

11/22/21 Monday

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Jan. 6 Panel Subpoenas Roger Stone, Alex Jones Over Participation in 'Stop the Steal' Rally
By - Morgan Artyukhina

The House committee investigating the January 6, 2021, insurrection at the US Capitol has issued subpoenas for former Donald Trump campaign adviser Roger Stone and Alex Jones, owner of the right-wing website InfoWars.

The committee announced on Monday it was seeking information from five more people in connection with the storming of the national legislature by Trump's supporters during his final days as president.

"The Select Committee is seeking information about the rallies and subsequent march to the Capitol that escalated into a violent mob attacking the Capitol and threatening our democracy," Rep. Bennie Thompson (D-MS), chair of the committee, said in a [Monday news release](#).

"We need to know who organized, planned, paid for, and received funds related to those events, as well as what communications organizers had with officials in the White House and Congress. We believe the witnesses we subpoenaed today have relevant information and we expect them to cooperate fully with our effort to get answers for the American people about the violence of January 6th," he added.

According to the release, Stone was slated to speak at the "Stop the Steal" rally outside the White House hosted by Trump that immediately preceded the attack on the Capitol, and "promoted his attendance at the rallies and solicited support to pay for security" through a website. It also says that a member of the Oath Keeper militia who reportedly served as part of Stone's security entourage in Washington, DC, has already been indicted, and adds that "Mr. Stone has made remarks that he was planning to 'lead a march to the Capitol' from the Ellipse rally."

Stone was previously jailed in 2019 for procedural crimes associated with then-special counsel Robert Mueller's Russiagate investigation. Sentenced to 40 months in prison, Trump commuted his sentence in July 2020, days before he was due to surrender himself, and then [fully pardoned him](#) on December 2020.

Jones, it says, helped organize the January 6 rally, "including by facilitating a donation to provide what he described as 'eighty percent' of the funding." He also spoke at a related rally the day prior.

"Mr. Jones has stated that he was told by the White House that he was to lead a march from the January 6th Ellipse rally to the Capitol, where President Trump would meet the group and speak," the release adds. "Mr. Jones has repeatedly promoted unsupported allegations of election fraud, including encouraging individuals to attend the Ellipse rally on January 6th and implying he had knowledge about the plans of the former President with respect to the rally."

Three other figures are also named in the release, including Dustin Stockton [and his fiancée](#), Jennifer Lawrence, who the committee says were reportedly involved in organizing several

pro-Trump rallies after the November 3, 2020, election, aimed at repudiating the results, which showed now-US President Joe Biden as the victor.

Taylor Budowich, who now serves as Trump's spokesperson, "reportedly solicited a 501c(4) organization to conduct a social media and radio advertising campaign encouraging attendance at the January 6th Ellipse rally and advancing unsupported claims about the result of the election," the release says.

Since it was formed in July, the House Select Committee to Investigate the January 6 Attack on the US Capitol has met extensive resistance obtaining materials, with Trump filing repeated lawsuits aimed at halting the release of his documents by the National Archives under the purview of executive privilege. Dozens of subpoenas have been issued, which several figures have ignored, including former senior Trump adviser and far-right ideologue [Steve Bannon](#), who was indicted and booked earlier this month; [Mark Meadows](#), Trump's chief of staff at the time of the riot; and [Jeffrey Clark](#), who was assistant attorney general at the time.

Five people died in the riot, including a US Capitol Police officer and a woman who was shot by a USCP officer outside the House chamber while attempting to break through the door.

However, Trump's supporters failed at their objectives of either disrupting verification of the election results by Congress or capturing any members of Congress or other politicians who rejected Trump's claims to have only lost the election due to fraud. Thousands of US troops garrisoned the capital city in the wake of the attack, and Biden was sworn in later that month under unprecedented heavy guard.

Trump was impeached by Congress on charges of instigating the insurrection, but was acquitted by a minority of senators in a trial several weeks after leaving office.

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Sen. Warren Pledges to Oppose Biden's Nomination of Jerome Powell for Second Term as Fed Chair

By - Morgan Artyukhina

The Fed has traditionally used currency inflation as the primary determinant of its fiscal policy, but amid the lockdown-induced economic malaise last year, Chairman Jerome Powell abandoned that principle in an attempt to prop up the country's struggling employment numbers, causing the worst devaluing of the US currency in 30 years.

Following US President Joe Biden's Monday nomination of Powell to serve a second term as Chairman of the Federal Reserve, US Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) has said she will oppose the move, which requires Senate confirmation.

Warren said on Monday afternoon that she would not support Powell, the present chair of the country's central bank, serving a second four-year term in the position. However, she did give her blessing to Biden's nomination for the Fed's vice chairman, Lael Brainard, a former Treasury Secretary who also sits on the Fed's Board of Governors.

In a [Monday news release](#) announcing his nominations, Biden praised Powell for "decisive action ... to cushion the impact of the pandemic and get America's economy back on track" and

Brainard, one of the country's leading macroeconomists, for playing "a key leadership role at the Federal Reserve, working with Powell to help power our country's robust economic recovery." "Powell and Brainard share the Administration's focus on ensuring that economic growth broadly benefits all workers," Biden said. "That's why they oversaw a landmark re-evaluation of the Federal Reserve's objectives to refocus its mission on the needs of workers of all backgrounds. And they've advanced key priorities that the President shares, like addressing the financial risks posed by climate change, and staying ahead of emerging risks to our financial system."

"I'm confident that Chair Powell and Dr. Brainard's focus on keeping inflation low, prices stable and delivering full employment will make our economy stronger than ever before," Biden said.

Warren Opposes 'Dangerous' Powell

However, Warren sharply dissented from the president's assessment, [saying in a statement](#) that "it's no secret" she opposes Powell remaining at the head of the Fed.

"Powell's failures on regulation, climate, and ethics make the still-vacant position of Vice Chair of Supervision critically important. This position must be filled by a strong regulator with a proven track record of tough and effective enforcement - and it needs to be done quickly," the Massachusetts senator said.

"American taxpayers have bailed out large financial institutions enough times. It's the job of the Federal Reserve to ensure large financial institutions do not put our economy at risk," she added. "As we move forward, I will use every oversight tool within reach to make sure that the Federal Reserve works for American families and not Wall Street."

In a Senate Banking Committee hearing September, [Warren told Powell](#) he was a "dangerous man," claiming he'd weakened the country's banking system and done little to ensure that another collapse like that in 2008 happens again. The Massachusetts lawmaker was instrumental in creating the Consumer Finance Protection Bureau in the aftermath of that collapse as a new regulatory agency also aimed at preventing a repeat.

"Your record gives me grave concerns," Warren said to Powell. "Over and over, you have acted to make our banking system less safe, and that makes you a dangerous man to head up the Fed."

Powell has led the Federal Reserve, which sets the nation's monetary policy independently of the rest of the government and acts as a "bank for banks," since February 2018. He was nominated by then-US President Donald Trump, with whom he had a [stormy relationship](#) after Trump attempted to [pressure the Fed](#) to keep interest rates low for political reasons.

Warren voted against Powell's nomination then, as well. She was joined by 12 other senators, including US Vice President Kamala Harris, who at the time was a US senator representing California.

Keeping Inflation From 'Becoming Entrenched'

Under Powell's leadership, the Fed has abandoned its typical focus on controlling inflation, or the devaluing of the currency, over fears that over-vigilance would hurt attempts to reduce unemployment. The two phenomena are often seen as divergent, with lower unemployment tending to cause inflation. However, Powell [warned in August 2020](#), several months into the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated lockdown, that "inflation that is persistently too low can pose serious risks to the economy."

Earlier this month, with [inflation hitting 6.2%](#) - its highest since 1990 - Powell sought to dissuade economic fears, telling the Fed's Board of Governors [on November 3](#) that higher inflation reflected "factors that are expected to be transitory."

Later on Monday afternoon, Powell and Brainard [said they were committed](#) to preventing inflation from "becoming entrenched," and that the US economy carries "the promise of a return to maximum employment."

"The unprecedented reopening of the economy, along with the continuing effects of the pandemic, led to supply and demand imbalances, bottlenecks, and a burst of inflation," Powell said. "We know that high inflation takes a toll on families, especially those less able to meet the higher costs of essentials like food, housing and transportation. We will use our tools both to support the economy - a strong labor market - and to prevent higher inflation from becoming entrenched."

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Ethiopian PM Abiy Says Will Lead Army in Anti-TPLF Struggle 'From the Battlefield'
By - Morgan Artyukhina

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said on Monday that beginning the following day, he would take personal command of the war effort against the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), an armed rebel group that has taken over the northern Tigray region and invaded several neighboring states.

In a Monday statement, the Ethiopian head of government said he would "lead the fight from tomorrow onwards," calling on all Ethiopians to unite in defense of their country and on all Black people across the world to defend Ethiopia in the spirit of pan-Africanism.

"Starting tomorrow, I will mobilize to the front to lead the defense forces," Abiy said in the release. "Those who want to be among the Ethiopian children who will be hailed by history, rise up for your country today. Let's meet at the front."

"We are now in the final stages of saving Ethiopia," he added. "Our enemies are attacking us on the outside and on the inside ... This is the struggle of all Black people. It is a conspiracy to humiliate Black people and subdue Ethiopia in a new colonial yoke."

Abiy's government in Addis Ababa has faced down a renewed threat by the TPLF for nearly a year after the group revolted against his government in response to reforms that weakened its once-dominating power over Ethiopian affairs. In recent months, the TPLF has launched new operations outside of Tigray state into neighboring Afar and Amhara states, repudiating a unilateral ceasefire by the Ethiopian government.

The TPLF has claimed it has widespread support and openly threatened to march on the capital, although it's unclear if the rebel group has the power to do so and Abiy's government has [sought to dissuade fears](#) that Addis Ababa is in danger. Critics have also said the TPLF's claims of support are overstated.

In May, the Ethiopian parliament categorized the TPLF as [a terrorist organization](#).

Abiy came to power in 2018 amid a wave of discontent with the TPLF-dominated government, and under his tenure political reforms have attempted to undo much of the federative structure the TPLF used to control the country's other ethnicities. He was given a Nobel Peace Prize for signing a peace treaty with Eritrea, ending a 20-year war that killed more than 120,000 people. The US, which had a close War on Terror partner in the TPLF-led government, has called for peace and [sanctioned the governments](#) of both Ethiopia and its ally, Eritrea, saying they have "contributed to the crisis and conflict" and "undermined the stability and integrity of the Ethiopian state."

On Monday, US Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa Jeffrey Feltman returned to Washington after traveling to Addis Ababa over the weekend to meet with Ethiopian officials and representatives from the African Union, which is also headquartered in the city.

"We have continued to call for an end to the fighting," US State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters on Monday. "We have continued to call for the parties to engage in diplomacy in furtherance of a cessation of hostilities, just as we have reiterated the calls of the international community for an end to the human rights abuses and violations that we've seen."

The US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has also issued a [warning to pilots](#) that there is a risk of encountering anti-aircraft fire over Ethiopia, something the government has disputed. The FAA said there is "no indication of an intent to threaten civil aviation." Ethiopian Airlines, Africa's largest air carrier, is headquartered at Addis Ababa Bole International Airport.

The conflict has created a massive humanitarian crisis, with [more than 70,000](#) people fleeing across the border into neighboring Sudan and an [estimated 4 million](#) more internally displaced, according to United Nations data. There is no reliable death toll for the conflict.

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'No More': Worldwide Protests Oppose US Intervention, Corporate Media Disinfo on Ethiopia, Eritrea

By - Morgan Artyukhina

Large protests in more than 30 countries on Sunday demanded an end to US intervention in the conflict in Ethiopia, as well as misleading reporting on the conflict by Western media outlets, including the BBC and CNN.

The protests took place under the hashtagged slogan #NoMore, signifying an end to Africans' tolerance of US meddling not just in Ethiopia and Eritrea, but the entire Horn of Africa region. According to Horn of Africa Hub, which helped initiate the hashtag as well as the protests, the protests spanned from London to Pretoria and from Washington, DC, to Tel Aviv, including in dozens of US cities.

In the US, the protests were supported by the Black Alliance for Peace and the Act Now to Stop War and End Racism (ANSWER) Coalition, two leading activist groups in the US anti-war movement.

Thousands rallied outside the White House and marched through the US capital, waving Ethiopian and Eritrean flags and carrying signs that criticized the US Agency for International

Development (USAID) for weaponizing aid and suggested that if the US continued its intervention in Ethiopia, the country would meet the same fate as other nations like Libya, Afghanistan, and Syria.

The protests followed others [held two weeks earlier](#) in conjunction with demonstrations in Addis Ababa.

'You Are Reporting Fake News'

Another prevailing theme was repudiating what many called the "disinformation" about the conflict spread by major news outlets including CNN, the BBC, the Associated Press, and Reuters.

"CNN, you are reporting fake news on Ethiopia," one sign read. "#NoMore spreading misinformation and insighting [sic] panic, fear and chaos," read another.

Several rally-goers told a Sputnik correspondent at the Washington, DC, rally that the outlets had given readers false impressions about the conflict, including that the Ethiopian government had fired the first shot and not the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and that the Ethiopian army is on the verge of collapse, leaving the capital of Addis Ababa open to capture by the TPLF.

They also expressed their resentment that Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, the country's first democratically-elected leader and a recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize for making peace with Eritrea, was not being properly represented in the outlets' reports.

Those attitudes are widespread back in Ethiopia, too. On Friday, the Ethiopian Media Authority published letters to CNN, BBC, Reuters and AP warning the news agencies "not to endanger Ethiopia's national interest, territorial integrity, or the peaceful coexistence of the people of Ethiopia" with their news reports. "[I]n the absence of ethical and professional journalistic operation, the Authority would be compelled to revoke the license granted to your institution to operate in Ethiopia."

Some of the objections the EMA noted include manufacturing and dissemination of false news and news analyses on Ethiopia to assist the TPLF's objectives; reporting the law enforcement operation as a genocidal campaign; reports undermining the government's efforts to address the humanitarian crisis in Tigray; reporting that the government is using famine and rape as weapons of war in Tigray; producing defamatory reports on the country's leading institutions, and publishing news seeking to discredit Abiy in the international arena and put the country under intense diplomatic pressure.

Their fears are real: days earlier, the US Treasury announced [sanctions against Eritrean](#) defense and political figures and institutions, claiming their alliance with Abiy against the TPLF has "undermined the stability and integrity of the Ethiopian state." Earlier this month, the Biden administration [also removed Ethiopia](#) from the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), a US law that gives preferential trading privileges to certain African states, citing "gross violations of internationally recognized human rights."

Rebellion Against TPLF Rule

The conflict began with Abiy's election in 2018 as the replacement chairman of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) after the former leader of the TPLF, Hailemariam Desalegn, resigned amid mass protests. A coalition of ethnic parties from some of Ethiopia's many ethnic groups, the EPRDF had been dominated for nearly three decades by the

TPLF, but the other coalition members rebelled against TPLF rule and chose Abiy from the Oromo Democratic Party (ODP) instead.

After Abiy became prime minister, he began a series of reforms designed to undo the TPLF's ethnic federation system, which gave it leverage over other Ethiopian states, including merging the EPRDF's many parties into a single nationwide Prosperity Party. The TPLF rejected these changes, calling them illegal, and rejected postponement of August 2020 elections caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, deciding to hold its own elections in Tigray anyway, which the Ethiopian government called illegal.

The tense situation finally exploded in November 2020 when the TPLF launched an attack on Ethiopian National Defense Force bases inside of Tigray state, a northern province that borders Eritrea and Sudan. While the ENDF counteroffensive made early gains and captured the capital of Mekelle, the TPLF regrouped in the countryside. By July 2021, they had pushed the ENDF out of Tigray and launched new offensives into nearby Amhara and Afar states. Earlier this month, the TPLF claimed to be considering a march on the capital, but statements about its strength are believed to be overstated.

The conflict has created a massive humanitarian crisis. According to the United Nations, [more than 70,000](#) people have fled across the border into neighboring Sudan and an [estimated 4 million](#) more internally displaced. There is no reliable death toll for the conflict.

On Monday, Abiy said he would be [taking direct control](#) over the military's effort, noting that "our enemies are attacking us on the outside and on the inside."

"Starting tomorrow, I will mobilize to the front to lead the defense forces," Abiy said in the release. "Those who want to be among the Ethiopian children who will be hailed by history, rise up for your country today. Let's meet at the front."

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US Reportedly Shared Intel Maps With European Allies Showing Alleged 'Buildup' of Russian Troops

By - Gaby Arancibia

US-Russian tensions were recently kicked up a notch after accusations of a planned military invasion of Ukraine were made against Russia, with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken revealing that he had expressed concern over the allegations with European partners. The unsubstantiated claims have been consistently rejected by the Kremlin.

American officials have reportedly shared intelligence with European allies that includes a map outlining an alleged Russian troop "buildup" near the Ukrainian border, a Bloomberg [exclusive](#) has detailed.

The weekend report indicates that the relayed intelligence information also shows the location of munition reserves purportedly meant to be used as part of a "rapid, large-scale push into Ukraine from multiple locations if [Russian] President Vladimir Putin decided to invade."

One scenario reportedly outlined by the American intel paints Russian troops allegedly attempting to enter Ukraine through Crimea, the Russian border and through Belarus, which is currently in the midst of its own [migrant crisis](#) with Poland.

The same scenario also suggests the use of "about 100 battalion tactical groups" that would amount to some 100,000 soldiers.

"Two of the people said about half that number of tactical groups was already in position and that any invasion would be backed up by air support," the report reads, before noting two sources with claims that "Moscow had also called up tens of thousands of reservists."

Unsubstantiated claims that Russia is engaging in a disinformation campaign against Ukraine were also noted in the report.

Citing individuals with knowledge of the development, Bloomberg detailed that the information was forwarded by the Biden administration to "some" NATO members over the last week as a means of proving that Russia is in the midst of plotting an invasion against Ukraine sometime within the next year.

The report is the latest in a series of accusations made against Russia, which has repeatedly rejected any assertion that it is planning an invasion. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov most recently [lashed out](#) at the allegations, saying earlier that "this hysteria is being whipped up artificially."

"Those who bring their armed forces overseas now accuse us of some 'unusual military activity' on our own territory," Peskov said, in reference to the US. The official later slammed the NATO alliance and warned it against providing Ukraine with modern weaponry.

"Ukraine is most likely seeking to make another attempt at resolving its own problem through military means; create another disaster for themselves and for everyone in Europe," Peskov said.

"This is what Ukraine is striving for. And it is trying to achieve this, most likely, under the cover of those very NATO exercises [near Russia's borders], NATO ships in the Black Sea - US, British soldiers in the region, of which there are more and more."

Both the weekend report and Peskov's commentary came on the heels of remarks from US Secretary of State Antony Blinken that underscored his so-called "[concerns](#)" regarding growing reports of a Russian "buildup" along the Ukrainian border.

Blinken's comments surfaced days after Gen. Mark Milley, who serves as the US chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters that he sees [no indication](#) that Russia is planning a military invasion.

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Daughter of Malcolm X Malikah Shabazz Found Dead in Brooklyn Home

By O Gaby Arancibia

[All materials](#) Write to the author

Malikah Shabazz, a daughter of Malcolm X, was found dead in her Brooklyn home late Monday, police have revealed. She was 56 years old.

Citing police, local media outlet WABC [reported](#) that Shabazz had been found inside the home by her daughter.

A police source [informed](#) ABC's Aaron Katersky that Shabazz's death did not appear to be suspicious.

Shabazz was one of Malcolm X's six daughters. Over the years, Shabazz had several run-ins with the law having most recently been [arrested](#) in Maryland in 2017 for animal abuse. Reports of Shabazz's death comes days after two men found guilty in Malcolm X's assassination were exonerated of the 1965 murder that shocked the nation. Both men maintained their innocence since their arrest.

The minister and human rights activist was a central figure during the US' civil rights movement. He was killed as he prepared to address eventgoers at New York City's Audubon Ballroom.

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Waukesha Parade Suspect Charged With Five Counts of Intentional Homicide
By - Evan Craighead

At least five people are dead and several others injured after a man driving a red SUV broke through a police barricade and sped through a Christmas parade in downtown Waukesha, Wisconsin, mowing down attendees and participants, including children and the elderly. Waukesha police confirmed to reporters on Monday that some 48 people were injured during the Sunday evening incident. Two of the 48 injured are children.

The deceased have been identified as one 79-year-old woman; one 71-year-old woman; two 52-year-old women; and one 81-year-old man.

Authorities have referred five counts of first-degree intentional homicide against the suspect, who told police that he acted alone.

According to Waukesha Police Chief Daniel Thompson, the suspect was involved in a domestic disturbance just minutes before he drove his automobile through a police barricade at the parade. Authorities have denied that they were pursuing the suspect at the time of the fatal incident.

The act has not been labeled a terrorist attack.

The suspect has been identified in the media as Darrell Brooks, 39, reportedly a registered sex offender in the US state of Nevada.

Brooks, within the past two years, has been charged three times for recklessly endangering others, [according to the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel](#). He was most recently released from the Milwaukee County Jail on November 16.

Court records obtained by the outlet showed that this is not the first time Brooks has used a vehicle to inflict harm.

Earlier this month a woman filed a criminal complaint saying that Brooks purposefully ran her "over with his vehicle" as she was attempting to walk through a gas station parking lot. The two

were allegedly having an argument moments prior to the incident and the woman was ultimately hospitalized for her injuries, according to court documents.

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'Conspiracy-Mongering': Two Veteran Fox News Contributors Quit Over Carlson's Series on Capitol Riot

By - Evan Craighead

'Patriot Purge,' a three-part series hosted by Tucker Carlson, was released earlier this month on Fox Nation, a subscription-based video streaming service. Fox News staffers have pushed back against the conspiracy theory-laden series about the US Capitol riot, as well as Carlson's recent reliance on innuendo to clear Trump's rioting supporters.

Steve Hayes and Jonah Goldberg, two longtime Fox News contributors, have left the channel after coming to the realization that responsible reporters are being "drowned out" by irresponsible opinion.

The duo detailed in a [Sunday memo](#) that Carlson's recent three-part special on the deadly January 6 US Capitol riot was the last straw. While the project is billed as an exposé, it is less of a piece of investigative journalism and more of a collection of "incoherent conspiracy-mongering, riddled with factual inaccuracies, half-truths, deceptive imagery, and damning omissions," according to Hayes and Goldberg.

Hayes and Goldberg both joined Fox News in early 2009, and are co-founders of The Dispatch, a conservative digital media company that reports and provides commentary on politics, policy and culture, [according to the website](#).

Per the release, one scene in the series depicts the waterboarding of an individual donning an orange jumpsuit.

"The left is hunting the right, sticking them in Guantanamo Bay for American citizens—leaving them there to rot," a voice-over claims, despite there being zero evidence of these kinds of attacks and imprisonment.

The duo warned that the dissemination of such misinformation could lead to a potentially fatal event akin to the January 6 riot, in which five people were killed including a Capitol police officer. "I thought it was irresponsible to put that out into the public airwaves," Hayes told NPR, speaking of Carlson's series.

The former Fox News contributor said that promotional videos for the special had set off alarm bells for many affiliated with the channel.

"The trailer basically gave people the impression that the US government was coming after all patriots — half of the country in the word of one of the protagonists in the piece," Hayes said. "And that's not happening. That's not true."

Goldberg said the decision they were forced into was "regrettable" because it means their conservative values-driven commentary will be cut off from "a very large audience." However, they do not regret the move, he added.

The series, which was heavily advertised on Fox News, received backlash from many staffers and reportedly prompted objections from other veteran figures, including anchors Chris Wallace and Bret Baier.

Their qualms with the special were initially shared with Fox News Media CEO Suzanne Scott and Jay Wallace, president of Fox News. [According to NPR](#), these objections eventually reached Lachlan Murdoch, chairman and CEO of Fox News parent company Fox Corporation. Prior to the special's release, Baier's 'Special Report' ran a segment that dismissed false flag attack claims about the 6 January riot regarding the antifa involvement. Both Hayes and Goldberg were recurring commentators on Baier's program since joining the channel in 2009. When asked about the departures of Hayes and Goldberg, Carlson declared that their exits "will substantially improve the channel."

"These are two of the only people in the world who still pretend the Iraq war was a good idea," the Fox News opinion show host told NPR. "No one wants to watch commentary that stupid."

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Saudi Coalition Launches Strikes Against Military Targets in Yemen - State TV
By - Evan Craighead

Saudi state media warned early Tuesday morning that civilians should avoid areas of the Yemeni capital of Sanaa as forces conduct airstrikes against a number of "legitimate" Houthi targets.

The Saudi-led coalition in Yemen confirmed on Tuesday that it carried out a series of same-day airstrikes against secret ballistic missile sites around Yemen's capital. One desired target was located in Dhahban, just outside of Sanaa.

Precautionary measures were taken to avoid civilian casualties and collateral damage, according to the coalition. The group also claimed that hospitals and organizations in the area have been compromised by the militants and civilians have reportedly been taken as human shields.

Unconfirmed social media footage allegedly shows the scene in Sanaa—featuring one blast that illuminates the night sky.

Civilians and dogs can be overheard reacting to the blasts in another unconfirmed clip said to be from the area.

Unconfirmed stills have also been uploaded to social media.

The strikes come hours after the Saudi-led coalition published footage that appears to show Houthi militants running test on an air system amid take-off and landing at Sanaa International Airport, which possesses a single, 3,200-meter-long runway.

The coalition argued that the video proved that Houthi militants have transformed the airport into military barracks, complete with workshops, missiles, drone storage and even booby-traps.

[Days prior, Houthi fighters took responsibility](#) for a number of attacks against Saudi Arabian infrastructure, including the Royal Saudi Air Force's King Khalid Air Base.

Additional "military targets" were struck in the capital city of Riyadh, as well as Jeddah, Abha, Jizan, and Najran, according to the Yemen-based militants.

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US Reportedly Mulling Lethal Aid Package for Ukraine Amid Invasion Concerns
By - Evan Craighead

On Monday, the Kremlin accused Bloomberg and other US media of being involved in a "targeted information campaign" after the outlet reported that the US had shared intel with NATO allies that included a map outlining an alleged "buildup" of Russian troops near the Ukrainian border. Moscow has rejected claims of a planned invasion of Ukraine. The administration of US President Joe Biden is considering the deployment of military advisers and ship military equipment - including weaponry - to Ukraine amid a purported buildup of Russian forces along the border, [according to a new report from CNN](#). Citing sources familiar with the deliberations, the outlet detailed that such a package could possibly include shipments of US-made Javelin anti-tank missiles, anti-armor missiles, and/or mortars.

Retired Lt. Col. Cedric Leighton, a US veteran with 26 years of military intelligence experience, told the outlet that while the Javelin anti-tank missiles "are quite effective against the T-80 tanks, which the Russians are actually employing in these efforts against Ukraine right now," the issuance of a lethal aid package would undoubtedly risk "further heightening tensions" between Washington and Moscow.

Sources said air defense systems, like man-portable FIM-92 Stinger missiles, are also under consideration.

The US Department of Defense has also been pushing to send Ukraine equipment previously used for US-led operations in Afghanistan, such as the Soviet-designed Mi-17 military helicopter.

As for the deployment of military advisers, it remains unclear whether those who could be sent to the region would actually be deployed to Ukraine, the sources told CNN.

During a Monday briefing, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki reiterated Washington's call for Moscow to "de-escalate tensions."

"We've had extensive interactions with our European allies and partners in recent weeks, including with Ukraine," Psaki said. "We've discussed our concerns about Russian military activities and harsh rhetoric towards Ukraine."

Washington has also spoken with Moscow officials regarding both Ukraine and US-Russian relations, she said.

However, no details were provided about the reported package to Kiev. "I don't have anything to preview for you on that," Psaki noted.

Last week, Russian President Vladimir Putin panned reports of Russia planning an attack on its neighbor, characterizing them as "alarmist." More recently, [Russian Foreign Minister Sergei](#)

[Lavrov asserted](#) that speculation surrounding Ukraine will arise, "one way or another," in the next meeting between Putin and his American counterpart.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov [pointed out on Monday](#) that Moscow is being subjected to a "targeted information campaign" that is increasing tensions in the area.

"Kiev itself is building up its forces, Kiev is being helped to build up its forces. Kiev is supplied with a significant amount of weapons, including modern, high-tech weapons," Peskov said.

"And all this, of course, we are watching with great concern, knowing the significant influence of extremist politicians in Ukraine."

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Rittenhouse Accuses Biden of Malice, Defamation in First TV Interview Since Verdict
By - Evan Craighead

On Friday, US President Joe Biden declared that he stands by the jury's decision to acquit Kyle Rittenhouse, the teenager who claimed he was acting in self-defense when he shot and killed two people and injured another individual amid civil unrest in Kenosha, Wisconsin, on August 25, 2020. Biden also acknowledged that he did not watch the trial.

Rittenhouse, 18, had a few words for the US president during the Monday broadcast of his interview with Fox News opinion show host Tucker Carlson.

Speaking of a video Biden tweeted in September 2020, the 18-year-old said that Biden defamed his character by including him in a compilation alongside known white supremacist and militia groups.

"Mr. President, if I could say one thing to you, I would urge you to go back and watch the trial and understand the facts before you make a statement," he said to Biden during the interview.

The 18-year-old asserted that the president's characterization of him was unfair.

Within the video in question, Fox News anchor Chris Wallace is asking then-Republican nominee and President Donald Trump if he was "willing to condemn white supremacist and militia groups and to say that they need to stand down and not add to the violence in a number of these cities as we saw in Kenosha and as we've seen in Portland."

An image of Rittenhouse is flashed as Wallace mentions the unrest in Kenosha.

Later in the video, Trump is seen condemning political violence from the left before infamously telling members of the Proud Boys, a far-right, neo-fascist, group to "stand back and stand by."

"There's no other way to put it: the President of the United States refused to disavow white supremacists on the debate stage last night," Biden said in the tweet. The video compilation has been viewed more than 3.7 million times.

"It's actual malice, defaming my character for him to say something like that," he said in his first television interview since the verdict, denying that he was a white supremacist.

Rittenhouse also clarified that he was not part of a militia.

Rittenhouse Says Media Manipulated Facts of Case to Fit White Supremacist Narrative

Rittenhouse maintained that the city of Kenosha failed their community by not calling for the National Guard ahead of the racial justice demonstrations. He told Carlson that he believes

"opportunists" took advantage of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) demonstration and used it as a moment to cause chaos.

The 18-year-old also revealed that he supports the racial justice movement and their right to protest.

"I agree with the BLM movement. I agree everybody has the right to protest and assemble," he told Carlson. "I do not agree that people have the right to burn down ... American cities."

"This case had nothing to do with race," Rittenhouse raised.

The 18-year-old asserted that it was "sick" how people were twisting the facts of the case to fit a narrative in which he was a white supremacist and member of a militia.

In addition to an apology from the US president, Rittenhouse may also be seeking to hold a number of entities and people accountable for the lies and defamatory statements made during the trial. He told Carlson that he had no idea the case could be so polarizing and politicized by the media.

Looking forward, Rittenhouse said that he plans on attending Arizona State University, although he does not know whether he will take classes in-person.

"This is far from the life I planned," Rittenhouse confessed, reiterating that he wishes the situation never took place.

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Former South Korean President Chun Doo-Hwan Dead at 90 - Yonhap
By - Nevin Brown

Chun Doo-Hwan, South Korea's fifth president, has died. Chun, who was 90, had served as South Korea's president from 1980 to 1988, following a coup d'état.

Chun died at his home in Seoul at 8:40 a.m. It was reported in August that he had been [diagnosed with multiple myeloma](#), a type of blood cancer that affects plasma cells. [He reportedly died of cardiac arrest.](#)

Chun's legacy is extremely complicated. He rose to power through a military coup and ruled South Korea as a strongman. In May of 1980, as Chun was consolidating his hold over South Korea, he enacted martial law throughout the entirety of the country. The move signaled to Koreans that another military dictatorship was set to rule the nation and prompted citizens in the city of Gwangju to mobilize.

The event became known as the Gwangju Democratization Movement. Chun immediately sent troops to end the movement and led to a bloody massacre that resulted in the deaths of some 4,900 people. The incident earned him the nickname, "The Butcher of Gwangju."

Chun's presidency began with his abolition of all political parties, limiting freedom of the press, and enacting a new constitution. In 1983, North Korea attempted a failed assassination of Chun that resulted in the deaths of 17 people.

Chun ruled South Korea as a military dictator, but he was unable to turn his reign into a lifelong endeavor. The constitution he enacted in 1981 restricted a president to one seven-year term, which he honored.

Chun planned to hand the nation over to his protege, Roh Tae-woo. In 1987, when Roh was named candidate for president, it sparked pro-democracy demonstrations throughout South Korea. To appease the pro-democracy movement sweeping the country, Roh promised South Koreans direct presidential elections.

In December of 1987, Roh won the presidential election and Chun handed the presidency to Roh in February of 1988 in the first peaceful transfer of power in South Korea's history.

Over the next decade, Chun's brutal tactics to gain and maintain control of South Korea were put on trial by an increasingly democratic South Korean society. In April 1997, he was convicted of leading an insurrection, conspiracy to commit an insurrection, partaking in an insurrection, illegal troop movement orders, dereliction of duty during martial law, murder of superior officers, attempted murder of superior officers, murder of subordinate troops, leading a rebellion, conspiracy to commit rebellion, taking part in a rebellion, murder for the purpose of rebellion, and crimes relating to bribery. His conviction resulted in a life sentence and a ₩220 billion fine. Chun's sentence was commuted in December of 1997, but he was still required to pay the ₩220 billion fine. In November of 2020, [Chun was found guilty of defaming a pro-democracy activist](#). In his 2017 memoir, he called Cho Chul-hyun a "despicable liar" for testifying that government helicopters had fired on civilians.

Chun's two-year jail sentence was suspended due to his old age and deteriorating health.

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Michael Cohen Released From Prison Sentence, Claims Trump's 'Fragile Ego' Will Prevent 2024 Bid

By - Nevin Brown

Michael Cohen, who previously served as former US President Donald Trump's personal lawyer for a period of years, was officially released from prison on Monday after having served some three years.

Cohen initially served out his sentence in prison before later serving out the remainder in home confinement due to Covid concerns. He began his sentence in May of 2020, and is now expected to undergo an additional three years of supervised release.

[Trump's former lawyer pleaded guilty to nine federal charges](#), including tax fraud, lying to Congress, and paying off two women to prevent them from going public with their allegations of sexual affairs with Donald Trump.

[In a statement made outside a New York federal courthouse](#), Cohen said, "I will continue to provide information, testimony, documents and my full cooperation on all ongoing investigations to ensure that others are held responsible for their dirty deeds and that no one is ever believed to be above the law."

Following Cohen's release from prison, he told CNN that he believes Trump will be indicted, saying, "I believe, personally, that they have more than enough in order to bring the indictments yesterday."

He added that he believes that the information and leads he has provided prosecutors are more than enough to indict the former president, adding that "the wheels of justice turn slowly, but they always come full circle."

Cohen also gave his opinion on Trump's 2024 presidential plans, saying, "Donald will not run, because first of all, he has an incredibly fragile ego. He lost by what? Nine million votes the first time, he will lose by more than nine million the second, and his fragile ego cannot stand to be considered a two-time loser."

He later added that Trump's supposed 2024 presidential run is, "nothing more than the world's greatest grift. He's bringing in money greater than when he had the Trump organization and all its assets. So why would he give this up?"

Cohen was Trump's personal lawyer and self-described political 'fixer' from 2006 to 2018. He at first refused to turn on the former president amidst the investigations until federal authorities raided his home, office, and hotel room in 2018.

Cohen sued William Burr, Trump's Attorney General from February 2019 to December 2020, for allegedly using the Justice Department to retaliate against Cohen over his plans to write a tell-all book about Trump. Since then Cohen has released a book about Trump and reportedly has plans to write another

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US Imposes Sanctions on Two Vessels, One Entity as Targets Over Nord Stream 2
By - Nevin Brown

The United States has imposed further sanctions in connection to the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. United States Secretary of State Anthony Blinken said on Monday that two vessels and the Russian-linked company, Transadria Ltd, will face sanctions over their involvement in the completion of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline.

Blinken said in a statement, "The Department of State has submitted a report to Congress pursuant to the Protecting Europe's Energy Security Act of 2019 (PEESA), as amended. The report lists two vessels and one Russia-linked entity, Transadria Ltd., involved in the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. Transadria Ltd. will be sanctioned under PEESA, and its vessel, the Marlin, will be identified as blocked property."

PEESA, [Protecting Europe's Energy Security Act](#), is a national defense act that aims to curtail Russia's use of energy exports for coercive purposes. The United States, Ukraine, and other Eastern European nations have opposed the expansion of Baltic Sea pipelines.

In response to the development, Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov blasted the move as being completely unacceptable.

"Dialogue through sanctions is unacceptable and violates international law," he said in a statement posted on the diplomatic mission's Facebook page. "We regard all attempts against

Russian oil and gas exports to Europe as unfair competition that undermines the principles of a free market."

Nord Stream 2 is a natural gas pipeline that runs under the Baltic Sea and links Russia to Germany. Construction of the pipeline began in 2018 and was completed in September of 2021 after the US eased sanctions in May 2021.

The project was preceded by an original Nord Stream gas pipeline that began in 2011 and was completed in 2012. The introduction of a second Nord Stream pipeline is estimated to double the gas exportation capacity to 3.9 trillion cubic feet.

The United States reportedly eased sanctions related to the construction of Nord Stream 2 to improve their relationship with Germany. Germany, outside of Russia, was the nation most eager to complete the project.

The expansion of the Nord Stream pipelines will provide Germany and Western Europe with cheap natural gas. Transporting natural gas through overland pipelines is more costly because Eastern European countries charge fees for its passage.

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Daughter of First US Astronaut to Join Blue Origin's December Flight Alongside 5 Others

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - Private space firm Blue Origin, owned by Jeff Bezos, announced on Tuesday that the daughter of the first US astronaut, Alan Shepard, will join the upcoming flight in December along with five other people.

"Blue Origin today announced that the crew of its upcoming NS-19 flight on December 9 will include two honorary guests and four paying customers. Guests include Good Morning America co-anchor Michael Strahan and Laura Shepard Churchley, the eldest daughter of Alan Shepard, who was the first American to fly to space," Blue Origin said.

Shepherd currently serves as chair of the Astronaut Scholarship Foundation Board of Trustees, a group that raises funds for college students.

Space industry executive and philanthropist Dylan Taylor, investor Evan Dick, Bess Ventures founder Lane Bess, and Cameron Bess will join the crew.

"This mission furthers the company's vision of millions of people living and working in space for the benefit of Earth. It will be New Shepard's third human flight this year, the sixth for the program in 2021, and the 19th in its history. It will carry a full manifest of six astronauts to space for the first time," the statement added.

Live launch coverage will start on the BlueOrigin.com website. The lift-off will take place from Launch Site One in West Texas.

Alan Shepard became the second person and the first American citizen to travel into space in 1961. In 1971, he was among the US astronauts who walked on the Moon.

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US Orders Oil Reserve Release in Response to 7-Year Price Highs - Energy Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - The United States has ordered a release from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) in response to the oil prices hitting their seven-year highs, to ensure adequate supply as the world exits the COVID-19 pandemic, the Energy Department said on Tuesday.

Earlier in the day, President Joe Biden announced the release of 50 million barrels of oil from the SPR in concert with other energy consuming nations, including China, India, Japan, South Korea and the UK.

"As the global economy recovers from the pandemic, oil supply has failed to increase at a pace necessary to meet demand. Today's decision is in response to the highest oil prices experienced in seven years and aims to ensure adequate supply as we exit the pandemic," the statement said.

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Biden Announces Release of 50Mln Barrels of Oil From Strategic Reserve

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden announced on Tuesday the release of 50 million barrels of oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve in concert with other energy consuming nations, including China, India, Japan, South Korea and the UK.

"Today, the President is announcing that the Department of Energy will make available releases of 50 million barrels of oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve to lower prices for Americans and address the mismatch between demand exiting the pandemic and supply," the White House said in an statement.

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Blinken Urges Sudan's Leaders to Work Rapidly to Implement Political Deal - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken recently spoke with Sudanese Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok and General Abdel Fattah Burhan to discuss the restoration of a process to transition to a civilian-led government, State Department Spokesperson Ned Price said in a statement.

"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken spoke today with Sudanese Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok and separately with General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, Chair of Sudan's Sovereign Council," Price said on Monday. "The Secretary encouraged both leaders to work rapidly to put Sudan's democratic transition back on track."

Blinken urged Hamdok and Burhan to take timely action to implement the elements of the agreement reached November 21 to transfer power to a civilian government, including creating a transitional legislative council, judicial structures, electoral institutions, and a constitutional convention, Price said.

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US Announces 95% of Federal Employees Now Vaccinated Against COVID-19 - White House

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - The US government has now achieved a 95% compliance rate of vaccination against COVID -19 among the 3.5 million federal employees, White House COVID-19 Response Coordinator Jeff Zients said.

The government has achieved 95% compliance and 90% of the 3.5 million federal workers are [now] successfully vaccinated," Zients told a nationally televised briefing on Monday. "We have 98% compliance at the IRS [Internal Revenue Service] [and] 99% compliance at the FBI." Vaccination compliance rates had reached nearly 98% at US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and 99% at the Federal Aviation Authority (FAA), he said.

Zients explained that the federal government had now amassed more than enough booster vaccines to give a third shot of immunization to every adult in the United States.

"We are prepared: We have secured enough supply of booster vaccines for every adult. Boosters are free and readily available at more than 80,000 locations throughout the country including 40,000 local pharmacies," Zients said.

Over the past weekend, health workers had delivered 3 million booster shots into people, an average of a million booster shots per day and 71% of all American adults were now fully vaccinated compared with less than 1% when Biden took office in January, he added.

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IMF Approves Disbursement of \$699Mln for Ukraine After Completing First Performance Review

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) said that it has approved the disbursement of \$699 million to Ukraine after its Executive Board completed the first review of the country's economic performance under the existing loan agreement.

"The Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) completed today the first review of Ukraine's economic performance under the 18- month Stand-By Arrangement (SBA) that was approved on June 9, 2020. The completion of the review allows the authorities to draw the equivalent of about US\$699 million (SDR 500 million), bringing total disbursements under the current SBA to about US\$2.8 billion (SDR 2 billion)," the IMF said in a press release on Monday.

The IMF also approved an extension of the arrangement to the end of June 2022 as well as a rephrasing of program disbursements.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in a statement that the funds will be used to support Ukraine's financial system and to combat the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

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Biden Backs Powell to Continue Heading Federal Reserve, Says Central Bank Needs Stability

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - The Federal Reserve needs stable and independent leadership to navigate a post-pandemic world and Jerome Powell would be the right apolitical candidate to continue heading the US central bank, President Joe Biden said.

"Now some will no doubt ask why I'm renominating Jay, when he was the choice of a Republican predecessor? Why I'm not picking a Democrat?" Biden said during a press conference on Monday. "Put directly at this moment of both enormous potential and enormous uncertainty for our economy, we need stability and independence. At the Federal Reserve, Jay has proven the independence that I value in the Fed chair."

The renomination of Powell, a Republican appointed by former president Donald Trump, comes after one of the most tumultuous periods ever for both, the Federal Reserve and the US economy emerging from the coronavirus pandemic and the recession triggered by the measures implemented to address it.

Powell's reappointment had been opposed by the far-left wing of Biden's Democratic party establishment that has criticized Powell for lax regulations at the US central bank.

Biden acknowledged the nurturing role played at the Federal Reserve by Powell and Lael Brainard, a governor at the central bank whom the US president elevated to the post of vice chair. Both will have to go through Senate hearings to confirm the president's decision.

Biden particularly spoke about Powell's determination to defy former president Trump's attempts to influence the Fed chair's job or politicize the central bank altogether.

"In the last administration, he stood up to unprecedented political interference and, in doing so, successfully maintained the integrity and credibility of this institution," Biden said. "It's just one of the many reasons why Jay gets support from across the political spectrum."

Powell had repeatedly turned down Trump's suggestion to employ zero interest rates for the United States, even before the COVID-19 breakout, to boost growth. Since the pandemic began, however, the Fed has held rates at near zero, saying such support was required for the beleaguered economy.

Notwithstanding Biden's praise, Powell and the Federal Reserve have taken intense criticism over inflation running at its highest levels in over 30 years in the US economy, which has been caught up in supply chain bottlenecks in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis.

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

In March, the Federal Reserve announced it expected a 6.5% economic expansion for all of 2021 and has not changed its target despite the uneven growth in the past three quarters. The problem the central bank continues to face is inflation as wages and the prices of almost everything have soared from the lows of the pandemic.

Powell and the Federal Reserve have also been criticized because of an ethics scandal where several officials of the central bank were found to have engaged in trading stocks at a time when the institution was implementing policies aimed at boosting markets. Powell himself disclosed that he owned municipal bonds, which the Federal Reserve was also buying, and he also bought and sold funds tied to the broad stock market indexes.

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US Federal Reserve Chief, Vice Chair Should Get 'Broad Senate Support' - Yellen

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - The renomination of Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell for a new four-year term, along with the pick of the US central bank's Governor Lael Brainard as his number two, should get broad Senate approval, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said.

"Powell and Brainard should have broad Senate support" on their nominations, Yellen said in an interview on Monday.

Earlier in the day, President Joe Biden announced his support for Powell for another term at the helm of the Federal Reserve and also his support for Brainard as vice chair of the US central bank.

"America needs steady, independent and effective leadership at the Federal Reserve," Biden said via Twitter. "That's why I will nominate Jerome Powell for a second term as Chair of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System and Dr. Lael Brainard to serve as Vice Chair of the Board of Governors."

The renomination of Powell, appointed by former president Donald Trump, comes after one of the most tumultuous periods ever for both the US economy and its central bank emerging from the coronavirus pandemic and the recession triggered by the measures implemented to address it.

Powell's reappointment had been opposed by the far-left political wing of Biden's Democratic party establishment, which have criticized him for lax regulations at the central bank.

Pundits have speculated for months that Brainard, a Democrat serving as Federal Reserve governor and an advocate of climate issues in banking regulation and monetary policy, would replace Powell.

Both will have to sit through Senate hearings to confirm the presidential decision.

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US House Select Committee Subpoenas Trump Adviser Roger Stone, InfoWars Founder Alex Jones

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - The US House Select Committee investigating the events at the Capitol on January 6 said in a press release that it has issued new subpoenas to five individuals, including former Donald Trump campaign adviser Roger Stone and InfoWars founder Alex Jones, to testify about their role in the rallies in Washington.

"Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) today announced that the Select Committee has issued subpoenas to five individuals as a part of its investigation into the January 6th attack on the US Capitol and its causes. The committee is demanding records and testimony from five witnesses who helped or had knowledge of the planning and financing of the January 5th and 6th rallies in Washington, DC and the subsequent march and violent attack on the United States Capitol," the release said on Monday.

The US House Select Committee also subpoenaed Dustin Stockton, Jennifer Lawrence and Taylor Budowich, the release said.

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White House Says Biden Intends to Run for Reelection in 2024

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - Joe Biden intends to run for reelection in 2024, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki confirmed on Monday during a press briefing aboard Air Force One.

"He is, that's his intention," Psaki said in response to a question whether Biden will run for reelection in 2024.

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White House Says Has Nothing to Preview on Sending Military Equipment, Weapons to Ukraine

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said she has nothing to preview on reports that the United States is considering sending more military weapons and equipment to Ukraine.

"I don't have anything to preview for you on that," Psaki said on Monday when asked if the United States is considering sending military equipment and weapons to the Ukrainian border with Russia.

Earlier in the day, US media reported that President Joe Biden is mulling sending new lethal weapons and military advisers to Ukraine over fears of a possible Russian incursion. Russian President Vladimir Putin said last week that reports warning about Russia's alleged preparations for an invasion in Ukraine were "alarmist."

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US Says Had Talks With Moscow, Kiev About Russian Military Buildup on Border With Ukraine

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - The United States has held discussions with officials in Moscow and Kiev about the Russian military buildup near the Ukrainian border, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said during a press briefing aboard Air Force One.

"We continue to have serious concerns about Russian military activities and harsh rhetoric towards Ukraine. We call on Moscow to de-escalate tensions. We've had extensive interactions with our European allies and partners in recent weeks, including with Ukraine. We've discussed our concerns about Russian military activities and harsh rhetoric towards Ukraine. We've also held discussions with Russian officials about Ukraine and US-Russian relations generally," Psaki said on Monday.

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IMF Approves Disbursement of \$699Mln for Ukraine After Completing First Performance Review

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) said that it has approved the disbursement of \$699 million to Ukraine after it completed the first review of the country's economic performance under the existing loan agreement.

"The Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) completed today the first review of Ukraine's economic performance under the 18-month Stand-By Arrangement (SBA) that was approved on June 9, 2020. The completion of the review allows the authorities to draw the equivalent of about US\$699 million (SDR 500 million), bringing total disbursements under the current SBA to about US\$2.8 billion (SDR 2 billion)," the IMF said in a press release on Monday.

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US Urges Americans to Leave Ethiopia Before Crisis Worsens - Senior Official

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - US citizens in Ethiopia should leave the country immediately before the crisis there worsens, a senior State Department official said during a conference call.

"We're urging US citizens to leave Ethiopia now while commercial flight options are available," the official said on Monday. "Our core message is do not wait until the situation gets worse to decide to leave. Leave before things change."

The US Embassy in Ethiopia will be unable to assist Americans seeking to leave the country if commercial flight options are unavailable and the Biden administration does not plan to send military aircraft to conduct evacuation operations, the official said.

The United States continues to call on the warring parties in Ethiopia to negotiate an agreement to cease all hostilities, the official said.

US diplomatic engagement with the Ethiopian government and other partners in the region continues, the official added.

Earlier in November, 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 (PNLF) who are advancing upon the country's capital Addis Ababa. This development prompted several countries to start evacuating their diplomatic missions from Ethiopia.

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Biden Administration Considering Sending Weapons to Ukraine Amid Russian Buildup - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is considering sending new lethal weapons and military advisers to Ukraine amid fears of a possible Russian incursion, CNN reported, citing multiple sources familiar with the matter.

The weapons would include air defense systems, Javelin anti-tank and anti-armor missiles, and mortars, the sources reportedly said. The Defense Department is pressing for Mi-17 helicopters initially intended for Afghanistan to be sent to Ukraine instead, according to the report published on Monday.

The reports come amid a buildup of military forces near the Russian border with Ukraine, which has US Defense officials paying close attention. Some in the administration are concerned that sending the equipment could be viewed as a major escalation by Russia, the sources said. Russian President Vladimir Putin said last week that reports warning about Russia's alleged preparations for an invasion in Ukraine were "alarmist."

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US Targets 2 Vessels, 1 Entity in New Nord Stream 2 Sanctions – Blinken

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) – The United States will impose sanctions on one entity and two vessels that are allegedly involved in the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project which the US government and lawmakers continue to oppose, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Monday.

"The Department of State has submitted a report to Congress pursuant to the Protecting Europe's Energy Security Act of 2019 (PEESA), as amended. The report lists two vessels and

one Russia-linked entity, Transadria Ltd., involved in the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. Transadria Ltd. will be sanctioned under PEESA, and its vessel, the Marlin, will be identified as blocked property," Blinken said in a statement.

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US to Invest \$1.5Bln in Equitable Health Care - Harris

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration will invest \$1.5 billion in equitable healthcare in the United States, US Vice President Kamala Harris said.

"I am proud to announce, thanks to our American Rescue Plan, we will invest \$1.5 billion to help us do just that," Harris told reporters at the White House on Monday. "With these funds, we will invest in our national health service core and our nurse core."

Harris emphasized that the Biden administration aims to address an urgent issue of shortage of medical staff in the country.

"Our nation must invest in the health care workforce that provides access to equitable health care for all Americans," she said.

The new investment will allow supporting more than 22,000 health care providers through scholarships and other payments, she added.

Harris noted that the medical professionals serve more than 23 million Americans throughout the country.

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US Delays Webb Telescope Launch for 4 Days After Shock Clamp Release Incident - NASA

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - NASA announced that it is delaying the launch of the James Webb Space Telescope by four days until December 22 to investigate the unanticipated release of a clamp band holding the highly sensitive instrument to its launch vehicle.

"The launch readiness date for the James Webb Space Telescope is moving to no earlier than December 22 to allow for additional testing of the observatory, following a recent incident that occurred during Webb's launch preparations," NASA said in a press release on Monday.

The incident occurred during operations at the satellite preparation facility in Kourou, French Guiana, performed under the overall responsibility of France's Arianespace organization, release said.

The telescope was previously scheduled to launch on December 18 on an Arianespace Ariane 5 rocket from Kourou, the release said.

"Technicians were preparing to attach Webb to the launch vehicle adapter, which is used to integrate the observatory with the upper stage of the Ariane 5 rocket. A sudden, unplanned

release of a clamp band - which secures Webb to the launch vehicle adapter - caused a vibration throughout the observatory," the release added.

A NASA-led anomaly review board was immediately convened to investigate and instituted additional testing to determine with certainty the incident did not damage any components. NASA and its mission partners will provide an update when the testing is completed at the end of this week, according to the release.

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US Aware of Americans Detained in Ethiopia, Remains in Contact With Government - Official

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - The United States is aware that US citizens have been detained in Ethiopia and is in close contact with the government to discuss gaining access to those individuals, a State Department official said.

"On the issue of US citizen detentions, we are aware of detentions of US citizens and we are in close contact with the government of Ethiopia so we can attain access to those individuals but due to privacy considerations I can't go into anymore detail," the official said during a conference call on Monday.

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Ballet Teacher Poroshin's Trial on Sex Assault Charges to Start in January - Consul in US

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - A pre-trial hearing in the case of ballet instructor Ivan Poroshin, accused of molesting a minor, is scheduled for January 10, Russian Consul General in Houston Alexander Zakharov told Sputnik on Monday.

"The [pre-trial] court hearing is scheduled for January 10, and we hope that the trial will not be postponed, and he will not have to wait for this," Zakharov said. "We provided Russian-speaking lawyers to the family ... we ensured that a Russian-speaking translator was assigned to him so that he could familiarize himself with the case materials and the charges," Zakharov said. According to the court's database, the hearings in the Poroshin case were originally scheduled to start on November 18, but were postponed until January 25. A pre-trial conference is scheduled for January 10.

There are eight criminal episodes in the Poroshin case, the first is kidnapping, and the rest are related to sexual conduct with a minor.

Poroshin is a teacher at a ballet school in Arizona. He is accused of sexually assaulting a 16-year-old student. According to the local branch of the NBC channel, citing the police, Poroshin admitted to having had sexual contact with the minor.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY
WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) -

PUTIN-DRAGHI TALKS

- * Russian President Vladimir Putin, in a conversation with Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi, said that Kiev's provocative steps to deliberately aggravate the situation in Donbas were a matter of concern, the Kremlin said on Monday.
- * Putin confirmed to Draghi Russia's readiness to ensure uninterrupted gas supplies to Europe, including using the capabilities of Nord Stream 2, the Kremlin said.
- * Putin and Draghi discussed the situation on the borders of Belarus with EU countries, the Kremlin said.
- * Draghi discussed by phone with Putin the situation in Ukraine and on the border of Poland and Belarus, the Chigi Palace said.

DEADLY INCIDENT IN WISCONSIN

- * There is no evidence the recent deadly car-ramming incident in Waukesha, Wisconsin, was a terrorist attack, Police Chief Dan Thompson said on Monday.
- * US President Joe Biden said that his family is praying for the families of those killed and injured in the deadly incident in Waukesha, Wisconsin, when a vehicle plowed through a gathering of people during a Christmas-celebration event over the weekend.

SUDAN DEVELOPMENTS

- * Russia expects that the implementation of the agreement concluded between the head of the Sudanese Sovereign Council, Abdel Fattah Burkhan and Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, previously ousted by the military from the post, will help stabilize the situation in the country, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

US-BELARUS RELATIONS

- * Direct dialog with Minsk over the migrant crisis is necessary despite the fact that no results can be anticipated, Austrian Chancellor Alexander Schallenberg said on Monday.
- * Minsk's proposal to Berlin to open a humanitarian corridor for 2,000 migrants who are located at the Belarus-Poland border is unacceptable, German government spokesman Steffen Seibert said.
- * Approximately 2,000 illegal immigrants will be deported from Poland this week, spokeswoman for the Border Guard Anna Michalska said.
- * Unfounded reports that appeared in western media and claim that Moscow uses current migration crisis to "invade" Ukraine are nothing more than a myth, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.
- * The European Union members are forcing fewer migrants over the border back to Belarus, President Alexander Lukashenko said.

MOLDOVA GAS CRISIS

* Moldovan gas distributor Moldovagaz received a notification from Gazprom about the possible termination of gas supplies, but the country's authorities have not yet familiarized themselves with it in detail, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Infrastructure Andrei Spinu said on Monday.

* Moldovagaz said it was working on the problem of fulfilling payment obligations to Gazprom and hoped to resolve it as soon as possible with the help of the authorities of the republic.

* The Moldovan authorities did not receive any notification from Gazprom about the possible termination of gas supplies due to non-payment, the country's ministry of infrastructure told Sputnik.

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UPDATE: US Imposes Sanctions on 4 Individuals in Afghanistan - Treasury

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - The United States has added four Afghan men to its Designated Global Terrorists list, including Ismatullah Khalozai who was designated as a key financial facilitator for the branch of the Islamic State (banned in Russia) in Afghanistan, the US Treasury Department said on Monday.

"Today, the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated Ismatullah Khalozai, an individual who has acted as a financial facilitator for the Islamic State's Khorasan Province (ISIL-Khorasan), active in Afghanistan and commonly referred to as "ISIS-K," the Treasury Department said in a press release.

Three more individuals, Sultan Aziz Azam, Sanaullah Ghafari, Maulawi Rajab, were also added to the Specially Designated Global Terrorists list, the release said.

The US government alleges that Ismatullah Khalozai was transferring funds to finance Islamic State-Khorasan operations from Turkey for a period of two years. Khalozai previously used a United Arab Emirates-based scheme to sell luxury items in order to generate funds to support the terror group, the release added.

Khalozai has also been involved in human smuggling operations for the benefit of Islamic State-Khorasan, including personally smuggling a courier from Afghanistan to Turkey, according to the release.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a separate statement that Ghafari is the current overall emir of the Islamic State-Khorasan who is responsible for approving all of the terror group's operations in Afghanistan.

Azam has held the position of spokesperson since the terror group came to Afghanistan, while Rajab is a senior leader in Kabul province and has planned attacks on the Afghan capital, Blinken said.

US citizens are prohibited from engaging in any transactions with the designated persons and the latter's property and interests in property subject to US jurisdiction are blocked, he added.

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Blinken Tells Sudanese Leaders US Wants More Progress Before Restoring Aid - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - Secretary of State Antony Blinken told Sudanese leaders recently that the United States wants to see more progress in the country before it will restore aid, State Department spokesman Ned Price said on Monday.

"The Secretary had an opportunity today to speak to Prime Minister [Abdalla] Hamdok, to speak to general [Abdel Fattah] Burhan. That was essentially his message, that we must continue to see progress, we must continue to see Sudan move back down the democratic path and that starts with the reinstatement of the prime minister but it certainly doesn't end there," Price said regarding steps needed to restore US aid to Sudan.

Price said the United States calls for the immediate release of all civilian leaders detained in Sudan and reiterated the call to lift the state of emergency in the country.

The United States did not facilitate discussions in Sudan that led to a political agreement that was signed by the military and civilian forces on Sunday that guarantees the transfer of power to a civilian government in the agreed timeframe, the spokesman added.

The agreement was signed by Burhan, the head of the Sudanese Sovereign Council, and Hamdok in a televised ceremony in the presidential palace in Khartoum.

The military seized power in Sudan on October 25, dissolving the transitional government and arresting its civilian leaders. Citizens responded by taking to the streets for regular protests, some of which escalated into violence.

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Blinken Says Maduro Deprived Venezuelans of Free, Fair Elections in Sunday Vote

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - The Venezuelan people were deprived of a free and fair electoral process by the Maduro government during regional and local elections on Sunday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement.

"The Maduro regime deprived Venezuelans yet again of their right to participate in a free and fair electoral process, during Venezuela's November 21 regional and local elections. Fearful of the voice and vote of Venezuelans, the regime grossly skewed the process to determine the result of this election long before any ballots had been cast," Blinken said on Mon.

Arbitrary arrests, harassment of political and civil society actors, and other authoritarian tactics quashed political pluralism and ensured the elections would not reflect the will of the Venezuelan people, the diplomat argued.

The US stands with Venezuela and supports negotiations to restore democracy in the country, Blinken said. The US will continue to work with Venezuelan and international partners to press for the release of all those unjustly detained by the government and an end to human rights abuses, Blinken added.

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US Health Agency Raises COVID-19 Warning for Germany, Denmark

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) – The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on Monday put Germany and Denmark on the list of countries with the highest COVID-19-related threat and recommended avoiding travel to these two destinations.

At the same time, CDC has lowered the threat level associated with the novel coronavirus for Israel and Aruba from Very High to just High.

As of today, CDC doesn't recommend traveling to 76 countries because of the risky COVID-19 situation. This list includes among others Russia, the United Kingdom, Ukraine, Norway, Switzerland, and Turkey.

Both Germany and Denmark are currently experiencing a significant surge in new COVID-19 infections with the seven-day average being over 49,000 and 26,000, respectively, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University.

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US Will Not Engage in Unilateral Steps on Iran Nuclear Program - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - The United States will not engage in unilateral steps on the Iran nuclear program, as it seeks mutual return to full compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), also known as the Iranian nuclear deal, State Department spokesman Ned Price said on Monday.

"We've been clear - we will not take unilateral steps. Mutual return to compliance is in the interests of the United States, it is in the interests of the P5+1, it is als ... in the interests of Iran," Price said.

In 2015, Iran signed a nuclear deal, known officially as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Actions, with the P5+1 group, which includes the United States, China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, Germany and the European Union. It required Tehran to scale back its nuclear program and drastically reduce its uranium reserves in exchange for sanctions relief, including the lifting of an arms embargo five years after the deal was made.

In May 2018, the US abandoned its conciliatory stance, withdrawing from the JCPOA and implementing hardline policies against Iran, prompting the latter to largely discontinue its own obligations under the accord.

Since April, Vienna has been hosting talks aimed at preventing the Iran nuclear deal from failing altogether. The sixth round of the talks finished on June 20 but the negotiations have since hit a deadlock. The negotiations are set to resume on November 29.

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Conditional Sanctions Over Donbas an 'Invitation' to Russian Aggression - Naftogaz

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - The proposal of US Sen. Bob Menendez to release a cascade of new sanctions if Russia moves to aggravate the conflict in Donbas looks like an "invitation to military aggression," Yuriy Vitrenko, CEO of Ukrainian energy giant Naftogaz, said on Monday.

Last week, US Senate Foreign Relations Chairman Bob Menendez introduced a measure that would entail a broad range of sanctions against the Russian government if it engages in or supports a significant escalation of hostilities in or against Ukraine.

"This kind of logical construct that now, for example, we hear from... Sen. Menendez is that 'look, we'll have a condition that if there is a full scale war or this military aggression intensifies, then basically there will be sanctions.' It seems like an invitation to an extent for this kind of military aggression," Vitrenko told an Atlantic Council event. "Because first of all, I personally don't believe that it will be easy when there is a military aggression and when it's clear that the gas cannot flow through Ukraine to tell Europeans that 'look, guys, you will also have to stay without Russian gas because the US will sanction Nord Stream 2."

"Basically, this is kind of an open invitation for Russians to increase stakes in this military aggression," he said. "For Ukraine, it makes us really not comfortable when we see these open invitations for Russia to be more aggressive, again to be in breach with European rules. And again coming back to this kind of logical construct of Sen. Menendez, to us it seems really illogical."

Under the amendment, the US president will determine whether the Russian government is engaged in or knowingly supports a significant escalation in hostilities in or against Ukraine compared to levels before November 1, 2021.

The sanctions would target high-level Russian government and military officials, entities and officials tied to Nord Stream 2, Russian banks, and state-owned businesses.

The measure would also ban primary and secondary sovereign debt transactions. Moreover, it would authorize additional security assistance for Ukraine.

The amendment was submitted as a part of the 2022 National Defense Authorization Act, which the US Senate agreed to begin debating on Friday morning.

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No Evidence Wisconsin Car-Ramming Was Terrorist Attack – Police

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) – There is no evidence the recent car-ramming incident in the city of Waukesha, Wisconsin, was a terrorist attack, Police Chief Dan Thompson said on Monday.

"This is not a terrorist event," Thompson said during a press conference.

At the moment it is known of at least five people killed and 48 injured in the incident, including children, Fire Chief Steve Howard said during the conference.

Earlier on Monday, police confirmed that five people were killed and over 40 injured after a car plowed into the Waukesha Christmas Parade in Wisconsin late Sunday. The driver was identified by law enforcement officers as Darrell Brooks Jr., who was detained immediately after the incident.

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UNDP Warns Afghanistan Banking System on Brink of Collapse - Report

UNITED NATIONS, November 22 (Sputnik) - Afghanistan's banking and financial systems are on the verge of collapse after the country was taken over by the Taliban (sanctioned by the United Nations over terrorist activities), a new report by the UN Development Program (UNDP) said on Monday.

"Afghanistan's financial and bank payment systems are in disarray," the report said. "The bank-run problem must be resolved quickly to improve Afghanistan's limited production capacity and prevent the banking system from collapsing."

The United States froze Afghanistan's international reserves after the Taliban takeover, leading to a dramatic shock in the country's financial and payment systems.

As a result, the country's central bank could not meet deposit demands, prompting the Taliban to impose withdrawal caps of a maximum of \$200 per week. The amount was recently increased to \$400.

Afghanistan's total banking system deposits fell to \$2 billion in September from \$2.8 billion at the end of 2020, the report said.

With the current pace and withdrawal restrictions, deposits are projected to fall to \$1.7 billion by the end of 2021, likely leading to the collapse of Afghanistan's banking sector, the report said.

"Without the banking sector, there's no humanitarian solution for Afghanistan," UNDP Resident Representative Abdallah Al Dardari said. "Do we really want to see Afghans completely isolated?"

In addition, the country's credit market is also in decline. Total credits fell to \$307 million in September from \$33 billion at the end of last year.

To prevent the collapse of the country's banking system, UNDP urged for prompt and decisive action, which includes deposit insurance for depositors, adequate liquidity for the banking system and credit guarantees and loan repayment delay options.

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Suspect in Waukesha Car Ramming Has Extensive Criminal Record – Court Filings

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) – A suspect in Waukesha Christmas Parade tragedy, identified earlier as Darrell Brooks Jr., 39, has extensive criminal record as well as two open cases in Milwaukee County in the US state of Wisconsin, according to online court filings. Earlier in the day, police confirmed that five people were killed and over 40 injured after a car plowed into the Waukesha Christmas Parade in Wisconsin late Sunday. According to a report by the Associated Press, the suspect was identified by law enforcement officers as Darrell Brooks Jr., who was detained immediately after the incident. Just several days before the tragedy in Waukesha on November 11 Brooks was released on \$1,000 bail in a criminal case charging him with five counts, including domestic abuse, battery, and safety endangering, the court documents show. Following the tragedy, the Office of the District Attorney of the Milwaukee County issued a statement on Monday, in which it calls the \$1,000 bail "inappropriately low" in light of the defendant's current and previous criminal history. The Office informed that it is conducting an internal review of the decision to recommend this bail amount in Brooks' case. According to multiple media reports, the five-count case relates to an incident that involved Brooks running over the mother of one of his children in Milwaukee while he was in his car on November 2. Another open case against Brooks has three counts, including two counts of a dangerous weapon use and possession of a firearm by a previously convicted of a felony individual.

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New York Probe Finds Cuomo Engaged in Sexual Harassment, Other Misdeeds - Report

NEW YORK, November 22 (Sputnik) - Former New York Governor Andrew Cuomo repeatedly engaged in sexual harassment of his female staff, used state resources to support his multi-million dollar book project and was not transparent about COVID-19 deaths in nursing homes that occurred on his watch, a state investigation report concluded on Monday. The New York State Assembly Judiciary Committee investigation report was initiated after Cuomo resigned on August 13. Cuomo served as governor for more than a decade before being felled by numerous allegations against him. "As detailed throughout this report, we collected and reviewed evidence that former Governor Cuomo engaged in multiple instances of sexual harassment, including by creating a hostile work environment and engaging in sexual misconduct," the Judiciary Committee said. The Judiciary Committee said the investigation found that Cuomo utilized state resources and property to write, publish and promote his book regarding how he handled the COVID-19 crisis - a project for which he was guaranteed at least \$5.2 million in personal profit. "At the same time, [Cuomo] was not fully transparent regarding the number of nursing home residents who died as a result of COVID-19," the report added.

The Judiciary Committee did not make any recommendations to prosecute or otherwise sanction Cuomo. However, the committee made note about ongoing law enforcement interests into several matters covered in its report.

"We have prepared this report with those interests in mind and we are cooperating with any such investigations," it said.

While the 63-page report covered various alleged misdeeds, it focused particularly on his sexual harassment of two of his female staff, including a policewoman assigned to protect him.

At the height of the investigation against Cuomo, he was accused of having harassed nearly a dozen women. Cuomo continues to deny any wrongdoing.

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Biden Says His Family Praying for Victims of Deadly Waukesha Car-Ramming Incident

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Monday that his family is praying for the families of those killed and injured in the deadly incident in Waukesha, Wisconsin, when a vehicle plowed through a gathering of people during a Christmas-celebration event over the weekend.

"We know this morning that five families of Waukesha are facing fresh grief of a life without a loved one. At least 40 Americans are suffering from injuries, some of them in critical condition. An entire community is struggling, struggling to cope with the horrific act of violence," Biden said. "The morning, Jill and I and the entire Biden family, and I'm sure sure all of us, pray that that same spirit is going to embrace and lift up all the victims of this tragedy."

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Ex-Trump Attorney Michael Cohen Says Released From Home Confinement

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - Attorney Michael Cohen said on Monday that he has been freed from home confinement after serving a three-year prison sentence for crimes related to his previous job as a personal lawyer of former President Donald Trump.

"My release today in no way negates the actions that I took at the direction of, and for the benefit of, Donald J. Trump. Nevertheless, I remain cognizant of my responsibilities and my release today. And today, I will not cease my commitment to law enforcement," Cohen said in remarks on his release outside of a US federal court in New York.

Cohen said he will continue to provide information, testimony, documents and full cooperation on all ongoing investigations to ensure that other individuals are held responsible and that no one is above the law.

Cohen pleaded guilty in 2018 to financial crimes, lying to Congress and to campaign finance violations related to payments to two women who claimed they were involved in romantic affairs

with Trump. He began serving his three-year prison sentence in May of 2019 but was released to home confinement in May of 2020 as part of an effort to slow the spread of COVID-19 in the prison system.

The attorney was then returned to prison in July of 2020 after being photographed having a meal with his wife and another couple outside a restaurant near his apartment in violation of the terms of his furlough from prison.

Cohen had posted messages on social media about plans to publish a book on Trump. A US federal judge ordered his release from prison in July of 2020 after ruling that the government detained him in retaliation for his plan to publish a book critical of the former US president.

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US Considers Releasing Oil From Reserve on Tuesday in Concert With Other Nations - Reports (Updates lede, adds details and context in paras 3-6)

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - The United States is preparing to release oil from its Strategic Petroleum Reserve as soon as Tuesday, in concert with other consuming nations after global producers alliance OPEC+ rebuffed their pleas for more output amid surging fuel prices, Bloomberg reported, citing sources familiar with the matter.

The plans still could change, but the US is mulling a release of more than 35 million barrels over time, the report said.

The release from the SPR comes after crude prices hit seven-year highs above \$85 per barrel in October as OPEC+ continued to keep about 5 million barrels per day of regular supply away from the market as part of production cuts carried out since 2020 in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis which decimated demand for crude.

OPEC+ agreed earlier this year to boost production by 400,000 barrels per day starting in August and has not budged beyond that.

The White House, accusing OPEC+ of dragging its feet despite explosive demand for energy now, announced last week that major consuming countries led by China, India and Japan, were considering joining the US plan to release some of their strategic or emergency crude reserves to cool inflation triggered by runaway pump prices of fuel.

Since then, other consuming countries have more or less confirmed they were on board with the plan, though none have committed to actual numbers. Japan has also said that it needs to ensure that it can comply with the plan without infringing its laws that permit oil reserves to be released only to mitigate short supply, not high prices.

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US Lands on List of 'Backsliding' Democracies Alongside India, Brazil - Report

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - The United States is among the world's major backsliding democracies this year alongside countries such as India and Brazil, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) said in their Global State of Democracy Report 2021, published Monday.

"For the fifth consecutive year, the number of countries moving in an authoritarian direction exceeds the number of countries moving in a democratic direction," International IDEA said. "Some of the most worrying examples of backsliding are found in some of the world's largest countries (Brazil, India). The United States and three members of the European Union (EU) (Hungary, Poland and Slovenia, which holds the chair of the EU in 2021) have also seen concerning democratic declines."

Regarding the US, the organization singled out "the violently contested elections" of 2020 and the Trump administration's early ban on travel from China during the pandemic.

The world is becoming more authoritarian due to non-democratic regimes becoming more brazen in their repression, as well as many democratic governments backsliding by restricting free speech and weakening the rule of law, exacerbated by COVID-19 restrictions, International IDEA said.

The number of countries moving in the direction of authoritarianism triples those moving toward democracy, International IDEA noted.

However, democracy is resilient and pro-democracy movements in 2020 and 2021 such as those in Belarus, Cuba, Hong Kong and Myanmar show the willingness of activists to brave repression, International IDEA said. Over 80% of countries have experienced protests during the pandemic, despite restrictions on assembly in nearly every country in the world, they added. The Sweden-based intergovernmental organization in its report called for a global alliance for the advancement of democracy through a three-point agenda, which includes cooperation between government institutions and civil society, reforming democratic institutions and behaviors, and preventing the rise of authoritarianism through investment in democracy education.

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US Critical Infrastructure Companies Should Stay Vigilant During Holidays - Cyber Agency

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) on Monday advised the critical infrastructure companies in the United States to remain vigilant during the upcoming holiday season in order to be in position to repel possible cyberattacks.

"As Americans prepare to hit the highways and airports this Thanksgiving holiday, CISA and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) are reminding critical infrastructure partners that malicious cyber actors aren't making the same holiday plans as you," CISA said in a press release. "CISA and the FBI strongly urge all entities - especially critical infrastructure partners - to examine their current cybersecurity posture and implement best practices and mitigations to manage the risk posed by cyber threats."

CISA and FBI have not identified any specific threat at present but want to remind everyone that malicious cyber actors are prone to be more active during holidays and weekends and urges for immediate action, the release said.

Both agencies recommend a score of preventive actions against possible attacks, including establishing a designated cyber employees for the holidays season and implementation of a strong multi-factor authentication for its networks, the release added.

Earlier in November, CISA also ordered all US government departments and agencies to enforce new hardware and software security regulations within two-month period.

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US Mulling Oil Release From Reserve on Tuesday in Concert With Other Nations - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - The United States is preparing to release oil from its Strategic Petroleum Reserve as soon as Tuesday in concert with other consuming nations, Bloomberg reported on Monday.

The plans still could change, but the US is mulling a release of more than 35 million barrels over time, the report said.

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Washington Metro to Continue Operating on 'Reduced' Schedule Until 2022 - Statement

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - The metro rail system in the US capital will continue operating on reduced levels at least until the end of the year, the Washington Metropolitan Transport Administration (WMATA) said in a statement on Monday.

The Washington authorities decided to stop operating new model trains after one derailed in mid-October in order to investigate reasons for the incident.

"Metro customers can expect to see current (reduced) rail service levels through December 31," the statement said. "With no timeline established to return the 7000-series fleet in the interest of safety, and 6000-series railcars awaiting parts due to global supply chain challenges, incremental service improvements will be made during December as parts arrive for older model railcars."

The WMATA said about 75 percent of stations have trains arriving every 10-12 minutes, but sometimes trains operate on less frequent schedules.

"The rail service outlook for January 2022 will depend upon the successful completion of the 7000-series test plan and restoration plan - both of which require acceptance from Washington Metrorail Safety Commission - and the operational plan to remobilize the fleet for passenger service," the statement said.

On October 12, a metro train derailed near Arlington Cemetery in Virginia, located just outside Washington. The Arlington Fire Department said there were no injuries in the incident.

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US, Turkey Announce Agreement Terms on Switch to Multilateral Tax Deal - Treasury Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - The United States and Turkey announced terms of agreement on the switch from the current Turkish Digital Services tax to one aligned with the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) multilateral tax deal, the Treasury Department said on Monday in a press release.

"Last month, an historic agreement (sic) was reached between 137 countries of the OECD-G20 Inclusive Framework – representing nearly 95% of the world's GDP – on a two Pillar package of reforms to the international tax framework to be implemented in 2023... In support of that agreement, the United States and Turkey have today announced the terms of an agreement on the transition from the existing Turkish Digital Services Tax to the new multilateral solution and have committed to continuing discussions on this matter through constructive dialogue," the Treasury Department said.

OECD in October finalized an international tax deal aimed at revamping the global tax system by imposing certain restrictions on tax competition and ensuring fair revenue distribution. A major guarantee of the proposed deal was the joint implementation of a minimum 15% tax for multinational enterprises.

The international community intends to sign the multilateral convention sometime in 2022, with hopes to put it into practice in 2023.

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Biden Nominates Fed Chair Powell for Second Term Amid US Inflation Scare

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell has been nominated for another four-year term while Fed Governor Lael Brainard, who was tipped to replace him, will become vice chair at the US central bank, President Joe Biden announced on Monday.

"America needs steady, independent, and effective leadership at the Federal Reserve," Biden said in a tweet from @POTUS Twitter account. "That's why I will nominate Jerome Powell for a second term as Chair of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System and Dr. Lael Brainard to serve as Vice Chair of the Board of Governors."

The renomination of Powell, a Republican appointed by former President Donald Trump, comes after one of the most tumultuous periods ever for both the American economy and its central bank emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic and the recession triggered by that.

Powell's reappointment had been opposed by the far-left political wing of Biden's Democratic establishment, which have criticized the Fed chair for lax regulations at the central bank.

Brainard, a Democrat serving as Fed governor and an advocate of climate issues in banking

regulation and monetary policy, had been strongly rumored for months to replace Powell. Both will have to sit through Senate hearings to confirm the presidential decision.

Biden, a Democrat in office since January, acknowledged the role played by both Biden and Brainard in helping the US recovery from the pandemic.

"Fundamentally, if we want to continue to build on the economic success of this year we need stability and independence at the Federal Reserve," Biden said in a statement issued by the White House. "And I have full confidence after their trial by fire over the last 20 months that Chair Powell and Dr. Brainard will provide the strong leadership our country needs."

Both Powell and the Fed have taken intense criticism over inflation running at its highest levels in over 30 years in the US economy which has been caught up in supply chain bottlenecks in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis.

The US economy shrank by 3.5% for all of 2020 due to shutdowns and other disruptions caused by the pandemic. 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.

The Fed announced in March that it expected a 6.5% economic expansion for all of 2021 and has not changed its target despite the uneven growth in the past three quarters. The problem for the central bank though is inflation as wages and the prices of almost everything have soared from the lows of the pandemic.

The Labor Department reported earlier this month that the US Consumer Price Index, which represents a basket of products ranging from gasoline and health care to groceries and rents, rose 6.2% during the year to October. It was the fastest growth of the so-called CPI since November 1990, an acceleration driven mostly by pump prices of fuel running at seven-year highs.

Powell and Fed officials who share his thinking have described current price pressures in the economy as "transient", meaning things could return to normal once labor and materials supply get sorted out and normalize. The Fed's own tolerance for inflation is supposed to be at just 2% per annum.

Biden echoed his confidence in Powell and Brainard on getting inflation back on track, saying their "focus on keeping inflation low, prices stable, and delivering full employment will make our economy stronger than ever before".

Powell and the Fed have also taken heat lately over an ethics scandal where several officials of the central bank were found to have engaged in trading stocks at a time when the institution was implementing policies aimed at boosting markets. Powell himself disclosed that he owned municipal bonds, which the Fed also was buying, and he also bought and sold funds tied to the broad stock market indexes.

The Fed has launched a probe into the securities holdings and conduct of its officials since the scandal broke out, promising full transparency and assurance that the integrity will not be questioned in a similar fashion in the future.

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US Imposes Sanctions on 4 Individuals in Afghanistan - Treasury

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - The United States has added four Afghan men to its Designated Global Terrorists list, including Ismatullah Khalozai who was designated as a key financial facilitator for the branch of the Islamic State (banned in Russia) in Afghanistan, the US Department of the Treasury said on Monday.

"Today, the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated Ismatullah Khalozai, an individual who has acted as a financial facilitator for the Islamic State's Khorasan Province (ISIL-Khorasan), active in Afghanistan and commonly referred to as "ISIS-K," Treasury said in a press release.

Three more individuals, Sultan Aziz Azam, Sanaullah Ghafari, Maulawi Rajab, were also added to the Specially Designated Global Terrorists list, the release said.

The US government alleges that Ismatullah Khalozai was transferring funds to finance Islamic State-Khorasan operations from Turkey for a period of two years. Khalozai previously used a United Arab Emirates-based scheme to sell luxury items in order to generate funds to support the terror group, the release added.

Khalozai has also been involved in human smuggling operations for the benefit of Islamic State-Khorasan, including personally smuggling a courier from Afghanistan to Turkey, according to the release.

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John Kerry Heads to UAE for Launch of Energy, Water Cooperation Effort - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - US Climate Envoy John Kerry will travel to the United Arab Emirates on Monday for the launch of a joint energy and water cooperation effort in the region, the State Department said.

"Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry will travel to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on Monday, November 22, to attend the signing ceremony for Project Prosperity, a new regional clean energy and water cooperation effort," the State Department said in a media note.

The effort, launched jointly by the UAE, Israel and Jordan, is designed to help meet the goals set in the Paris Agreement, reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the region, and provide a new source of fresh water, the State Department said.

The meeting comes following the UN Climate Summit in Glasgow earlier this month, where world leaders organized to fulfill goals set in the 2015 Paris deal and to foster international cooperation on other climate-related issues.

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Trump Under Scrutiny for Allegedly Diminishing High-End Manhattan Property Value - Reports
WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump's company is under scrutiny for allegedly downgrading the value of its several properties in the years preceding 2016, including a high-end 70-story building in Manhattan, the Washington Post reported on Monday citing city records and officials familiar with the matter.

The Manhattan building is located at 40 Wall Street and the Trump Organization listed its worth at \$527 million in 2012. Later in the year, the company informed property tax officials that the entire building was worth just \$16.7 million, one-thirtieth, the report said.

New York Attorney General Letitia James is considering filing a lawsuit while prosecutors in the Manhattan District Attorney's Office have already convened a grand jury, which could vote on imposing criminal charges, the report added.

Among other properties under scrutiny are Trump's golf club in California, which he claimed to be worth \$900,000 and at the same time \$25 million in different situations, as well as his estate in suburban New York that was also valued between \$56 million and \$291 million, according to the report.

In July, the Trump Organization and its Chief Financial Officer Allen Weisselberg were charged in a New York court with a tax crimes ranging over a 15-year timespan, including a scheme to defraud, conspiracy, grand larceny and falsifying of business records.

Both, the Trump Organization and Weisselberg pleaded not guilty to the charges. Former president Donald Trump has characterized the charges as being politically motivated.

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Waukesha Incident Not Linked to Terrorism, Rittenhouse Verdict - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - There is no early indication of terrorism or any link to the recent verdict in the Kyle Rittenhouse case as the motive behind the deadly car ramming incident in Waukesha in the US state of Wisconsin, NBC News reported on Monday, citing sources.

The driver might have been fleeing an earlier incident involving a knife fight, five senior law enforcement officials told the broadcaster.

Earlier in the day, police confirmed that five people were killed and over 40 injured after a car plowed into the Waukesha Christmas Parade in Wisconsin late Sunday.

It came just days after the jury in the case of Rittenhouse issued a verdict of not guilty on all charges after the teenager shot three men, killing two, during racial justice riots in Kenosha, Wisconsin, August 2020. Rittenhouse insisted that the shootings were done in self-defense. Following the ruling, President Joe Biden urged Americans to express their views peacefully and lawfully. He said that "while the verdict in Kenosha will leave many Americans feeling angry and concerned, myself included," it should be respected.