rittenhouse, that he was at the riots to administer first aid.

The defense team focused on Grosskreutz's approaching Rittenhouse with a firearm intending to shoot when the latter acted in self-defense. Grosskreutz had previously told law enforcement that he dropped the pistol on the streets sometime before the shooting and did not have a valid concealed carry permit.

Judge Bruce Schroeder at one point reminded Grosskreutz not to refer to Rittenhouse's actions as "murder" while testifying, as the jury is there to determine whether his actions constitute murder.

Rittenhouse's defense team argues that he shot Grosskreutz, Anthony Huber and Joseph Rosenbaum acting in self-defense after being confronted, chased and attacked by the three men.

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UN Under Secretary Seeks \$385Mln to Fund Myanmar Humanitarian Response - Statement

UNITED NATIONS, November 8 (Sputnik) - UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Martin Griffiths on Monday urged the international community to fund the humanitarian response for Myanmar by providing \$385 million amid the deteriorating situation in the country.

The humanitarian situation in Myanmar is deteriorating. Across the country, there are now more than 3 million people in need of life-saving humanitarian assistance because of growing conflict and insecurity, COVID-19 and a failing economy," Griffiths said in a statement. "... call on the international community to fund the response. Less than half of the US\$385 million required under the Humanitarian Response Plan and Interim Emergency Response Plan launched after the armed forces' takeover has been received."

Since the military coup on February 1, Griffiths said hundreds of thousands of people had fled their homes and 223,000 people remain internally displaced.

In addition, more than 37,000 people, including women and children, have been newly displaced in recent weeks as the fighting between the Myanmar Armed Forces and the Chinland Defense and the People's Defense Forces has escalated in Chin state, Mgyway and Sagaing regions, Griffiths said.

While humanitarian workers are providing aid to the people in need, they face a lack of access across the country resulting from bureaucratic impediments imposed by the military, Griffiths added.

"I call on the Myanmar armed forces - and all parties - to facilitate safe, rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access," he said.

November 8 marks one year since the 2020 general elections in Myanmar deemed free and fair by domestic and international observers.

The military came to power in Myanmar on February 1, 2021, under the pretext that the National League for Democracy rigged the November election. The military coup triggered a wave of civil protests, and more than 1,180 people have died in clashes with the authorities.

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US Has Ways of Disrupting Cyber Criminals Sheltering in Russia - FBI Director

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - The United States has ways of disrupting cyber criminals sheltering in Russia, FBI Director Christopher Wray said on Monday.

"We've got ways of disrupting those sheltering in places like Russia as [Yevgeniy] Polyanin discovered when he woke up and found \$6.1 million he extorted from his victims missing," Wray said during a press conference.

US Attorney General Merrick Garland said during the same press conference he could not comment on whether Moscow was aware of REvil ransomware activities that occurred out of Russia because the investigation into Polyanin's alleged cyber crimes against US businesses and entities is still ongoing.

However, Merrick said the US Justice Department expects any government in which one of these ransomware actors is residing to provide that person to the United States for prosecution.

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US Unseals Charges Against Polyanin, Says Russian Citizen Got \$13Mln Through REvil Hacks

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - US Attorney General Merrick Garland announced on Monday the unsealing of an indictment against Russian citizen Yevgeniy Polyanin, charging him for allegedly obtaining \$13 million through REvil cyber attacks against companies and other entities throughout the United States.

"Polyanin, who we also charged by indictment, is alleged to have conducted approximately 3,000 ransomware attacks," Garland said during a press briefing. "Polyanin's ransomware attacks affected numerous companies and entities across the United States, including law enforcement agencies and municipalities throughout the state of Texas. Polyanin ultimately extorted approximately 13 million dollars from his victims."

Garland explained that the indictment against Polyanin has been unsealed, charging him with conspiring to commit intentional damage to protected computers and to extort in relation to that damage, causing intentional damage to protected computers and conspiring to commit money laundering.

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US Offers \$15Mln for Info on REvil Leaders, Others Tied to Ransomware Attack - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - The US government is offering up to \$10 million for information leading to the identification or location of any REvil leaders and up to \$5 million for information leading to the arrest and/or conviction of any individual conspiring to participate in or attempting to participate in a ransomware incident tied to the group, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Monday.

"The Department of State is offering a reward of up to \$10,000,000 for information leading to the identification or location of any individual holding a key leadership position in the Sodinokibi ransomware variant transnational organized crime group. In addition, the Department is offering a reward offer of up to \$5,000,000 for information leading to the arrest and/or conviction in any country of any individual conspiring to participate in or attempting to participate in a Sodinokibi variant ransomware incident," Price said in a statement.

The REvil ransomware group is believed to be responsible for the ransomware attack on the software firm Kaseya in July, which impacted up to 1,500 businesses worldwide. The cybercriminal group has received more than \$200 million in ransom payments, the Treasury Department said.

The US Treasury Department issued a statement on Monday that its Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) has added Russian citizen Yevgeniy Polyanin and Ukrainian citizen Yaroslav Vasinskyi to their list of sanctioned nationals over their criminal cyber activities.

Earlier on Monday, a US court unsealed the criminal indictment and arrest warrant for Vasinskyi, who is currently held in Poland awaiting extradition. He faces charges including conspiracy to commit money laundering and conspiracy to commit computer fraud.

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Protesters Amass Outside White House to Show Opposition to US Interference in Ethiopia

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - A protest is taking place outside the White House to show opposition and potentially appeal to US President Joe Biden to end the United States' interference in Ethiopia's internal affairs, a Sputnik correspondent reported from the scene on Monday.

More than 1,000 people have assembled in front of the White House on Monday, including families with children and elderly individuals, to have their voices heard in support of Ethiopia's democratically-elected government and the country's unity and territorial integrity as well as against US-encouraged rebel forces.

The protesters are holding Ethiopian national flags and signs saying "USA - Hand off Ethiopia," "TPLF is a Killer," and "CNN, Stop assisting the terrorist TPLF." The TPLF refers to the Tigray People's Liberation Front.

The TPLF and the Ethiopian government have been locked in a conflict over control of the country's northern territories since November 2020, when the government accused the TPLF of attacking a military base. The Ethiopian government launched a military operation in Tigray with the support of neighboring Eritrea and the conflict has since escalated.

A law enforcement officer told Sputnik that that protest in front of the White House is peaceful and no additional police presence is seen in the area.

One of the rally organizers and an advocate for Global Ethiopian Advocacy Nexus, Gennet Negussie, told Sputnik that at least 2,000 people have joined the rally while they are still expecting up to 10,000 to show up from all over.

"As you can see people are very upset and frustrated about Biden's foreign policy on Ethiopia, so we are here to protest and to tell the Biden administration to stop forcing Ethiopian government and sit down and negotiate and we want them to support the current democratically-elected Prime Minister," Negussie said.

Negussie also said the protest movement will not stop until the situation changes in Ethiopia, adding that the protesters have started an email/regular mail campaign to make their voice known to lawmakers.

On Friday, nine Ethiopian rebel groups announced they had formed an alliance to change the government and establish a transitional body. The alliance, dubbed the United Front of Ethiopian Federalist Forces, comes as Ethiopia was put under a six-month state of emergency as the rebel forces advance toward the capital of Addis Ababa.

"We don't recognize that. We are surprised that the United States would be supporting them when more than 40 million people voted for the current prime minister. The majority of the Ethiopian people support him. The diaspora supports him," Negussie said. "It is very odd. It seems like the US government is trying to overthrow the democratically-elected government and create a transitional government."

Instead, the United States should support the Ethiopian government to bring the terrorist groups to justice as that is the only way to end the conflict, she said.

Protestors told Sputnik they also oppose the sanctions the United States has imposed against Ethiopia in pursuit of its foreign policy goal.

Protester Mekdes Tefera told Sputnik that she joined the rally from Northern Virginia and wants to show opposition to the damaging US sanctions against Ethiopia.

"We are present here to show that we are in support of the government and we don't approve of US interference. We want them to stop sanctioning the country when we have the government that has already been selected, that the people chose," Tefera said.

Dagm Kabeta told Sputnik that protesters have also gathered to oppose the false coverage of the Ethiopian crisis by the major US corporate media outlets.

"The reason why we came here is because the United States and the US media have been attacking Ethiopia to divide the nation," Kabeta said. "That's why we came here to tell CNN and others to stop giving the false information to the world."

Kabeta pointed out that the protesters seek to be the voice of the Ethiopian people who say they have their democratically-elected government and do not want others to get involved in the country's internal affairs.

On Friday, the UN Security Council held a special meeting on Ethiopia after which it issued a statement expressing concern about the escalation of fighting in northern Ethiopia and called on all sides to negotiate a lasting ceasefire.

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UN Security Council Condemns Drone Attack Against Iraq Prime Minister

UNITED NATIONS, November 9 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council on Monday issued a statement condemning the terrorist attack targeting the Iraq Prime Minister Mustafa-al-Kadhimi. "The members of the Security Council condemned in the strongest terms the 7 November 2021 assassination attempt against Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi," the statement said. The UN Security Council also said it was relieved that al-Kadhimi had not sustained any injuries in the attack, adding that its members reiterated their support for the independence, sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity, democratic process and prosperity of Iraq.

"The members of the Security Council reaffirmed that terrorism in all its forms and manifestations constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security," the statement said and called for holding those involved in the attack accountable.

"The members of the Security Council reiterated that any acts of terrorism are criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of their motivation, wherever, whenever and by whomsoever committed," the statement said.

On Sunday, media reported that al-Kadhimi's house came under a drone rocket attack and three security guards were injured.

Al-Kadhimi issued a statement via social media saying that he was fine and called on everyone to exercise restraint and maintain calm.

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US Offers \$15M In for Info on REvil Leaders, Others Tied to Ransomware Attack - State Dept. WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - The US government is offering up to \$10 million for information on REvil leaders and up to \$5 million to anyone trying to participate in the ransomware incident, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Monday.

"The Department of State is offering a reward of up to \$10,000,000 for information leading to the identification or location of any individual holding a key leadership position in the Sodinokibi ransomware variant transnational organized crime group. In addition, the Department is offering a reward offer of up to \$5,000,000 for information leading to the arrest and/or conviction in any country of any individual conspiring to participate in or attempting to participate in a Sodinokibi variant ransomware incident," Price said in a statement.

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US Sanctions Russia's Polyanin, Ukraine's Vasinskyi Over Cyber Activities - Treasury

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - The US Treasury Department issued a statement on Monday that its Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) has added Russian citizen Yevgeniy Polyanin and Ukrainian citizen Yaroslav Vasinskyi to their list of sanctioned nationals over their criminal cyber activities.

"OFAC is designating Ukrainian Yaroslav Vasinskyi (Vasinskyi) and Russian Yevgeniy Polyanin (Polyanin) for their part in perpetuating Sodinokibi/REvil ransomware incidents against the United States," the statement said.

The REvil ransomware group is believed to be responsible for the ransomware attack on the software firm Kaseya in July, which impacted up to 1,500 businesses worldwide. The cybercriminal group has received more than \$200 million in ransom payments, the Treasury Department said.

Earlier on Monday, a US court unsealed the criminal indictment and arrest warrant for Vasinskyi, who is currently held in Poland awaiting extradition. He faces charges including conspiracy to commit money laundering and conspiracy to commit computer fraud.

OFAC also sanctioned a company owned by Polyanin and the cryptobank Chatex, which is involved in facilitating the financial transactions of cybercriminals, the statement said.

Analysis of Chatex's transactions indicate that over half are related illicit or high-risk activities such as darknet markets and ransomware, the statement added.

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us department of justice unseals indictment against Polyanin, says the Russian national obtained \$13mln through revil hacks

Sputnik

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UN Political Affairs Chief to Speak at Security Council on Tigray War Monday - Spokesman UNITED NATIONS, November 8 (Sputnik) - UN Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo on Monday will brief the UN Security Council on the situation in northern Ethiopia, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric told reporters. The meeting on the conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray region will take place at United Nations headquarters in New York at 3:00 p.m. EDT (20:00 GMT).

"Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo will speak to the Security Council this afternoon," Dujarric said during a briefing. "In an open meeting, she is expected again to highlight the risks in the year-long conflict in Tigray and the risks that it poses to the country and the region as a whole and the urgent need for cessation of hostilities, talks on the lasting ceasefire and the creation of the conditions for an inclusive Ethiopian dialogue to resolve the crisis."

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UNSC Condemns Attack Against Iraq Prime Minister

WASHINGTON, November 9 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council in a statement on Monday condemned the terrorist attack targeting Iraq's Prime Minister.

"The members of the Security Council condemned in the strongest terms the 7 November 2021 assassination attempt against Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi," the statement said.

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Blinken Discusses Iran, Sudan During Strategic Dialogue With Egyptian Counterpart

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - Secretary of State Antony Blinken discussed a number of issues pertinent to the US-Egypt partnership with Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry during a Strategic Dialogue in Washington on Monday, the State Department said in a readout of the meeting.

"During their bilateral meeting at the beginning of the dialogue, Secretary Blinken and Foreign Minister Shoukry exchanged views on international and regional issues, human rights, and pathways to increased cooperation on economic, judicial, security, education, and cultural issues," the State Department said.

Secretary Blinken also expressed appreciation for Egypt's work to de-escalate tensions in Gaza and support of the UN Support Mission in Libya, the readout added.

Blinken said during opening remarks for the dialogue that they would also discuss shared concerns about Iran's alleged destabilizing influence in the region, as well as the return to a democratic transition in Sudan. The situation in Sudan also threatens to destabilize the region, Blinken said.

The two diplomats agreed that the Strategic Dialogue presents an opportunity to advance collaboration and agreed to maintain close coordination on these issues going forward, the State Department said. Blinken noted he intends to return the dialogue to a regular cadence, given that the last one occurred in 2015.

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US Sanctions Russia's Polyanin, Ukraine's Vasinskyi Over Cyber Activities - Treasury

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - The US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) on Monday added Russian citizen Yevgeniy Polyanin and Ukrainian citizen Yaroslav Vasinskyi to their list of sanctioned nationals over their criminal cyber activities. Polyanin and Vasinskyi were added to OFAC's Specially Designated Nationals list that subjects them to certain sanctions.

Earlier on Monday, a US court unsealed the criminal indictment and arrest warrant for Vasinskyi, who is currently held in Poland awaiting extradition. He faces charges including conspiracy to commit money laundering and conspiracy to commit computer fraud.

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IT Security Company McAfee Sold to Advent-Led Investor Group for \$14 Billion

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - The computer security software company McAfee announced in a statement on Monday that it was acquired by an investor group led by the US private equity firm Advent International for \$14 billion.

"McAfee Corp. ... today announced it has entered into a definitive agreement to be acquired by an investor group led by Advent International Corporation ("Advent") and Permira Advisers LLC ("Permira"), Crosspoint Capital Partners ("Crosspoint Capital"), Canada Pension Plan Investment Board ("CPP Investments"), GIC Private Limited ("GIC"), and a wholly owned subsidiary of the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority ("ADIA") (collectively, "the Investor Group)," the statement said.

McAfee President and CEO Peter Leav said the transaction valued at \$14 billion is a testament to the corporation's market-leading online protection solutions.

"We want to thank our employees for their continued hard work and commitment to McAfee. We are thrilled to be partnering with premier firms who truly understand the cybersecurity landscape and have a proven track record of success," Leav said.

Under the terms of the deal, McAfee shareholders are due to get \$26.00 in cash for each share of common stock they own. The transaction will close in the first half of 2022.

The San Jose, California-based company was founded by tech guru, businessman and visionary John McAfee in 1987 and was the first to bring a commercial antivirus solution to the market. McAfee was purchased by Intel in 2011.

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US Indicts Ukrainian Vasinskyi for Alleged Role in REvil Ransomware Cases - Court Filing

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - US prosecutors indicted Ukrainian national Yaroslav Vasinskyi for his alleged involvement with the Sodinokibi/Revil ransomware group and are seeking his extradition from Poland, according to court filings released on Monday.

The court filing from Acting US Attorney Chad Meacham moved to unseal the indictment of Vasinskyi, as well as his arrest warrant. The documents detail Vasinskyi's alleged role in approximately 2,500 ransomware attacks through the group that received roughly \$2.3 million in ransom payments.

The unsealed indictment lists charges for Vasinskyi including conspiracy to commit computer fraud, conspiracy to commit money laundering, and intentional damage to a protected computer.

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Some 25% of US Mothers Rendered Jobless or Made to Work Less by COVID-19 - Powell

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - The COVID-19 crisis disrupted childcare or in-person schooling for nearly 70% of US parents, with a quarter of working mothers rendered jobless or

made to work less as a consequence, Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell said on Monday.

The Federal Reserve's 2020 Survey of Household Economics and Decision Making showed the pandemic also left less than 40% of mothers with the ability to cover a \$400 cash emergency on their own, Powell said.

"The pandemic disrupted childcare or in-person schooling for nearly 70 percent of parents, with 25 percent of mothers reporting they did not work or worked less as a result," Powell said at a Federal Reserve-sponsored conference on gender and the US economy. "Many faced substantial financial difficulty. Only 37 percent of mothers who reported not working or working less because of childcare or schooling disruptions would cover a \$400 expense with cash or its equivalent."

Powell said the pandemic widened deep-rooted inequities in the economy and those least able to bear it from racial, gender, and socioeconomic perspectives were the most affected.

"Women make up the majority of frontline workers, who have been under substantial strain - and subject to personal risks - during the pandemic. Additionally, women took on the majority of caring responsibilities, for older relatives and children alike," he said.

As of April 2020, the unemployment rate for women was 16.1%, compared with 13.6% for men, according to the Federal Reserve.

Powell said the gap persisted until September of last year and while it has since reversed, it does not account for the many women who left the workforce entirely.

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US Federal Reserve's Quarles Resigns From Board, Effective at End of December - Statement

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - Federal Reserve Board member Randal K. Quarles has informed the central bank that he will resign from its governing body by the end of next month, the Fed announced on Monday.

"Randal K. Quarles submitted his resignation Monday as a member of the Federal Reserve Board, effective at the end of December," the Fed said in a statement posted on its website. Quarles, who oversaw the regulation of financial firms as the Fed's vice chair for supervision at the board, informed President Joe Biden in a resignation letter made public by the central bank that he intended to be gone before the end of the year.

"It has been a great privilege to work with my colleagues on the Board, throughout the Federal Reserve System, and among the global central banking and regulatory community," Quarles wrote.

Besides being the Fed's vice chair for supervision, Quarles served simultaneously as chair of the Financial Stability Board, an international body established by the Group of 20 countries. His three-year term in that other role ends on December 2, the Fed said.

"In both positions, he played a central role in ensuring the safe operation of both the domestic and international financial systems during the stress of the COVID event," the central bank said.

CNBC noted that although Quarles actual term on the board of governors does not expire for another 11 years, he was walking away from the special supervisory role established in the wake of the 2008-09 financial crisis.

In recent weeks, Quarles has become a lightning rod for criticism from some of the more progressive leaders in Congress, CNBC said, adding that he had been targeted for loosening financial regulations put in place after the financial crisis.

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Trump Says May Announce Decision on Re-Election After November 2022 Midterm Vote
WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump said on Monday that he may announce whether he will run for re-election in 2024 after the US midterm elections take place in in early November of 2022.

"I am certainly thinking about it and we'll see. I think a lot of people will be very happy, frankly, with the decision, and probably will announce that after the midterms," Trump said in an interview with Fox News.

Trump also said there is a possibility he could break from his plan and announce the decision before next November.

In addition, Trump said he has not made a decision on a potential vice president and refused to confirm if Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and his former US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley would be considered.

Trump said there are many well-known Republicans who want to run for president in 2024, but most will likely hold off on entering the presidential race if he runs for re-election.

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US to Charge Ukrainian, Russian Over July Ransomware Attack by REvil Group - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - US authorities have seized \$6 million in ransom payments and are expected to charge Ukrainian national Yaroslav Vasinskyi and Russian national Yevgeniy Polyanin for the REvil ransomware hacks, CNN reported on Monday.

The \$6 million in recovered funds is allegedly linked to payments made by victims of the REvil ransomware tool used by Vasinskyi and Polyanin, who are expected to face charges including conspiracy to commit fraud and conspiracy to commit money laundering, US officials are expected to announce, the report said.

The REvil ransomware attacks included the US-based software firm Kaseya in July, which impacted up to 1,500 businesses worldwide, the report said.

Vasinskyi is held in Poland, where he was recently arrested, pending extradition to the United States, while Polyanin's whereabouts remain unknown, the report added.

The Biden administration has been working alongside international partners to combat the rising threat of ransomware to businesses and critical infrastructure, with the State Department last month establishing a Bureau of Cyberspace and Digital Policy to focus on international cybersecurity efforts.

The State Department announced on Thursday a reward of up to \$10 million for information leading to the identification or location of anyone who holds a key leadership position in the DarkSide ransomware group, which is said to be responsible for the Colonial Pipeline ransomware attack in May.

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US May See Full Employment by End of 2022 as Precondition for Interest Rate Hike - Clarida

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - The United States may see "full employment," or a jobless rate of 4% or less, by the end of next year, satisfying one of the Federal Reserve's main conditions for a post-pandemic interest rate hike, Vice Chairman Richard Clarida said on Monday.

"My expectation today is that the labor market by the end of 2022 will have reached my assessment of maximum employment if the unemployment rate has declined by then to the SEP [Summary of Economic Projections] median of modal projections of 3.8 percent," Clarida said in a speech prepared for delivery at a Federal Reserve conference on monetary policy. In September, the Federal Reserve predicted that real US gross domestic product growth will have returned to its pre-coronavirus growth trajectory by the fourth quarter of 2021, in what would be one of the most rapid economic recoveries in 50 years.

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 2020.

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 also has faced three other problems. The first is inflation as wages and the prices of almost everything have soared from the lows of the coronavirus pandemic. The second is slower-than-expected employment growth, with at least 5 million of the about 21 million jobs lost last year not having returned due to conditions forced by the pandemic. The third is the continuous disruption in supply chains as world output of key components, such as microchips, continues to face challenges.

Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell said last week the central bank will be patient with a rate hike to fulfill its long-term inflation and employment targets. Inflation is trending at around 4% per year compared with the Fed's long-term target of 2% per year. The unemployment rate stood at 4.6% at the end of October, versus the desired goal of 4% or less.

"As I have noted before, there is no doubt that it is taking much longer to fully reopen a \$20 trillion economy than it did to shut it down," Clarida said in his speech. "Although in a number of sectors of the economy the imbalances between demand and supply - including labor supply -

are substantial, I do continue to judge that these imbalances are likely to dissipate over time as the labor market and global supply chains eventually adjust and, importantly, do so without putting persistent upward pressure on price inflation and wage gains adjusted for productivity." Clarida noted while the Federal Reserve was clearly "a ways away" from considering higher interest rates, it was accelerating toward the target.

"If the outlooks for inflation and unemployment I summarized a moment ago turn out to be the actual outcomes realized over the forecast horizon, then I believe that these three necessary conditions for raising the target range for the federal funds rate will have been met by year-end 2022," he added.

The Federal Reserve announced in March that it has targeted a 6.5% economic expansion for all of 2021 and has not officially changed the projection despite uneven growth in the last two quarters.

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US to Use Diplomacy, Sanctions to Respond to Nicaragua's 'Undemocratic' Election - Blinken

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - The United States will use diplomacy, coordinated actions, sanctions and visa restrictions to respond to Nicaragua's "undemocratic" election, State Secretary Antony Blinken said on Monday.

Nicaragua held its general election on Sunday, with incumbent President Daniel Ortega and his wife, Vice President Rosario Murillo, running. As of Monday, Ortega's ruling Sandinista Front is in the lead with 74.49% after nearly half of votes counted.

"We will continue to use diplomacy, coordinated actions with regional allies and partners, sanctions, and visa restrictions, as appropriate, to promote accountability for those complicit in supporting the Ortega-Murillo government's undemocratic acts," Blinken said.

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US to Charge Ukrainian, Russian Over July Ransomware Attack by REvil Group - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - US authorities have seized \$6 million in ransom payments and are expected to charge Ukrainian national Yaroslav Vasinskyi and Russian national Yevgeniy Polyanin for the REvil ransomware hacks, CNN reported on Monday.

The \$6 million in recovered funds is allegedly linked to payments made by victims of the REvil ransomware tool used by Vasinskyi and Polyanin, who are expected to face charges including conspiracy to commit fraud and conspiracy to commit money laundering, US officials are expected to announce, according to CNN.

The REvil ransomware was used to commit such ransomware attacks as the one on US-based software firm Kaseya in July, which impacted up to 1,500 businesses worldwide.

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US Not Taking Steps to Reopen Embassy in Kabul 'At This Time' - Special Representative

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - The United States is not taking the step to reopen its embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan, at the present time, US Special Representative for Afghanistan Thomas West told reporters on Monday.

"When it comes to reopening our embassy in Kabul, I have to tell you that we are not seriously taking this step at this time," West said during a press briefing.

The United States would first like to see "a record of responsible conduct" by the Taliban (banned in Russia), West added.

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US Special Representative for Afghanistan Says Plans to Visit Russia, Pakistan, India

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - US Special Representative for Afghanistan Thomas West said on Monday that he plans to visit Russia, Pakistan and India as a part of his upcoming trip.

"[Within] my upcoming travels, I do plan to visit Pakistan, Russia and India," West said during a briefing.

The US Special Representative pointed out that he will be in Pakistan "later this week."

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US Preparing for New Round of Talks With Taliban, No Date Set Yet - Special Envoy

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - The United States is preparing for a new round of negotiations with the Taliban (under UN sanctions over terrorist activities), but no date has been set yet, special representative for Afghanistan Thomas West said on Monday

"We are preparing for the next round of inter-agency US engagement with the Taliban. I don't have a date to share with you at this stage," he told a briefing.

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Regeneron Says Its Antibody Cocktail Protects Against COVID-19 for Up to 8 Months

WASHINGTON, November 8 (Sputnik) - Regeneron Pharmaceuticals, a US biotechnology company, announced on Monday that a single dose of its antibody cocktail dubbed REGEN-COV is capable of reducing the risk of contracting COVID-19 for up to eight months. "Single dose of REGEN-COV (1,200 mg subcutaneous) reduced the risk of COVID-19 by 81.6% during the pre-specified follow-up period (months 2-8), maintaining the 81.4% risk reduction previously reported during month 1. During the 8-month assessment period there were 0 hospitalizations for COVID-19 in the REGEN-COV group and 6 in the placebo group," the company said in a statement.

The data shows that a single dose of REGEN-COV can protect people from the virus for many months after administration, Myron Cohen, who is leading the monoclonal antibody efforts for the National Institutes of Health-sponsored COVID Prevention Network, said.

"These results demonstrate that REGEN-COV has the potential to provide long-lasting immunity from SARS-CoV-2 infection, a result particularly important to those who do not respond to COVID-19 vaccines including people who are immunocompromised," he said.

According to George Yancopoulos, the president and chief scientific officer at Regeneron, the drug can be especially important for many immunocompromised people.

"With infections still occurring despite widespread vaccination, the immunocompromised face an ongoing risk of encountering the virus during their daily lives. We intend to rapidly share these additional data with regulatory authorities to help those in most need of protection from COVID-19," he explained.

In July, the Food and Drug Administration approved the emergency use of the Regeneron antibody therapy as a preventive treatment in high-risk individuals.