

1/4/22 Tuesday

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Anti-Daesh Coalition Strikes in Syria's Deir-ez-Zor Reportedly Targeted 'Imminent Threat'
By - Morgan Artyukhina

US military operations in Syria have been widely protested as violations of the country's sovereignty and a de facto partitioning of the country that denies Damascus access to its oil-rich eastern provinces.

Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR), the US-led coalition against Daesh*, said on Tuesday it had carried out airstrikes against several sites in Syria that posed an "imminent threat."

According to Reuters, a coalition spokesperson said on Tuesday that strikes by an unnamed coalition partner had targeted rocket sites spotted engaging in indirect fire on Tuesday afternoon near the Green Village, a housing complex in Syria's eastern Deir-ez-Zor Governorate, near the border with Iraq. The rocket fire was reportedly aimed at the US base adjacent to the Omar Oil Field, one of the country's largest.

"Acting in self defense, coalition forces conducted a strike to eliminate the threat," a spokesperson [told the BBC](#), noting that indirect fire poses a "a serious threat to innocent civilians because of their lack of discrimination."

The coalition formally contains dozens of nations, but only a handful have actually engaged in combat operations, including the US and UK.

The launches come a day after the second anniversary of the [US assassination](#) of Iranian Maj. Gen. Qasem Soleimani, who led Iran-Iraq-Syria coalition against Daesh. The US killed him in an airstrike at Baghdad International Airport in Iraq; the same strike also killed Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, commander of the militia Kata'ib Hezbollah and deputy commander of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF).

The US has claimed that Iran controls the Shiite militias in Iraq and Syria that formed the backbone of the anti-Daesh campaign and is pushing them to attack US forces in the region, blaming them for a series of attacks on US and Iraqi bases in recent years and carrying out [retaliatory strikes](#) in response. However, those retaliatory strikes have often his forces not associated with the attacks, including strikes ordered by US President Joe Biden last year in Deir-ez-Zor that [drew condemnation](#) across the region.

Ahead of the anniversary of Soleimani's killing, Washington warned there might be an uptick on attacks on coalition forces in the region. An Iraqi security source told Sputnik several attacks have been foiled, including the downing of several small explosives-laden drones on Monday and Tuesday near US bases in central Iraq which had "Revenge for Soleimani" inscribed on the side.

The roughly 900 US forces in eastern Syria are not [present with the permission](#) of the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, but instead to support Kurdish militias that control much of eastern Syria in defiance of Damascus. Another 2,500 US troops are present in

Iraq with the tacit permission of the Iraqi government, although the country's parliament voted to ask them to leave in January 2020, following Soleimani's killing.

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Israel's Elbit Gets \$53 Million From UAE Air Force for Systems Defending Against Anti-Air Missiles

By - Morgan Artyukhina

The Emirati government said it signed the 2020 Abraham Accords with Israel out of a desire to stop the annexation of Palestinian land in the West Bank, but since the deal happened, it has gotten several lucrative military and trade deals from Israel and the US.

Elbit Systems, a defense electronics company based in Haifa, Israel, [announced on Monday](#) that it had been awarded a \$53 million deal to supply Direct Infrared Countermeasures (DIRCM) and airborne electronic warfare systems for Airbus A330 aerial refueling tankers used by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Air Force over the next five years.

The work will include installing several [J-MUSIC turrets](#) on each aircraft, which carry small lasers for frustrating the targeting systems of heat-seeking anti-air missiles, such as those fired by man-portable air [defense systems \(MANPADS\)](#) such as the US-made Stinger and the Russian-made Strela-2. Elbit will also install a passive detection system on the aircraft.

The UAE has three such aircraft and two more on order, according to [an Airbus release](#) from November, which notes delivery is expected in 2024.

The groundwork for the deal was laid in November at the Dubai Air Show, when Elbit established a separate subsidiary in Dubai, saying it "will seek to foster a long-term cooperation" with the UAE, which agreed to normalize relations with Israel in August 2020 in a deal overseen by the United States.

"The Abraham Accords provide a sound basis for business collaborations in the region," Elbit's executive vice president for international marketing and business development, Ran Kril, [said at the time](#).

"The UAE and other countries in the region are important new markets for Elbit Systems. We believe that our broad portfolio of solutions positions us well to address the needs and opportunities in this region."

Israel also made peace with Bahrain in 2020, but is recognized by no other country in the region, as the Arab League pledged in 1967 not to negotiate with Israel until it withdraws to its borders prior to the 1967 Six-Day War.

At the same time, Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) [announced a partnership](#) with Emirati defense conglomerate EDGE to create an advanced modular unmanned vessel for the UAE that would be able to detect and attack submarines. The two companies also signed a [memorandum of understanding](#) to establish a maintenance center for IAI electro-optical systems in the UAE.

Since 2015, the UAE has been engaged in the catastrophic war in Yemen against the Houthi movement as part of a Saudi-led coalition. The coalition's intense bombing campaigns and

blockade of the country have greatly contributed to the humanitarian crisis, killed 377,000, according to [United Nations estimates](#). Military equipment sold to the UAE and Saudi Arabia has also been [spotted in the hands](#) of allied Yemeni militias fighting the Houthis, including al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula*.

Abu Dhabi mostly pulled out of the war in 2019, but some troops reportedly remain in the country. Western countries have continued selling them weapons regardless, including a French deal [agreed to last month](#) for \$19 billion in Rafale fighter jets.

The UAE is host to three US military bases in Jebel Ali, Fujairah, and al-Dhafra, the latter of which hosts a variety of US spy planes and aerial tankers. While likely to side against Iran in the event of a regional war, the UAE's national security adviser, Sheikh Tahnoun bin Zayed, made a [rare trip to Tehran](#) last month, pledging a desire for regional peace.

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DPRK Fires Unidentified Projectile Toward East Sea - South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff
By - Morgan Artyukhina

Pyongyang has maintained a unilateral ban on nuclear and long-range missile tests since 2018 following an international outcry, but has tested shorter-range tactical weapons in the time since. It claims the missiles can evade South Korean air defence systems.

South Korea's top military leaders said on Wednesday morning that the North had fired what they believed to be a ballistic missile. The Japanese Coast Guard also said it had detected the launch, but was unable to identify the projectile. The missile is believed to have fallen outside of Japan's Exclusive Economic Zone.

Japanese Defence Chief Nobuo Kishi has since indicated that the projectile flew over a standard trajectory for roughly 500 kilometres. He further stated there were no reports of damages caused by the launch.

It was the first missile test by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) [since October](#), when it fired off a submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM).

Japan's NHK TV reported that Prime Minister Fumio Kishida had created a crisis response centre under his office after receiving news of the launch.

Hours after reports first emerged of the launch, Japanese Chief Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno told reporters at a Wednesday conference that the incident posed a threat to both security and peace in the region, underscoring that it serves as a "serious problem" for the globe.

The isolated socialist nation has commonly tested new projectiles by firing them into the Sea of Japan, including ballistic missiles, as well as what it said last September was a [hypersonic glide vehicle](#). In the past, some tests have flown over Japanese territory, but recent tests have stayed in international waters.

The launch comes days [after the conclusion](#) of a plenary session of the Central Committee of the Workers Party of Korea (WPK) at which DPRK leader Kim Jong-un hailed plans to boost economic development and improving people's lives in the face of what he called a "great life-and-death struggle". The country faces [severe economic sanctions](#) by Washington intended

to compel it into giving up its nuclear weapons, however, Pyongyang says it needs the weapons to guarantee its security against attack until a permanent peace treaty is arrived at with the US and South Korea.

Separately on Monday, a presumed defector from the DPRK to the South crossed the demilitarised zone separating the two countries to [return to the North](#), having failed to make a living in the capitalist country.

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Chinese FM Wang Tells Eritrea Beijing Opposes 'External Interference' in Africa Amid US Meddling

By - Morgan Artyukhina

Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi kicked off 2022 with a visit to three African nations, starting with Eritrea, a country declared a pariah by the United States, but which has recently joined the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Wang [arrived in Eritrea](#) on Tuesday for a two-day official visit, meeting with Eritrean Foreign Minister Osman Saleh and other senior officials before meeting with Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki. He will later continue to Kenya and then Comoros.

The Chinese foreign ministry gave no further details about Wang's visit. However, friendship between the two nations has been deepening recently, and Beijing has also moved to strike a stark contrast between its policies toward Africa and those of the United States, which has accused China of meddling in African affairs and forcing nations into its orbit via [so-called "debt trap diplomacy."](#)

China's [relationship with Eritrea](#) goes back decades, with China supporting the Eritrean Liberation Front fighting for independence from Ethiopia, and even giving Isaias special training in 1967. However, it later dropped this support when Ethiopia switched its recognition from Taipei to Beijing in 1971. China was among the first to recognize Eritrea after independence in 1993, and has coordinated several projects, including building a hospital in Asmara and the furnishing of technical assistance in the health sector.

According to China Global Television journalist [Shen Shiwei](#), Wang said China "firmly supports Eritrea in opposing external interference."

"Regional countries know best the problems within the region and it's up to the people of a country to properly handle its internal affairs," he added.

His comments come a month after visiting Addis Ababa, [where he told](#) Ethiopian Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Demeke Mekonnen that "China adheres to the principle of non-interference in internal affairs."

"We do not meddle in the internal affairs of Ethiopia, and we also oppose any external forces' interference in the internal affairs of Ethiopia, and in particular disagree with the practice of some external forces to pressure Ethiopia for their own political purposes," Wang said. He called for dialogue between the Ethiopian government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), a rebel group designated a terrorist organization by the Ethiopian parliament that has

waged a 13-month uprising aimed at reversing the loss of its longtime dominance of Ethiopian affairs. After a lengthy offensive into neighboring Afar and Amhara regions by the TPLF, the group was pushed back into Tigray late last year, and [an uneasy stalemate](#) has set in. "Wang's visit will also contribute to peace building and conflict mediation for the region, and help the countries affected by the war solve their urgent problems," Liu Qinghai, a professor at the Institute of African Studies of Zhejiang Normal University, told the [Global Times](#) on Tuesday about his Eritrea visit.

His visit also comes as the US is [putting heavy pressure](#) on Somali President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed for having suspended his prime minister, Mohamed Hussein Roble, following accusations Roble had interfered in a corruption probe against himself. The US said Mohamed was attempting to subvert the democratic process Roble has been overseeing. Eritrea was pulled into the conflict in Tigray just days after it began in November 2020, when in retaliation for giving shelter to Ethiopian government forces forced to retreat from Tigray, the TPLF launched ballistic missiles at the Eritrean capital of Asmara. The TPLF had separately waged a catastrophic war against Eritrea since 1998 that killed 120,000 people, but when Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed came to power in 2018, he quickly made peace with Eritrea, for which he was given a Nobel Peace Prize.

As [Sputnik has reported](#), Washington's support for the TPLF is largely motivated by the desire to punish Abiy for this misstep, which bridged an important gap in the region with a country the US has treated as a pariah state since it won independence from Ethiopia in 1991. [The US sanctioned](#) the Eritrean government, Isaias, and his top officials in November, accusing them of exacerbating the conflict in Ethiopia and threatening its territorial integrity.

By contrast, that same month, [Eritrea also joined](#) China's BRI, a globe-spanning infrastructure megaproject. China has helped build highways, railroads, ports, power plants, and other structures of public use across Africa; nearby in the Horn, China has helped finance the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the Blue Nile, a new railway from Addis to Djibouti, and several ports in Djibouti.

Like Djibouti, Eritrea sits on the African coast of the Red Sea, an important waterway through which more than 10% of global trade passes in a given year. However, unlike Djibouti, Eritrea has hungered for investment since independence and struggled to recover from the war with Ethiopia, including the loss of one-quarter of its productive land [to landmines](#).

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Motor Malfunction Triggered Fatal IAF Chopper Crash Over Mediterranean, Initial Probe Suggests

By - Evan Craighead

The Israeli Air Force (IAF) has grounded its fleet of AS565 Panther helicopters after two of three crew members operating one of the aircraft were killed in a crash just off the coast of Haifa on Monday. It is now thought that the chopper, termed an 'Ataleft' (bat) by the IAF, experienced a critical motor malfunction prior to the incident.

An AS565 chopper that crashed into the Mediterranean Sea on Monday night may have experienced a major malfunction in its left motor that caused the military aircraft to lose power, according to an initial IAF investigation.

It is believed that lack of power was the reason the three-man crew did not report the impending crash landing, according to IAF Brig. Gen. Amir Lazar.

Investigators' findings are primarily based on officer testimony and helicopter fragments that were recovered from the site and transported to Tel Nof Air Base for examination.

The force has yet to reach a determination as to why Lt.-Col. Erez Sachyani and Major Chen Fogel were unable to eject from the aircraft, unlike Maj. Ron Berman, who was able to eject and is the sole survivor of the crash.

"I was able to get myself out of the sinking helicopter and then, after many attempts to get my friends Sachyani and Fogel out, I was rescued by a naval police patrol," Berman said in a video statement published by the Israeli military, [per the Times of Israel](#).

The naval officer is presently recovering after being admitted to Haifa's Rambam Medical Center with a broken vertebra and mild hypothermia. Berman was visited in the hospital by heads of the IAF and Israeli Navy, including Maj. Gen. David Sa'ar Salame.

Salame spoke highly of Berman, asserting that the naval officer "did everything he could and everything possible to" rescue the pilots.

Sachyani and Fogel have since been buried.

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) stated on Tuesday that the military chopper was conducting a training flight when it went down around 9 p.m., local time, on Monday, approximately one hour after it took off from the Ramat David Israeli Air Force Base in Haifa.

Although the AS565 chopper, which is primarily used for missions at sea, was lauded by IAF Brig. Gen. Amir Lazar as a "very reliable" and "durable" aircraft, the service has for now grounded its entire fleet of the 25-year-old airframe.

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Cruz: GOP Has 'Multiple Grounds to Consider for Impeachment of Biden', If Republicans Win House

By - Evan Craighead

In 2021, US lawmakers in the House of Representatives impeached the then president in a 232-197 vote, making Trump the first president in the nation's history to be impeached twice. However, POTUS 45 was ultimately acquitted of his "incitement of insurrection" charge, as the US Senate was 10 votes shy of the two-thirds majority needed to convict.

Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) believes there are "multiple grounds" for the impeachment of US President Joe Biden, especially following a historic two impeachments for Trump, according to the American lawmaker's recent remarks.

The move would require Republicans to win a House majority in the 2022 midterm elections.

"If we take the House, which I said is overwhelmingly likely, then I think we will see serious investigations of the Biden administration", the senator said on the latest episode of his podcast, "The Verdict with Ted Cruz".

Speaking to conservative political commentator Michael Knowles, Cruz claimed that he is "very optimistic" about the GOP's position ahead of the November election. He declared that Republicans have a 90% chance of taking the House in 2022, although chances "may even be higher than that".

Cruz was less optimistic about the GOP taking control of the US Senate, which is presently comprised of 50 Democrats and 50 Republicans. "I put our odds at 50/50", he said.

The US senator from Texas claimed that Democrats had "crossed the line" by bringing Trump up on multiple impeachment charges during his presidency.

During Trump's first impeachment, in December 2019, the House voted in favour of impeaching him on abuse of power and obstruction of Congress. The second impeachment saw an "incitement of insurrection" charge from the House, which found that Trump had incited his supporters prior to their storming of the US Capitol building on 6 January 2021.

In the first case, the GOP-majority US Senate voted to acquit Trump of the impeachment article adopted by the House. In the second case, the Senate voted in favour of the charges against Trump, but was 10 votes short needed to convict the president.

"They used it for partisan purposes to go after Trump because they disagreed with him," Cruz offered, additionally suggesting that "one of the real disadvantages of doing that is, the more you weaponize it and turn it into a partisan cudgel, you know, what's good for the goose is good for the gander."

According to Cruz, who was born in Canada, one potential article of impeachment against Biden could relate to what the former characterised as the "utter lawlessness" of the presidential administration's "refusal to enforce the [US-Mexico] border".

[Cruz and other Republicans have been consistently critical](#) of Biden's handling of the US southern border crisis amid a surge of migrant detentions. In March 2021, Cruz tweeted several images from a migrant detention facility in Donna, Texas, showing overcrowding of children and teens in the centre.

At the time, Cruz called the situation "a humanitarian and public health crisis".

[Following a recent court order](#), the Biden administration reinstated a Trump-era "Remain in Mexico" policy, which forces non-Mexican asylum seekers at the southern US border to be returned to Mexico as immigration officials review their claims. Biden previously critiqued the policy as a "dangerous" and "inhumane" immigration programme.

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Trump Cancels Jan. 6 Mar-a-Lago Conference, Lays Blame on 'Total Bias & Dishonesty' of House Panel

By - Evan Craighead

Former US President Donald Trump announced in December 2021 that he would hold a press conference from his Mar-a-Lago resort on January 6, marking the one-year anniversary of his supporters' deadly riot at the US Capitol building. Alyssa Farah, a former Trump staffer, argued that the event was a tone-deaf move and that Trump should "stay silent."

Trump's news conference will not be held on January 6 as previously planned, according to a Tuesday statement by the 45th US president.

"I am canceling the January 6 Press Conference at Mar-a-Lago on Thursday, and instead will discuss many of those important topics at my rally on Saturday, January 15, in Arizona—it will be a big crowd!" Trump said.

Trump claimed that the decision to cancel his media event in Palm Beach, Florida, came in light of what he characterized as "total bias and dishonesty" in the US House Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol.

Earlier on Tuesday, the 9-member panel released a series of text messages between then-White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows and Fox News host and Trump supporter Sean Hannity.

During the pre-January 6, 2021, exchange, Hannity floated to Meadows that Trump should not oppose Congress' certification of the Electoral College vote from the November 2020 US presidential election.

"I do NOT see January 6 happening the way [Trump] is being told," the Fox News host texted on December 31, 2020, to the former White House chief of staff.

In his texts at the time Hannity suggested Trump return to Florida and become a proponent for election reforms.

"Stay engaged," Hannity said. "When he speaks people will listen."

Additionally, Rep. Bennie Thompson (D-MS), chairman of the House Select Committee, has declared that the panel would like to hear directly from former US Vice President Mike Pence, who certified the results of the 2020 presidential election.

"I would hope that he would do the right thing and come forward and voluntarily talk to the committee," Thompson said, noting that no formal request or order has been filed.

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NASA Successfully Deploys Tennis Court-Sized Sunshield on James Webb Space Telescope
By - Evan Craighead

The James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) is a large infrared telescope developed via a partnership between NASA, the European Space Agency, and the Canadian Space Agency. The telescope, launched last month on Ariane flight VA245, is equipped with a 6.5-meter mirror that gives it a light-collecting area around 5.6x larger than the Hubble Telescope.

The James Webb Space Telescope team has successfully deployed the telescope's 21-meter (70-foot) sunshield, marking a key milestone in prepping the JWST for operations, [according to a Tuesday memo issued by NASA](#).

Per the release, the five-layered sunshield was folded to fit inside an Arianespace Ariane 5 rocket's nose and remotely launched on December 28, 2021—[three days after the JWST launch](#). At full length, the five-layered sunshield rivals the size of a professional tennis court.

"This is the first time anyone has ever attempted to put a telescope this large into space," boasted Thomas Zurbuchen, associate administrator for NASA's Science Mission Directorate. "Webb required not only careful assembly but also careful deployments," the NASA official added. "The success of its most challenging deployment—the sunshield—is an incredible testament to the human ingenuity and engineering skill that will enable Webb to accomplish its science goals."

The sunshield is designed to protect the JWST from light and heat emitted from the Sun, Earth, and moon, and is made up of plastic sheets that are as thin as a human hair, but provide the telescope with protection on the order of over SPF 1 million.

"Unfolding Webb's sunshield in space is an incredible milestone, crucial to the success of the mission," asserted Gregory L. Robinson, Webb's program director at NASA Headquarters.

"Thousands of parts had to work with precision for this marvel of engineering to fully unfurl, he added. "The team has accomplished an audacious feat with the complexity of this deployment—one of the boldest undertakings yet for Webb."

The tensioning of the sunshield occurred at 11:59 a.m. ET on Tuesday, and required the use of 70 hinge assemblies, around 400 pulleys, eight deployment motors, 90 individual cables, and 139 of the JWST's 178 release mechanisms, according to NASA.

The JWST, humanity's largest and most complex space science observatory, will undergo further operations over the next several month to complete its setup.

These efforts include the deployment of the telescope's secondary mirror and primary mirror wings, as well as the alignment of the JWST's optics and calibration of its instruments.

The JWST is scheduled to reach its final orbit toward the end of January and, after a battery of testing, should during the summer begin beaming back to Earth images from the earliest days of our universe.

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Emma Watson Incurs Israeli Ire After Expressing Solidarity With 'Free Palestine' Movement
By - Evan Craighead

Emma Watson, 31, took to social media earlier this week to express her solidarity with Palestinians. "Solidarity is a verb", read the now-viral Instagram post from the English actress, best known for her role as Hermione Granger in the "Harry Potter" film series.

Israeli officials, including a current and former ambassador to the United Nations, are blasting Watson and accusing her of being anti-Semitic on social media due to her support of a pro-Palestinian rally.

Since its Monday posting, Watson's image has accrued 1.2 million likes and more than 100,000 comments.

"Fiction may work in Harry Potter but it does not work in reality", tweeted Gilad Erdanm, Israel's current ambassador to the UN. "If it did, the magic used in the wizarding world could eliminate the evils of Hamas (which oppresses women and seeks the annihilation of Israel) and the [Palestinian Authority] (which supports terror). I would be in favor of that!"

"10 points from Gryffindor for being an antisemite", quipped Danny Danon, who previously served as Israeli ambassador to the UN in the government of former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

However, netizens overwhelmingly opposed the officials' criticism of Watson's post.

Several Twitter users also called out Danon for labelling the actress as an anti-Semite, pointing out the support of Palestinians does not warrant the weaponisation of such a term.

Record Number of Americans Left Jobs in November: What Does the 'Big Quit' Mean in a COVID Economy?

[16 hours ago](#)

Between April and September of 2021, over 24 million Americans quit their jobs, with 4.2 million opting out in October, and another 4.5 million walking away in November. Estimates suggest a whopping 38 million Americans quit their jobs in 2021. Job openings also increased, from 431,000 to a some 11 million in October.

New figures released by the US Department of Labor revealed on Tuesday that an estimated 4.5 million workers turned in their pink slips in November 2021, marking just the latest uptick in an ever-increasing worker turnover in the labor market.

The numbers are not based on resignations alone, however, as many Americans either changed jobs for better pay, became self-employed, or opted for early retirement.

Data from the Labor Department shows that there are now 500,000 more unincorporated and self-employed individuals than there were at the start of the pandemic. Etsy, self-described as, "an American e-commerce company focused on handmade or vintage items and craft supplies," had 2.6 million sellers in September of 2019. That figure jumped to 7.5 million in September of 2020.

The COVID-19 pandemic has stressed many frontline and service workers, including those who work in the food service and hospitality industries. As workers began to see little return for their hard work and efforts during the pandemic; low pay, lack of benefits, long hours, emotional and/or mental stress, and possible exposure to COVID-19, 7% of workers quit their jobs in August compared to a rate of 2.9% for other industries.

"Lots of quits means stronger worker bargaining power which will likely feed into strong wage gains," [says](#) Nick Bunker, research director at the Indeed Hiring Lab. "Wage growth was very strong in 2021, and... we might see more of the same in 2022."

Former chief economist at the US Labor Department and current president of the Economic Policy Institute, Heidi Shierholz, is also optimistic. She [writes](#), "Workers being able to quit their jobs to take better jobs is a very good thing and signals an economy with healthy dynamism."

Early retirement has also played a major role. According to Goldman Sachs, Americans aged 55 and older made up 90% of those who quit in November 2021, opting to trade their jobs in for early retirement.

Despite a consistent Republican talking point that government spending and unemployment benefits are to blame for the worker shortage— the numbers don't add up to support the GOP claim.

Aaron Sojourner, a labor economist at the University of Minnesota's Carlson School of Management, [told CNN](#) that, "it's a bit of a puzzle why employers aren't raising wages and improving working conditions fast enough to draw people back in."

"They say they want to hire people- there are 11 million job openings- but they're not creating job openings that people want," Sojourner said, adding, "I can want a 65-inch TV for \$50, but it doesn't mean there's a TV shortage, it means I'm not willing to pay enough to get somebody to sell me a TV."

While some are confused by the worker shortage and the growth in job openings, it's no mystery among low-wage workers, many of whom were already working in high-turnover industries. Browsing the [r/careerguidance](#) subreddit, one can find several work stories that offer additional insight to explain the ugly underbelly of the low wage American workforce.

In fact, [one Redditor](#) recalled their experience when their manager threatened them and a coworker with "calling corporate" after the pair called out from work after suffering food poisoning. The two colleagues came under the weather shortly after ingesting products from their employer.

The post gained some traffic on the website with one comment stating that the supervisor was simply using an "intimidation tactic". "If they actually did so, corporate would then have definitive evidence they have an incompetent manager controlling their assets and maybe look for a replacement," the redditor added.

[Another redditor](#) detailed how their place of employment was prompting them to feel "severe anxiety" and depression, noting that they felt as though they "lost a huge part of my dignity and I crave to do something more meaningful and satisfying."

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Majority of Americans Are Not Interested in Traveling to the Moon, Poll Finds

A new Axios/Momentive poll recently determined that 61% of surveyed adults would not be interested in visiting the moon, even if money were not a factor.

Survey findings from an Axios/Momentive poll revealed that the least interested in lunar travel were those 65 and older. Only 18% reportedly voiced interest in human spaceflight. The most interested being those aged 18 to 34.

In a similar survey conducted by Pew Research Center, the biggest draw for Millennials to travel to space would be to experience "something unique." Older Americans indicated they were uninterested because their health might not allow it, or because they believe space travel would be "too scary."

At present, space tourism is only possible for the ultra-wealthy, an issue that has led backlash against Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, who launched into space in July during what some call a "joyride." Bezos, who is worth \$177 billion after multiplying his wealth during the COVID-19 pandemic, has largely been criticized by the public, wealth inequality and environmental activists, and his own employees.

Although Bezos thanked his employees after the launch of his Blue Origin spacecraft, Amazon workers were not exactly thrilled. Activist and former Amazon fulfillment center worker Chris Smalls referred to Bezos' thanks to his employees and customers as a "slap in the face." Smalls had been reportedly handing out water bottles to former colleagues at an Amazon warehouse in New York's Staten Island while Bezos was lifting off in his Blue Origin flight. "We take it as disrespect, and all the money he was donating, giving out, and the fact that I'm outside his facility in 90 degree weather handing out water... We honestly don't even care about it," [Smalls said](#).

At the time, the 1970 poem "[Whitey on the Moon](#)" by Gil Scott-Heron started trending on social media during the Blue Origin launch. The poem was originally written in response to government spending on the first space race in the 1960s while Black Americans were left behind on Earth, fighting for equal freedoms and civil rights. Smalls, who is Black, referred to Bezos' space launch as "whitewashed."

However, former Mexican astronaut Jose Hernandez says space race projects may bring positive effects to the economy, such as high-paying engineering jobs in the US.

"We now have three companies that can give access to humans into space, without being involved with NASA for the first time," Hernandez said. "I think that is a great achievement." Virgin Galactic, whose mission is to "open space to everybody" is offering tickets at a cost of \$250,000. However, it's worth noting that 40% of Americans aren't able to produce just \$400 if an emergency were to occur, according to a Federal Reserve [report](#). Of the 27% who were surveyed, most would have to sell a personal belonging or borrow the money to cover emergency costs.

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Photos: Greek Divers Uncover Wreckage of Italian WWII Submarine in Aegean Sea

Eighty years ago an Italian submarine was sunk off the coast of Greece during World War II. In a recent interview with Reuters, Greek diver Kostas Thoctarides confirmed that he and his team members found the Italian submarine in November 2021.

Records indicate that 48 crew members were aboard when the submarine was hit by British torpedoes in July 1941. Only six sailors were able to swim to the Greek island of Delos, near Mykonos, after the blast.

Italy's Naval History Office confirmed that the 80-year-old wreckage was in fact the Jantina, which was originally built for the Royal Italian Navy in the 1930s, and was used in the Spanish Civil War in support of Spanish Nationalists before its use in WWII.

"The wreck and the surrounding area was treated with respect as a wet grave," wrote Thoctarides on Facebook.

The submerged vessel was discovered using the ROV Super Achilles, capturing detailed [images](#) of the wreckage. The submarine was found resting at a depth of more than 300 feet. "Naval history is like a puzzle, and this is part of that puzzle," Thoctarides [told Reuters](#). "The confrontation of two submarines is a rare naval event."

According to the diver, the Jantina was about 200 feet long with speeds of up to 14 knots (16 mph) and a maximum depth of about 262 feet.

This is the fourth submarine accredited to the findings of Thoctarides.

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Jan. 6 Panel Requests Sean Hannity's Cooperation in Probe, Releases Details of Explosive Texts

By - Nevin Brown

The Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol has requested Sean Hannity's cooperation regarding his knowledge of US President Donald Trump and his legal team's thinking in the months before and after the 6 January Capitol attack, it was revealed Tuesday.

The Select Committee's letter to Hannity, the host of a popular Fox News programme and a long-term Trump supporter, revealed their possession of dozens of communications between Hannity and Trump, former White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows, and others close to Trump between 31 December 2020, and 20 January 2021.

The committee reportedly suspects that the communications prove that Hannity possesses, "factual information directly relevant to the events of January 6th", presenting a string of pertinent communications between the three to justify Hannity's testimony.

The first communication they cited was a text Hannity sent to Meadows on 31 December 2020: "We can't lose the entire WH counsels [sic] office. I do NOT see January 6 happening the way he is being told. After the 6th He should announce will lead the nationwide effort to reform voting integrity. Go to [Florida] and watch Joe mess up daily. Stay engaged. When he speaks people will listen".

The Select Committee suggests that Hannity, "had knowledge of concerns by President Trump's White House Counsel's Office regarding the legality of the former president's plans for January 6th".

A string of communications from 5 January 2021, was also referenced. In one text Hannity wrote, "I'm very worried about the next 48 hours". In another to Meadows, "Pence pressure. WH counsel will leave", Hannity texted.

The committee mentions that, based upon other text messages, Hannity potentially spoke with Trump directly on 5 January regarding his plans for 6 January.

During the 6 January attack by Trump supporters, Hannity texted Meadows to advise Trump to, "ask people to peacefully leave the [C]apit[o]". Later in the day, he sent texts regarding members of Trump's cabinet potentially using the 25th Amendment to remove Trump from office.

The Select Committee has pointed to Hannity's unprecedented access to Trump and his inner circle. A 10 January 2021, communication between Hannity, Meadows, and GOP Congress member Jim Jordan, the latter also an ardent Trump supporter, suggests that Hannity had spoken with Trump recently and was acutely aware of his thoughts.

"Guys, we have a clear path to land the plane in 9 days. He can't mention the election again. Ever. I did not have a good call with him today. And worse, I'm not sure what is left to do or say, and I don't like not knowing if it's truly understood. Ideas?", wrote Hannity.

In the Select Committee's letter to Hannity, they stress their deep respect for the First Amendment protections of freedom of political opinion and of the press, a career track of which Hannity has claimed to be a part.

"For that reason, we do not intend to seek information from you regarding your broadcasts on radio or television, your public reporting or commentary, or your political views regarding any candidate for office", the committee wrote.

"At the same time, we have a solemn responsibility to investigate fully the facts and circumstances of these events in order to inform our legislative recommendations", the notice continued.

Hannity's counsel, Jay Sekulow, [told ABC](#): "We are evaluating the letter from the committee. We remain very concerned about the constitutional implications especially as it relates to the 1st Amendment. We will respond as appropriate".

The vast majority of witnesses called upon by the Select Committee have cooperated with their investigation, however, a small number of high-profile Trump-centric individuals have openly resisted the inquiry and have been subsequently indicted for contempt of Congress.

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Videos: Sirens Sound Near Baghdad Airport Amid Reports Rockets Landed Near Diplomatic Centre

By - Nevin Brown

Rockets launched from Karkh, in the western half of Baghdad, prompted air raid sirens to sound at the Baghdad airport early on Wednesday morning, local time.

Reports indicated that rockets had landed near the Baghdad Diplomatic Support Centre (BDSC), which is located in the Baghdad International Airport. The rockets are said to have hit the tarmac but did not cause any casualties.

The BDSC is a diplomatic location and part of the US Embassy, hosting American diplomatic personnel and troops.

Initial reports had suggested that up to four Katyusha rockets were launched towards Camp Victory, and that a fire reportedly broke out on the base due to the strike.

Videos have emerged on social media appearing to capture the moment the base was targeted.

The base itself is approximately five miles from the Baghdad International Airport. It has not been reported who is responsible for the attack.

Camp Victory was the lead base for US military operations during the Iraq war, before being handed over to the Iraqi government in 2011.

The attack comes near the anniversary of a US drone strike at the Baghdad International Airport that killed Iranian General Qasem Soleimani. The strike also killed Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, a deputy commander of Iraq's Popular Mobilisation Forces.

US forces had been warned that an uptick in attacks might occur over this period.

On Monday, two armed drones were shot down at Baghdad International Airport, on the anniversary of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani's assassination. There were no reported damages or injuries from the incident.

According to sources, one of the wings of the suicide drones from Monday's attack had "Soleimani's revenge" painted on it. No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack. US-coalition forces had carried out strikes against targets in Syria on Tuesday. It is unknown if the rocket fire in Baghdad is related.

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Former New York Governor Andrew Cuomo to Avoid Charges Over Nursing Home Death Count
By - Nevin Brown

An investigation into the criminal culpability of Andrew Cuomo's handling of nursing homes death reporting in the early days of the coronavirus pandemic will see the former governor avoid charges, according to his attorney.

Cuomo is represented by Elkan Abramowitz, a criminal defense attorney, as the investigation began while Cuomo was still in office.

"I was contacted today by the head of the Elder Care Unit from the Manhattan District Attorney's Office who informed me they have closed its investigation involving the Executive Chamber and nursing homes," [a statement made by Abramowitz](#) reads. "I was told that after a thorough investigation – as we have said all along – there was no evidence to suggest that any laws were broken."

The investigation began in early 2021 after the New York state Attorney General [released a report](#) that claimed the administration had undercounted nursing home deaths by an estimated 50%.

Questions were raised from the onset, however, over Cuomo's use of nursing homes at the height of the pandemic.

At the beginning of the pandemic, New York hospitals became overrun with Covid patients. Under pressure from New York's powerful hospital lobby, Cuomo looked for ways to ease the burden that hospitals faced.

His administration landed on a risky and politically-polarizing decision to transfer patients to nursing homes. On March 25, 2020, he issued a directive that nursing homes could not deny patients based upon their Covid status.

Days later, Cuomo would add a provision making it difficult for patients to sue hospitals or nursing homes.

Cuomo's administration made the decision to send Covid-positive patients to nursing homes to alleviate the stress placed on hospitals, essentially, according to some, prioritizing hospitals over nursing homes at the height of a crisis.

There was reportedly reason to believe that the policy would fail as, at the earliest stages of the pandemic, it quickly became clear that the elderly were at increased risk of serious illness and death from COVID-19.

The policy was eventually reversed in May 2020, but by that time the damage was already done.

Cuomo's decision to allow hospitals to send Covid patients to nursing homes may have been a mistake, but what he and his administration did in the aftermath was, according to prosecutors, far worse.

The administration steadfastly stonewalled inquiries into nursing home death data following the policy, with the data that they did release being either altered or suggested to be intentionally misleading.

When initially reporting nursing home deaths from Covid, the state of New York only included deaths that physically occurred in a nursing home, not instances of individuals who had gotten Covid in a nursing home and later died in a hospital.

The administration also under-reported the number of patients sent from hospitals to nursing homes by 40%, according to an [Associated Press](#) report. A later [report](#) would emerge based on video footage of one of Cuomo's aides claiming to have hidden data on nursing home deaths. The Cuomo administration's alleged deceit led to a criminal investigation, which soon included the FBI.

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Democrats Doing Utmost to Exploit US Capitol Breach for Political Gain - Ex-FBI Agent

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - The Democratic Party and the mainstream media are trying their hardest to take full political advantage of the January 6 assault on the US Capitol, just as the country is on the verge of a civil war, former FBI Special Agent and whistleblower Coleen Rowley told Sputnik.

Thursday marks the one year anniversary of an attack on the US Capitol by pro-Trump supporters who were attempting to prevent Congress from certifying the 2020 presidential election results. At least five died as a result of the incident and more than 700 have been arrested for crimes related to the breach.

"The Democrats are trying their hardest to make hay out of the incident to their respective advantage - and they can probably claim some success in scoring political points - but it remains to be seen how much farther they can go with it," Rowley, named one of TIME's Persons of the Year in 2002, said.

On Tuesday, former President Donald Trump announced that he was canceling his January 6 news conference just as a Democratic-led congressional panel has escalated its probe of last year's attack on the Capitol. Trump said he canceled the presser "in light of the total bias and dishonesty of the January 6th Unselect Committee of Democrats, two failed Republicans, and the Fake News Media."

Rowley said although it created a shock to American pride in its democratic institutions, she doubted the storming of the Capitol would have much of a lasting impact.

The press from the very beginning, she added, have helped to exacerbate perceptions of the situation.

"Mainstream media did a good job, by constantly singling out the most bizarre/extremist elements, for instance, the multi-colored 'Shaman,' adorned with buffalo fur and horns, thus making the protesters look unhinged," Rowley said.

Moreover, most of those who made it inside the Capitol, she added, have gotten clobbered with lengthy sentences by judges. Hence, Rowley said she cannot foresee similar incidents in the near future.

"I doubt any repeat storming or destruction is likely to happen in the near future, but that doesn't mean the ever-more polarized country is not on the verge of a kind of 'civil war' - but that has many causes, and can hardly be attributed solely to the January 6 fiasco," Rowley said.

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Sullivan, Nordic Partners Talk Readiness to Impose Costs on Russia Over Ukraine - NSC

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan and his counterparts from the Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden discussed by telephone each country's readiness to impose consequences on Russia should it escalate tensions with Ukraine, Nation Security Council spokesperson Emily Horne said.

"National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan spoke today with his counterparts from the five Nordic countries to consult on ways to strengthen Transatlantic security," Horne said in a press release on Tuesday. "Mr. Sullivan and his counterparts discussed their readiness to impose severe consequences on Russia if it engages in further aggression against Ukraine."

Sullivan and his counterparts also agreed on the importance of engaging in diplomacy to de-escalate tensions in Eastern Europe through the Strategic Stability Dialogue, NATO Russia Council, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Horne said.

Sullivan and his partners underscored their commitment to Ukraine's territorial integrity, Horne said.

Tensions between Russia and Ukraine have increased in the past several weeks amid an alleged Russian troop buildup at the Ukrainian border and claims of preparations for an invasion. Moscow has repeatedly denied the accusations, saying that Russia has the right to relocate troops within its territory at its own discretion, while NATO's military activity near Russian borders poses a threat to its security.

On December 17, Russia released proposals on security guarantees to NATO and the United States that seek to prevent the alliance's further expansion eastward and ban the deployment of US and Russian intermediate and short-range missiles within reach of each other's territory, among other items.

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Trump Says Canceling January 6th Press Conference Due to US House Panel, Media Bias

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump said that he is canceling his press conference scheduled on the first anniversary of the January 6 events at the Capitol due to "total bias and dishonesty" by congressional investigators and the corporate media.

"In light of the total bias and dishonesty of the January 6th Unselect Committee of Democrats, two failed Republicans and the Fake News Media, I am canceling the January 6th Press Conference at Mar-a-Lago on Thursday, and instead will discuss many of those important topics at my rally on Saturday, January 15th, in Arizona - it will be a big crowd!" Trump said on Tuesday.

January 6 marks the first anniversary of the breach of the US Capitol complex by a group of Trump supporters who were protesting lawmakers certifying the 2020 presidential election from several states that Trump claimed were fraudulent. The breach resulted in the death of an unarmed protester, who was shot dead by law enforcement, as well as other injuries to demonstrators and officers.

Trump pointed out that the media will not report that US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and the Capitol Sergeant-at-Arms denied requests for the Washington, DC National Guard or the military to be present at the Capitol during the protest.

Trump is currently facing several lawsuits from law enforcement officers who were injured during the events at the Capitol for which they attribute responsibility to the former president.

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US Appeals Court Remands Lawsuit Against AstraZeneca, Others for Terrorism Ties - Filing

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - The US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia remanded to a lower court a lawsuit against the pharmaceutical companies AstraZeneca, Pfizer, Johnson and Johnson and others over alleged terrorism funding ties with the Iraqi Health Ministry, Circuit Judge Cornelia Pillard said in a written opinion.

"The district court held that the complaint failed to state claims for either direct or secondary (aiding-and-abetting) liability under the ATA (Anti-Terrorism Act), and that it lacked personal jurisdiction over six foreign defendants. We reverse on three points of law and remand the balance of the issues to be addressed by the district court consistent with our opinion," the opinion, filed on Tuesday, said.

The lawsuit, initially dismissed by a US federal judge in July 2020, alleges that companies including AstraZeneca, Pfizer, Johnson and Johnson and others helped fund terrorism in Iraq that killed Americans through contracts with the country's health ministry. The Iraqi Health

Ministry was reportedly under the control of militia group Jaysh al-Mahdi and used as a front for terrorist violence.

The defendants allegedly made corrupt payments in both cash and goods to the group in order to obtain medical-good procurement contracts, according to the court filing. The stream of money and goods allegedly helped finance Jaysh al-Mahdi's terrorist attacks on Americans, including the plaintiffs in the suit.

The allegations against the companies suffice to state a legally cognizable claim, the court said.

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January 6 House Panel Seeks Communication Records From Fox Anchor Sean Hannity - Letter

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - The US House Select Committee investigating the events at the Capitol on January 6 said it is seeking records from Fox News anchor Sean Hannity regarding communication he had with former President Donald Trump and other then-White House officials.

"We are also interested in other communications you may have had with the White House, the President, the Trump legal team or any other persons involved in the events of January 6th. We now ask you to preserve all records of such communications," the Select Committee said in a letter to Hannity on Tuesday.

The Select Committee said it has yet to schedule a transcribed interview with Hannity.

The US House panel said it has information in its possession indicating Hannity had advance knowledge of Trump's and his legal team's plans to contest the results of the 2020 presidential election.

Moreover, the Select Committee pointed out that Hannity expressed concerns and provided advice to Trump, his former Chief of Staff Mark Meadows and other White House officials related to the aftermath of the protest that unfolded at the Capitol.

The Select Committee noted that these records do not fall under executive privilege protections.

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Three Policemen File Suits Against Trump on Eve of January 6 Anniversary - Filings

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - Three law enforcement officers filed two lawsuits against former US President Donald Trump over injuries caused during the breach of the US Capitol complex on January 6, 2021, according to court documents.

One of the lawsuits was filed by Washington Metropolitan Police Department officers Bobby Tabron and DeDivine Carter for physical and emotional injuries caused by the January 6 Capitol Breach. The other lawsuit, filed by US Capitol Police officer Marcus Moore, similarly seeks compensatory and punitive damages for injuries incurred that day.

"As a result of Trump's speech on January 6th, 2021, his conduct and statements leading up to and on that date, and his refusal on that date to tell his followers to stop their continued violence at the Capitol, Trump engaged in unlawful conduct that resulted in injuries to United States Capitol Police officers and Metropolitan Police Department officers, including Plaintiff," the Tabron and Carter lawsuit alleges.

On January 6, one protester was shot-dead by law enforcement during the melee when a group of supporters of former US President Donald Trump entered the Capitol to protest the lawmakers certifying the 2020 presidential election results from several states that Trump has claimed are invalid. However, several law enforcement officers were reportedly injured. A Department of Homeland Security spokesperson told Sputnik there was no information indicating any specific or credible threats linked to the upcoming anniversary of the January 6 breach of the US Capitol.

The legal violations for which the officers are seeking judgement against Trump include directing assault and battery, aiding and abetting assault and battery and inciting to riot, the Moore lawsuit filing said.

The officers are several of many who have filed suit against Trump for his alleged role in instigating the events that lead to the breach of the US Capitol and subsequent injury and trauma to responding law enforcement.

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New York District Attorney Instructs Staff to Turn Blind Eye to Non-Violent Cases - Letter

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - New York District Attorney Alvin Bragg has issued a new guidance to his staff that requires them to turn a blind eye to any minor or non-violent crimes, including marijuana possession, prostitution and traffic violations.

"The Office will not prosecute the following charges, unless as part of an accusatory instrument containing at least one felony count: a) Marijuana misdemeanors... b) The act of refusing to pay the fare for public transportation... c) Trespass... e) Any violation, traffic infraction, or other non-criminal offense not accompanied by a misdemeanor or felony... f) Resisting Arrest... h) Prostitution..." Bragg said in a letter on Tuesday.

The District Attorney's office will not prosecute aggravated unlicensed operation, obstructing governmental administration and will not cease to pursue sex traffickers and pimps, the letter also said.

The new prosecution guidance also includes a presumption of pre-trial non-incarceration and informs prosecutors not to see a carceral sentence except for those defendants charged with homicide or the death of a victim cases, the letter added.

Bragg's office will also try to limit the number of youths under 25 years old tried in adult courts in order to prevent recidivism among this age group, according to the letter.

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UPDATE - Blinken Discusses Russia-Ukraine Tensions With Emirati, Saudi Counterparts - State Dept.

(Updates with more details in paras 3-5; edits throughout)

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken discussed the buildup of Russian forces near the border with Ukraine in a call with United Arab Emirates (UAE) Foreign Affairs Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said.

"Secretary Blinken and Sheikh Abdullah discussed Russia's military buildup near Ukraine's borders as well as other bilateral and regional issues, including developments in Yemen, Ethiopia, and Sudan," Price said in the readout of the conversation on Tuesday.

Blinken also congratulated the UAE for assuming a seat on the UN Security Council earlier this month, Price said in the readout.

In addition, Blinken discussed the buildup near Ukraine with Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud during a call on Tuesday, Price said in a separate readout. They also discussed other bilateral and regional security issues, including Yemen and Sudan, Price added. The discussions about the Russia-Ukraine situation were two of many that Blinken has had with European allies, Turkey and others amid the continued tensions. Talks are scheduled later this month between Russia and the US, NATO and the OSCE.

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US Condemns Houthis' Seizure of UAE-Flagged Vessel Off Hudaydah - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - The US government has condemned the seizure of a United Arab Emirates (UAE)-flagged cargo vessel off the Yemeni port of Hudaydah as it threatens international trade and regional security, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said.

"The United States condemns the Houthis' January 2 seizure of a UAE-flagged merchant vessel off the coast of Hudaydah, Yemen. These actions interfere with freedom of navigation in the Red Sea and threaten international trade and regional security," Price said in a press release on Tuesday.

Price called on the Houthis to immediately release the tanker and crew unharmed and stop all violence interfering with the political process seeking to end the war in the Republic.

Yemen has been engulfed in an armed conflict between the government forces, led by President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, and the Houthi rebels. Since March 2015, the Saudi-led Arab alliance, working in cooperation with Hadi's forces, has been conducting air, land and sea

operations against the Houthis. The conflict has created the arguably biggest humanitarian crisis in the world.

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Wall Street's Dow Jones Spikes as Nasdaq Dives in Mixed Show After Robust 2022 Start

NEW YORK, January 4 (Sputnik) - US stocks closed on Tuesday with the industrial sector rallying sharply on bets of economic outperformance versus a slump in Big Tech shares where high-priced valuations for some companies like Apple become a concern.

The blue-chip Dow Jones Industrial Average index, which lists a wide variety of stocks from leisure to banking and agriculture, gained 215 points, or 0.6%, on the day to close at 36,800.

The Nasdaq Composite index, which groups mega capitalized technology firms such as Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix and Google, fell 210 points, or 1.3%, to finish at 15,623.

The S&P 500, which lists the top 500 US stocks, was neither here nor there, shedding 3 points to finish the day practically flat at 4,793.

In Monday's first session of the year, all three indexes gained broadly, indicating investor confidence that the current dominant Omicron variant of COVID might not be as damaging to the health of Americans or the US economy like previous deadly strains of the virus.

"The second trading day of the New Year marks ... more importantly, the latest updates over how quickly global supply constraints are easing, but sadly that might not last," Ed Moya, analyst at online trading platform OANDA, said. "US stocks could not hold onto earlier gains as tech stocks got pummeled over fears that Treasury yields will go much higher."

US Treasury yields rose for a third day in a row on bets that the Federal Reserve will have to raise rates sooner than later this year to slow down inflation growing at its fastest clip in 40 years. The Federal Reserve has indicated that it could hike rates as many as three times before the end of 2022, adding between 0.25% and 0.3% in each cycle. The US central bank has kept rates at zero since the coronavirus outbreak of March 2020.

Apple, which crossed \$3 trillion in market capitalization in the previous day as the world's most valuable company, was among those hit in Tuesday's sell-off in tech shares. The Iphone maker fell \$2.31, or 1.3%, to close at \$179.70 after Evercore ISI analyst Amit Daryanani estimated that the company's App Store revenue slowed to a growth rate of 9% in the final month of the year.

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NASA Says Technicians Successfully Deployed James Webb Telescope Giant Sunshield

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - NASA technicians have successfully fully deployed the massive sunshield protecting the James Webb Space Telescope, the US space agency announced in a press release.

"The James Webb Space Telescope team has fully deployed the spacecraft's 70-foot sunshield, a key milestone in preparing it for science operations," the release said on Tuesday.

The sunshield, which NASA described as being about the size of a full size tennis court, was folded to fit in the payload area of an Arianespace Ariane 5 rocket's nose cone launched from French Guiana on Christmas Day. The Webb team technicians began to remotely deploy the sunshield on December 28, 2021, the release said.

"Two pallet structures - forward and aft - unfolded to bring the observatory to its full 70-foot length. The Deployable Tower Assembly deployed to separate the telescope and instruments from the sunshield and the main body of the spacecraft, allowing room for the sunshield to fully deploy," the release said.

Then, the sunshield's rear momentum flap and membrane covers were deployed as were the mid-booms, expanding vertically to the pallet structures and allowing the sunshield to extend to its full width of 47 feet, the release said.

Then at 11:59 a.m. Eastern Standard Time on Tuesday, the sunshield was fully tensioned and put in position, the release added.

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Blinken Discusses Russian Buildup Near Ukraine With Emirati Counterpart - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken discussed the buildup of Russian forces near the border with Ukraine in a call with United Arab Emirates (UAE) Foreign Affairs Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said in a readout of the call.

"Secretary Blinken and Sheikh Abdullah discussed Russia's military buildup near Ukraine's borders as well as other bilateral and regional issues, including developments in Yemen, Ethiopia, and Sudan," Price said in the readout of the conversation on Tuesday.

Blinken also discussed the Russia-Ukraine situation with the European allies, Turkey and others issues amid the continued tensions. Talks are scheduled later this month between Russia and the US, NATO and the OSCE.

Blinken also congratulated the UAE for assuming a seat on the UN Security Council earlier this month, Price added in the readout.

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US Charges Colombian in Connection With Plot to Kill Haitian President - Justice Dept.

Washington, DC January 4 (Sputnik) - The US charged Colombian national Mario Palacios with conspiracy to commit murder or kidnapping in connection with the assassination of former Haitian President Jovenel Moise, the Justice Department said on Tuesday.

"As alleged in the complaint, which was unsealed today, these charges relate to the July 7, 2021, assassination of the former President of Haiti, Jovenel Moise, in Port-au-Prince, Haiti," the department said in a statement. "As alleged, the defendant and others, including a group of approximately 20 other Colombian citizens and a group of Haiti-based dual Haitian-American citizens, participated in a plot to kidnap or kill the Haitian President."

According to the Justice Department, Palacios, 43, was involved in the plot that initially sought to kidnap and arrest Jovenel but ended up with the intention and plan to kill him, according to the release.

"Palacios, 43, is charged with conspiracy to commit murder or kidnapping outside the United States and providing material support resulting in death, knowing or intending that such material support would be used to prepare for or carry out the conspiracy to kill or kidnap," the release said.

He allegedly traveled with a co-conspirator to the United States on June 28, 2021 to solicit help to pull off the assassination, according to the Justice Department.

The person Palacios traveled with, a Haitian-American citizen, was arrested by Haitian authorities and remains in custody in that island nation. US officials said Palacios eluded arrest and traveled to Jamaica. After being deported from Jamaica, and during a layover in Panama, he agreed to travel to the United States.

He is currently in custody and is set to have his initial appearance in court later today.

Palacios faces up to life imprisonment if he is convicted.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) -

US-CANADA TRADE DISPUTE

* The United States has prevailed in the first trade dispute with Canada over quotas on dairy products within the context of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), the US Trade Representative's press office said on Tuesday.

OPEC+ MINISTERIAL MEETING

* Russia will restore its oil production by 85% of the highest restrictions under the OPEC+ deal by February, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said following the 24th OPEC and non-OPEC Ministerial Meeting on Tuesday.

* The OPEC+ countries emphasized the need for total compliance with the agreement and overproduction compensation mechanism during the Ministerial Meeting.

* The OPEC+ countries have decided to continue its current strategy by agreeing to increase the February oil production by another 400,000 barrels per day, a source from one of the delegations told Sputnik.

* The United States welcomes the decision by OPEC+ to increase oil production, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki told reporters.

AFGHANISTAN DEVELOPMENTS

* At least five people were killed in an avalanche in the Afghan province of Badakhshan, a Sputnik correspondent said on Tuesday.

* The Taliban (sanctioned by the UN for terrorism) has begun negotiations with neighboring countries for the return of Afghan aircraft which Afghan pilots used to flee to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan following the Taliban takeover in August, the movement's senior officials said.

NUCLEAR WEAPONS

* The United States' statements that China is rapidly building up its nuclear arsenal are not true, Chinese Foreign Ministry's Department of Arms Control Director-General Fu Cong said.

* Belarus welcomes and supports a joint statement of the five nuclear weapons powers on preventing nuclear war and avoiding arms races, also expecting that such joint efforts will be the key to reinforcing the global backbone of international security, Foreign Ministry spokesman Anatoly Glaz said on Tuesday.

COVID-19

* Texas Governor Greg Abbott on Tuesday announced his intention to sue the Biden administration in what he describes is an unconstitutional COVID-19 vaccine mandate for the state's National Guard.

* The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) endorsed the Food and Drug Administration's recommendation to reduce to five months the waiting period for Pfizer-vaccinated people to receive a booster shot.

* The US state of Maryland has declared a 30-day state of emergency due to the recent spike in COVID-19-related hospitalizations, Governor Larry Hogan said.

* A record number of Americans - 56% - say they disapprove of US President Joe Biden's handling of the pressing issues facing the United States, including the coronavirus pandemic and the economy, a new poll by Change Research revealed.

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US Welcomes OPEC+ Decision to Increase Oil Production - White House

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - The United States welcomes the decision by OPEC+ to increase oil production, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki told reporters on Tuesday. "We welcome [the] OPEC+ decision to continue increases in production," Psaki said during a press briefing.

That step along with US recent release from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve will help to facilitate the global economic recovery, she added. The White House will continue monitoring the situation, Psaki said.

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US, UK, EU, Norway React to Hamdok's Resignation in Sudan, Call for Dialogue - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - The Troika (the United States, the United Kingdom and Norway) and the European Union took note of the resignation of Sudanese Prime Minister Abdallah Hamdok and called for an immediate dialogue to prevent the country from plunging into conflict, the US Department of State said in a statement on Tuesday.

"[Abdallah Hamdok's] resignation as Sudanese Prime Minister, two months after the military's unconstitutional seizure of power, reinforces the urgent need for all Sudanese leaders to recommit to the country's democratic transition and deliver on the Sudanese people's demands for freedom, peace, and justice," the statement said. "Unilateral action to appoint a new Prime Minister and Cabinet would undermine those institutions' credibility and risks plunging the nation into conflict. To avoid this, we strongly urge stakeholders to commit to an immediate, Sudanese-led and internationally facilitated dialogue to address these and other transitional issues."

The statement said the dialogue should be fully inclusive, and the EU and the Troika will not support a Prime Minister or government appointed without the involvement of a broad range of civilian stakeholders.

"In the absence of progress, we would look to accelerate efforts to hold those actors impeding the democratic process accountable," it stated.

The statement also said the security services and other armed groups should refrain from violence against peaceful protestors and civilians across Sudan.

"The killing of scores of Sudanese, sexual violence and the injuries of hundreds more... is unacceptable. We reiterate the need for independent investigations into these deaths and associated violence, and call for the perpetrators to be held accountable," it said.

Hamdok was reinstated on November 21 after signing a pact with Burhan that seeks to install a civilian cabinet that will be subject to military oversight. Protesters demand transition to a fully civilian rule.

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UNSC Ready to Act to Any Development in Eastern Ukraine - President

UNITED NATIONS, January 4 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council will be ready to act to respond to any development in the situation in Eastern Ukraine, the council's President, Norway's Ambassador to the United Nations, Mona Juul, said at a press briefing on Tuesday. "I can assure you... that we are ready to deal with any situation that might arise and we are following very closely what is happening," Juul said when asked about the council's reaction if Russia moves to launch an attack on Ukraine.

Tensions between Russia and Ukraine have increased in the past several weeks amid an alleged Russian troop buildup at the Ukrainian border and claims of preparations for an invasion. Moscow has repeatedly denied the accusations, saying that Russia has the right to relocate the troops within its territory at its own discretion, while NATO's military activity near Russian borders poses a threat to its security.

On December 17, Russia released proposals on security guarantees to NATO and the United States that seek to prevent the alliance's further expansion eastward and ban the deployment of US and Russian intermediate and short-range missiles within reach of each other's territory, among other items.

Negotiations on security guarantees between Moscow and Washington are scheduled for January 10, followed by a Russia-NATO Council meeting to discuss the issue on January 12, and the summit of Russia and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe the following day.

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Biden Says US Schools Should Stay Open, Omicron No Worse for Kids Than Previous Variants

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - US schools should stay open despite concerns about COVID given there is no reason to suspect Omicron is more dangerous to children than previous variants, President Joe Biden said Tuesday.

"Look, we have no reason to think at this point that Omicron is worse for children than previous variants," Biden told a White House media briefing. "We know that our kids can be safe when in school. By the way, that's why I believe school should remain open."

Biden's remarks came ahead of a widely-expected approval from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention this week for COVID booster shots for 12 to 15 year olds in an effort to expand the nation's immunity from the virus.

The president reiterated on Tuesday his call for Americans to get vaccinated for COVID, saying some 35 million people, or more than 10% of the population, have not been immunized at all against the virus.

"We have booster shots for the whole nation," Biden said. "There is no excuse for people not to be vaccinated. This remains a pandemic of the unvaccinated."

US health authorities have not released data directly tying deaths rates from Covid with those who are unvaccinated.

But media reports on Tuesday said the Texas Children's Hospital set three new records this weekend with relation to children getting sick with COVID-19 caused mostly by the rapidly-spreading Omicron variant.

According to the reports, the hospital is currently treating almost 70 children infected by COVID-19 - the most ever since the pandemic began almost two years ago. Jim Versalovic, the hospital's pathologist-in-chief, was quoted saying that a third of the hospitalizations were of children younger than five years of age, a population that is not yet eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine.

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P5 Nuclear Statement Underscores Need for Restraint in Times of Tension - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - The joint statement put out by the five permanent member states of the UN Security Council on the topic of avoiding nuclear war and an arms race underscores the need for restraint in times of tension, US State Department Spokesperson Ned Price said on Tuesday.

"The President did join the leaders of the People's Republic of China, France, Russia and the United Kingdom in that joint statement affirming the principle that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought," Price said during a press briefing. "It underscored that even in times of tensions, countries have a responsibility to exercise restraint, especially concerning nuclear weapons."

The joint statement expressed the parties' commitment to Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) obligations and recognized the avoidance of nuclear war and the reduction of strategic risks as their foremost responsibilities.

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Pentagon Says Unaware of Efforts to Deploy National Guard at US Capitol on January 6

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - The Pentagon is not aware of any efforts to look at deploying National Guard troops at the US Capitol on January 6, Defense Department Spokesperson John Kirby said at a press briefing on Tuesday.

"I'm not aware of any formal or informal efforts to look at a Guard presence in the Capitol region on the sixth," Kirby said.

Earlier in the day, a Department of Homeland Security spokesperson told Sputnik there was no information indicating any specific or credible threats linked to the upcoming anniversary of the January 6 breach of the US Capitol.

On January 6, at least five people died in connection with the breach of the US Capitol by supporters of former US President Donald Trump in a bid to prevent Congress from certifying Joe Biden's election victory.

More than 700 individuals have been arrested in nearly all 50 states for crimes related to the breach of the US Capitol, including over 220 facing charges of impeding law enforcement, according to the US Justice Department.

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US Will Stick to Narrow Set of Issues in Russia Security Talks in Geneva - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - The United States will be discussing a narrow set of issues related to the US-Russia bilateral relationship during upcoming talks in Geneva on January 10, State Department Spokesperson Ned Price said on Tuesday during a press briefing.

"The questions of sanctions I do not expect will be all that prominent during the bilateral discussion between Deputy Secretary [Wendy] Sherman and her counterpart in Geneva on Monday... So when it comes to our engagement with Russia in the context of the Strategic Stability Dialogue, we won't be discussing issues that pertain to NATO, issues that pertain exclusively to Europe. We will be talking about the relatively narrow set of bilateral issues," Price said.

Confidence-building measures will be a topic of conversation during the upcoming meeting with Russia in Geneva, as well as in subsequent meetings with NATO and the OSCE, Price added.

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US Capitol Police Chief Says No Concerns Over Potential Incidents on January 6

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - The US Capitol Police have no indications of potential incidents related to the upcoming anniversary of the January 6 attack, Chief Tom Manger told reporters on Tuesday.

"The short answer is no," Manger said when asked if he has concerns.

There is no intelligence information that indicates potential problems, he added

US Homeland Security Department said earlier on Tuesday that there is no indication of threats related to the upcoming anniversary.

On January 6, at least five people died in connection with the breach of the US Capitol by supporters of former US President Donald Trump in a bid to prevent Congress from certifying Joe Biden's election victory.

More than 700 individuals have been arrested in nearly all 50 states for crimes related to the breach of the US Capitol, including over 220 facing charges of impeding law enforcement, according to the US Justice Department.

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US to Double Order of Pfizer Treatment Courses to 20Mln - Biden

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - The US administration is going to double its order of Pfizer treatment courses to 30 million doses, President Joe Biden said on Tuesday. "Today, I am directing my team to work with Pfizer to double our order from 10 million to 20 million treatment courses to be delivered in the months ahead," Biden said during the meeting with members of the White House COVID-19 response team. This move will allow to dramatically decrease hospitalizations and deaths from COVID-19, he added. Biden also warned that coming weeks will be challenging, but the US has tools to combat the pandemic. Pfizer announced earlier on Tuesday that the US government has committed to purchasing an additional 10 million treatment courses of its COVID-19 oral therapy named PAXLOVID. A total of 20 million treatment courses will be delivered to the US government in 2022, with approximately 10 million treatment courses accelerated for delivery by the end of June, the company said in a news release.

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Deputy Secretary Sherman to Lead US Delegation at Geneva Talks With Russia - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - The US delegation during the strategic stability talks with Russia in Geneva next week will be led by Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Tuesday. "Deputy Secretary Wendy Sherman will lead the US delegation to the strategic stability dialogue next week in Geneva," Price said during a press briefing. "Deputy Secretary Sherman and other senior leaders will continue to consult closely with allies and partners ahead of that dialogue and after." The US delegation in Geneva will include representatives of the Defense Department and the National Security Council, a senior administration official said last week. The US-Russian negotiations on January 10 will be followed by a Russia-NATO Council meeting on the Russian security proposals on January 12 and a summit of Russia and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe on January 13.

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US Hopes Economic Sanctions Against Russia Remain 'Hypothetical' - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - The US hopes that a coordinated economic response against Russia should they escalate the situation with Ukraine remains a hypothetical, State Department Spokesperson Ned Price said on Tuesday during a press briefing.

"We hope this remains a contingency. We hope the massive and serious consequences that the Russian economy would face if Russia's aggression towards Ukraine moves forward remains a hypothetical, because we are sincere in our desire to pursue diplomacy and deescalation," Price said.

Russian negotiators will engage in diplomatic and security discussions with the US in Geneva on January 10 and with NATO in Brussels on January 12 amid tensions between Russia and Ukraine.

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Pentagon Says NATO Has Not Requested Additional Aid, Change of Posture in Eastern Europe

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - NATO partners have not made a request for additional capabilities or change of posture in Eastern Europe, Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"There's been no request for changes to posture or request for additional capabilities by our NATO allies," Kirby said during a press briefing when asked about US contingency plans to support NATO should Russia invade Ukraine.

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Texas Sues US Government to Block COVID-19 Vaccine Mandate for National Guard - Governor

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - Texas Governor Greg Abbott on Tuesday announced his intention to sue the Biden administration in what he describes is an unconstitutional COVID-19 vaccine mandate for the state's National Guard.

"As the commander-in-chief of Texas's militia, I have issued a straightforward order to every member of the Texas National Guard within my chain of command: Do not punish any guardsman for choosing not to receive a COVID-19 vaccine," Abbott said. "Unless President

Biden federalizes the Texas National Guard in accordance with Title 10 of the US Code, he is not your commander-in-chief under our federal or state Constitutions."

Abbott said as long as he is commander-in-chief, he will not tolerate efforts to compel receiving COVID-19 vaccines. The governor also said the US federal government has put Texas's guardsmen in a difficult position and as their commander-in-chief, he promised to fight on their behalf.

On December 16, 2021, Abbott sent a letter US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin in which he stated Texas' intention to ignore the Biden administration's COVID-19 vaccine mandate with respect to the state's National Guard. Abbott sent the letter in response to Austin's threat a month earlier to stop federal funding going to unvaccinated guardsmen.

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Consensus Exists Among US Allies on Costs for Russia if It Invades Ukraine - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - There is a strong consensus among US allies to impose significant costs on Russian economy and financial system should it decide to invade Ukraine, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Tuesday.

"We have heard a strong consensus [among US allies] emerged regarding the profound costs that Russia would face if it were to go forward with further military aggression against Ukraine," Price told reporters.

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Coalition Confirms Attacked Rocket Launch Sites Near Syria's Omar Oil Field - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - The US-led Coalition carried out strikes early on Tuesday against rocket sites near Syria's Omar Oil Field, a Coalition spokesperson told Sputnik.

"Beginning at approximately 1540 today, Coalition forces observed several launch sites of indirect fire rockets that posed an imminent threat in the vicinity of Green Village, Syria," the spokesperson said. "Acting in self-defense, coalition forces conducted strikes to eliminate the threat."

The spokesperson said the Coalition has the right to defend its forces from any threat and will continue to undertake every action within its power to do so.

Earlier on Tuesday, Iraqi forces said they shot down two explosives-laden drones targeting an air base in Western Iraq that houses US troops in the second such attack in 24 hours. A similar attack occurred on Monday, when the Iraqi air defense system shot down two explosives-laden drones over the diplomatic zone at the Baghdad airport.

An Iraqi security source provided Sputnik with several photos of the wreckage of Monday's attack, showing the inscription "Revenge for Soleimani" on the drones.

Monday marked the second anniversary of the assassination of Qasem Soleimani, the commander of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' elite Quds Force, who was killed in a US airstrike on the outskirts of Baghdad.

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US Homeland Security Dept. Says No Indication of Threats Related to January 6 Anniversary

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - There is no information indicating any specific or credible threats linked to the upcoming anniversary of the January 6 breach of the US Capitol, a Department of Homeland Security spokesperson said in a statement to Sputnik.

"The Department of Homeland Security does not have information indicating any specific or credible threats related to the anniversary of the attack on the Capitol on January 6th. Since the violent events one year ago, DHS has enhanced its ability to detect, analyze, and respond to threats," the statement said.

The Homeland Security Department remains vigilant in their national security mission and will continue to review the threat environment and share information with the public and their partners, the statement also said.

On January 6, at least five people died in connection with the breach of the US Capitol by supporters of former US President Donald Trump in a bid to prevent Congress from certifying Joe Biden's election victory.

More than 700 individuals have been arrested in nearly all 50 states for crimes related to the breach of the US Capitol, including over 220 facing charges of impeding law enforcement, according to the US Justice Department.

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US Could See Elevated Inflation or Low-Growth in Post-COVID-19 World - Federal Reserve

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - The US economy risks an environment of sustained high price pressures in a post-COVID-19 world or a return to the low-growth, low-inflation regime experienced in the two decades before the pandemic, Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis Neel Kashkari President said on Tuesday.

Kashkari's comments came as the US central bank's policy-making Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) prepares to raise interest rates for the first time this year since the 2020 coronavirus outbreak.

"Hence, I now believe the FOMC must balance what I see as two essentially opposing risks: 1) transitory high inflation leads to an increase in long-term inflation expectations, which then leads to sustained high inflation, and 2) once the COVID-19 shock finally passes, the economy returns

to the low-growth, low-inflation regime it operated in for the 20 years prior to the pandemic," Kashkari said in an essay posted on the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis website. The US economy shrank by 3.5% for all of 2020 due the coronavirus pandemic measures. The Federal Reserve has projected a 5.5% growth for 2021 and 4% for 2022. The US central bank said it needs maximum employment, inflation at 2% or more per annum and steady economic growth to increase interest rates, which it has kept at between zero and 0.25% since the onset of the pandemic two years ago.

November's US jobless rate of 4.2% came just above the 4% mark that the Federal Reserve defines as "maximum employment."

The Federal Reserve's problem is inflation, running at more than 30-year highs as prices have soared from the lows of the coronavirus pandemic due to higher wage demands and supply chain disruptions.

In December, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell announced an expedited timetable for ending the US central bank's pandemic-era economic stimulus, saying there could be as many as three interest rate hikes in 2022. The FOMC will release its December meeting minutes on Wednesday to detail those discussions.

Kashkari said he had advocated for two rate hikes this year "because inflation has been higher and more persistent than I had expected."

He also said interest-rate policy should not be on a "pre-set course" due to economic and policy uncertainty, adding that close attention should be paid to demand and supply dynamics, as well as inflation, hiring, wage trends and labor agreements.

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Canada Agrees to Give Native Children Hurt by Welfare System \$20Bln in Compensation

TORONTO, January 4 (Sputnik) - The Canadian government has agreed to provide \$31.5 billion to implement long-term reforms and compensate First Nations children harmed by the country's child welfare system, Indigenous Services Minister Patty Hajdu said on Tuesday.

"I'm very pleased to announce that Canada and the parties have agreed to two significant agreements in principle: one that provides fair and equitable compensation to First Nations children and families harmed by discriminatory underfunding, and the other addressing the long-term reform that's needed for the First Nations Child and Family Services program," Hajdu said during a press conference.

The agreements-in-principle - which lay the foundation for a final agreement between the Canadian government and First Nations - include \$15.74 billion for compensating First Nations people negatively impacted by the First Nations Child and Family Services system, the Indigenous Services Canada said in a news release.

They also include an additional \$15.74 billion over five years to reform the program and ensure discrimination does not occur again, the release added.

In October, the Canadian government announced it was entering discussions to reach a global resolution to address outstanding litigation related to compensation and long-term reform of the

First Nations Child and Family Services system, which was found to be wrought with discriminatory practices.

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US Claims Victory in First USMCA Trade Dispute With Canada Over Dairy Quotas - Trade Rep.

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - The United States has prevailed in the first trade dispute with Canada over quotas on dairy products within the context of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), the US Trade Representative's press office said on Tuesday.

"United States Trade Representative Katherine Tai today announced that the United States has prevailed in the first dispute settlement panel proceeding ever brought under the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA). A USMCA panel agreed with the United States that Canada is breaching its USMCA commitments by reserving most of the in-quota quantity in its dairy tariff-rate quotas (TRQs) for the exclusive use of Canadian processors," the press office said in a press release.

Tariff-rate quotas provide preferential rates on custom duties to those quantities of imports that fall to an "in quota" category and a different, higher rate to imports above the "in-quota" quantities, the release said.

The USMCA panel, which was established on May 25 and issued its final report on December 20, requires Canada to comply with its findings no later than by February 3, the release also said.

Canada limited access to in-quota quantities for US farmers and exporters since the USMCA agreement entered into force by setting aside a certain percentage of dairy tariff-rate quotas exclusively for Canadian processors, the release said. The panel found this inconsistent with Canada's commitment under the USMCA agreement.

Canada is the third largest export destination for US dairy products, according to the release.

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Senior US Diplomat Discusses Support for Ukraine With Greek Foreign Minister - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman discussed with Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias over the telephone European stability and support for Ukraine, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Tuesday.

"Deputy Secretary Sherman and Foreign Minister Dendias stressed the importance of promoting solidarity and stability in Europe, including support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity," Price said in a readout of the conversation.

Sherman and Dendias underscored the importance of coordination between NATO allies and partners to deter Russia from further military action, Price said.

The call came amid tensions between Russia and Ukraine, which has prompted concerns among NATO allies about European security.

In late December, the United States deployed a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier to stay off the coast of Greece in the Ionian Sea to reassure US allies in Europe.

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UN Hopes NATO-Russia Talks Will Lead to De-Escalation of Tensions in Europe - Spokesman

(Updates with more details, background in paras 4-6)

UNITED NATIONS, January 4 (Sputnik) - The United Nations hopes the negotiations between Russia and NATO on security guarantees in Eastern Europe planned to be held later in January, will result in lowering of tensions around Ukraine and the region, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Tuesday.

"We very much hope what will come out of these meetings is a de-escalation of the tensions that we have seen in that part of the world," Dujarric said during a press briefing.

Dujarric added that the United Nations is always supportive and encouraging of a dialogue between member states at the highest level.

The spokesperson also said the United Nations hoped the contacts held at various levels on the issue of security will continue even if the tensions around Ukraine remain for the time being.

"We hope that the dialogue will continue. We would not want to see any hostile military action in Ukraine from wherever that that may come," Dujarric said.

The Russia-NATO Council meeting on security guarantees will be held from January 10-12 in Brussels. On December 17, 2021, the Russian Foreign Ministry published draft proposals on security guarantees with the United States and NATO. One of the key issues pointed out in the draft agreements is the non-expansion of NATO east toward Russia's borders.

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US-Led Coalition Carries Out Strike Against Rocket Sites Posing Threat in Syria - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - The US-led Coalition carried out a strike against rocket sites in Syria that posed a threat to its forces, Reuters reported on Tuesday citing a Coalition official who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The report said the Coalition targeted several launch sites near the Green Village in Syria.

Media reported that a new rocket attack from a suspected pro-Iranian militant group targeted a US military outpost near the Omar Oil Field in Syria's Deir az-Zor province.

The Coalition and the US Central Command did not respond immediately for comment to Sputnik.

Earlier on Tuesday, Iraqi forces said they shot down two explosives-laden drones targeting an air base in Western Iraq that houses US troops in the second such attack in 24 hours. A similar attack occurred on Monday, when the Iraqi air defense system shot down two explosives-laden drones over the diplomatic zone at the Baghdad airport.

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RECAST - US CDC Shortens Booster Waiting Period for Pfizer-Vaccinated People to 5 Months

(Recasts to clarify headline, lede)

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on Tuesday endorsed the Food and Drug Administration's recommendation to reduce the waiting period for Pfizer-vaccinated people to receive a booster shot to five months.

"Today, CDC is updating our recommendation for when many people can receive a booster shot, shortening the interval from 6 months to 5 months for people who received the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine. This means that people can now receive an mRNA booster shot 5 months after completing their Pfizer-BioNTech primary series," the health agency said in a press release.

As for other vaccines authorized in the United States, the interval when a person can get a booster shot remains unchanged for Moderna (six months) and Johnson & Johnson (two months), the release added.

The CDC also recommended an additional primary dose of the vaccine 28 days after the second shot for moderately or severely immuno-compromised 5- to 11-year-olds, according to the release.

Only Pfizer-BioNTech's vaccine has been authorized for emergency use in children aged 5-11 years.

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UN Hopes NATO-Russia Talks Will Lead to De-Escalation of Tensions in Europe - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, January 4 (Sputnik) - The United Nations hopes the negotiations between Russia and NATO on security guarantees in Eastern Europe planned to be held later in January, will result in lowering of tensions around Ukraine and the region, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Tuesday.

"We very much hope what will come out of these meetings is a de-escalation of the tensions that we have seen in that part of the world," Dujarric said during a press briefing. Dujarric added that the United Nations is always supportive and encouraging of a dialogue between member states at the highest level.

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Prince Andrew's Lawyers Say US Judge Should Dismiss Case Due to Epstein Settlement

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - Lawyers representing United Kingdom Prince Andrew on Tuesday argued in a New York court that the sex crimes lawsuit brought against him by Virginia Roberts Giuffre should be dismissed because of a prior settlement agreement between Giuffre and the late convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

Prince Andrew's attorneys argued that Giuffre agreed in the settlement deal with Epstein to a general release of claims against him and other potential defendants, which the lawyers claim it also includes Prince Andrew. However, his name is not explicitly mentioned in the document. Giuffre filed a separate US civil lawsuit against Prince Andrew, alleging that Epstein trafficked her to him for sex in 2001 when she was 17 and a minor under US laws.

Lawyers representing Giuffre argued that the settlement agreement with Epstein is irrelevant to the lawsuit against Prince Andrew and that he was not covered under the general release of claims against potential defendants.

Judge Lewis Kaplan did not come to a decision after hearing arguments from both sides and said he will do so soon.

Epstein's accomplice Ghislaine Maxwell was most recently tried in the same court and was found guilty on charges of grooming teenage girls for sexual encounters with Epstein.

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Record 4.5Mln Americans Quit Jobs in November - US Labor Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - A record 4.5 million Americans quit or changed jobs in November as the coronavirus pandemic continued to create conditions favorable to employees in the United States while making it more difficult for employers to get workers, the US Labor Department data showed on Tuesday.

"The number of quits increased in November to a series high [of] 4.5 million," the Labor Department said in its monthly Job Openings and Labor Turnover Summary (JOLTS). "The quits rate increased to 3 percent, matching the series high in September."

The Labor Department explained the number of people quitting their jobs increased in several industries, with the largest noted in accommodation and food services (up by 159,000); health care and social assistance (52,000); and transportation, warehousing and utilities (33,000).

Despite the sharp quit rate, job additions were also healthy for the first 11 months of last year, growing by more than 500,000 positions per month, the JOLTS data showed. The JOLTS report is a key indicator of labor market tightness or slack, and is closely watched by the Federal Reserve as criteria for increasing or decreasing interest rates. After staggering unemployment initially triggered by the coronavirus pandemic measures, the US labor market has recovered steadily, showing an official jobless rate of just 4.2% in November from a high of 14.8% in April of 2020. Analysts estimate that some 3 million of the 20 million or so jobs lost during the pandemic have not returned. Economists generally see the exodus as a greater opportunity in a pandemic-era market where workers could demand higher wages and prioritize child-care and health concerns.

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District Attorney Says Will Not Prosecute Ex-New York Governor Cuomo on Harassment Charges

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - Albany County District Attorney David Soares on Tuesday issued a statement announcing that he will not prosecute former New York Governor Andrew Cuomo on harassment allegations and requested that the criminal charges against him be dropped.

"While we found the complainant in this case cooperative and credible, after review of all the available evidence we have concluded that we cannot meet our burden at trial. As such, we have notified the Court that we are declining to prosecute this matter and requesting the charges filed by the Albany County Sheriff be dismissed," Soares said.

Cuomo was charged last October with forcibly touching a female assistant in 2020. He later resigned from office due to the allegations of sexual harassment, which he denies.

Soares said the decision to discontinue criminal prosecution is unrelated to potential civil liabilities and at he, like many New Yorkers, remains deeply troubled by allegations like those leveled at Cuomo.

Victims of workplace harassment and abuse are encouraged to come forward and bring the issues to light so that important discussions on the topic can continue, Soares added.

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US State of Maryland Declares COVID-19 Emergency, Deploys National Guard - Governor

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - The US state of Maryland has declared a 30-day state of emergency due to the recent spike in COVID-19-related hospitalizations, Governor Larry Hogan told reporters on Tuesday.

"I issued a proclamation declaring a 30-day state of emergency to take urgent short-time actions to combat the current crisis," Hogan said during a press briefing.

The Maryland authorities have reported 3,057 hospitalizations, which represents an increase of more than 500 percent in the last seven weeks, he said.

Hogan pointed out the next four to six weeks may be challenging as the authorities have said they expect that the number of COVID-19-related hospitalizations may reach 5,000.

The governor also said he signed two new executive orders, authorizing the Maryland health authorities to regulate hospital personnel, bed space and supplies, as well as augment emergency medical services.

Hogan said he mobilized 1,000 members of the Maryland National Guard to assist state and local health officials with the pandemic response.

"Approximately 250 members of the guard will be deployed to support COVID-19 testing sites across the state," he added.

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Biden Disapproval Rating Hits Record High of 56% Amid Economic Downturn, COVID-19 - Poll

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - A record number of Americans - 56% - say they disapprove of US President Joe Biden's handling of the pressing issues facing the United States, including the economy and the coronavirus pandemic, a new poll by Change Research revealed on Tuesday.

The approval rating of 44% is the lowest support for Biden since he became president a year ago.

The overwhelming majority of Americans said they disapprove of how Biden has handled every major aspect of his job, but particularly the economy (60%), employment (58%) and immigration (72%).

Going forward, Americans said they are mostly concerned about the state of the economy (73%), health care costs (86%), the federal debt (86%) and the increasing prices of everyday goods and services (89%).

Biden and former US President Donald Trump are viewed equally favorable by the same percentage of Americans (38%), according to the poll results.

The poll was conducted online among 1,895 registered voters from December 17-20 and has a margin of error of 2.3%.

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Biden Lauds Verizon, AT&T for Delaying 5G Push in Interest of Air Safety

WASHINGTON, Jan 4 (Reuters) - President Joe Biden on Tuesday lauded US telecommunications firms Verizon and AT&T for delaying their fifth generation, or 5G, network deployment in the interest of airspace safety, saying the move would ensure minimal disruption to US aviation activity.

"My Administration is committed to rapid 5G deployment, while minimizing disruptions to air operations and continuing to maintain the world's safest airspace," Biden said in a statement issued by the White House. "This agreement ensures that there will be no disruptions to air operations over the next two weeks and puts us on track to substantially reduce disruptions to air operations when AT&T and Verizon launch 5G on January 19th."

Verizon Communications and AT&T Inc said on Monday they would delay by two weeks the scheduled January 4 deployment of their C-Band wireless spectrum amid concerns that the move could undermine aviation safety standards.

The telecommunications firms had earlier faced pressure from the White House, airlines and aviation unions about the potential interference from their 5G networks to sensitive aircraft electronics like radio altimeters that could disrupt flights.

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US CDC Shortens Recommended Waiting Period for Pfizer Booster Shot to 5 Months

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) – The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on Tuesday endorsed the Food and Drug Administration's recommendation to cut the waiting period for a Pfizer booster shot after the second shot of the vaccine against COVID-19.

"Today, CDC is updating our recommendation for when many people can receive a booster shot, shortening the interval from 6 months to 5 months for people who received the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine. This means that people can now receive an mRNA booster shot 5 months after completing their Pfizer-BioNTech primary series," CDC said in a press release.

As for other vaccines authorized in the US, the interval when a person can get a booster shot remains unchanged for Moderna (six months) and Johnson & Johnson (two months), the CDC said.

The CDC also recommended an additional primary dose of the vaccine 28 days after the second shot for moderately or severely immuno-compromised 5- to 11-year-olds, according to the release.

Only Pfizer-BioNTech's vaccine has been authorized for emergency use in children aged 5-11 years.

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Melania Trump to Auction Off Worn Hat, NFT Commemorating Macron's Visit to US

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - Former US First Lady Melania Trump said on Tuesday that she was auctioning off a worn hat, watercolor painting and a second non-fungible token, or NFT, commemorating French President Emmanuel Macron's visit to the United States nearly four years ago.

Bids for the so-called Head of State collection will begin at the equivalent of \$250,000 in the cryptocurrency SOL during an auction that will run from January 11-25. The centerpiece of the collection will be an "iconic wide-brimmed white hat" fashioned by Herve Pierre, that the former First Lady wore during Macron's visit in 2018.

"It is important to note that Mr. Pierre designed Mrs. Trump's inaugural gown and served as her fashion stylist and consultant during the President's visit," a statement on the auction said via Twitter. "Indeed, Mrs. Trump's iconic white hat garnered media attention worldwide."

The announcement is the second of its kind in three weeks after a December 16 notice that the First Lady will release NFTs, which are customized digital images, of herself for sale that she said will embody her passion for the arts and provide opportunities for children to learn computer science skills.

NFTs are a special kind of crypto-asset where each token is unique, unlike "fungible" assets like Bitcoin and dollar bills, which are the same in appearance and value for each piece. Because they are each of a kind, NFTs can be used to legitimize ownership of digital assets such as artworks, recordings and virtual homes or pets.

Until last month's announcement, Melania Trump had largely stayed out of public view since leaving the White House a year ago following Donald Trump's election loss to Joe Biden in November of 2020.

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US Senator Rob Portman Says Quarantines After Testing Positive for Coronavirus

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - US Senator Rob Portman on Tuesday released a statement saying that he has quarantined after testing positive for the novel coronavirus.

"In preparation for returning to Washington, DC, I took an at-home COVID-19 test last night and it was positive. I am asymptomatic and feel fine," the senator from Ohio said.

Portman explained in the statement that he has been in contact with an attending physician as well as his personal doctor, and will quarantine for a period of five days as per US government guidance.

"I am following their medical advice and following CDC [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] guidelines and isolating for the recommended five days. I will work remotely from home this week, but will not be able to be in Washington, DC for votes," he said.

According to GovTrack, 154 members of Congress have tested positive for the novel coronavirus, have self-quarantined after being exposed to someone with COVID-19 or reported an exposure but took other action or no action.

Health experts have said that the latest coronavirus Omicron variant is much more transmissible but leads to mild cases and a significantly smaller number of hospitalizations.

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Over Half of Americans Think US Democracy in Danger – Poll

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) - A year after the infamous events of January 6 at the US Capitol, more than half of Americans believe that democracy in the United States is going through hard times and is in danger, a new Suffolk poll revealed on Tuesday.

A total of 83% are worried about the future of the American democracy, with 51% of those being very worried and 32% saying they are somewhat worried, the poll results showed. Notably, this opinion is shared among Republicans, Democrats and Independents.

But the poll also found that Democrats and Republicans have completely different views of the January 6 events, with 85% of the former calling the protesters “criminals” and two-thirds of the latter saying, “they went too far, but they had a point.”

Similarly, nearly 90% of Democrats view the work of the House Committee investigating the January 6 events as important, while nearly 80% of Republicans call it a waste of time, according to the poll results.

Over 70% of Americans still think US democracy is weaker than it was four years ago, the same number of people who said so a year ago, the poll found.

The poll was conducted among 1,000 registered voters over phone on December 27-30.

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More Than 300,000 People Without Power After Snowfall in US Capital Area - Tracker

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) – More than 300,000 households are still experiencing power outages after a winter snow storm in the US capital area, the tracking service poweroutages.us reported on Tuesday.

As of Tuesday morning, more than 277,000 customers had no electricity in the state of Virginia, while more than 26,000 people and businesses had no power in Maryland and outages in North Carolina stood at more than 29,000

Icy conditions forced local authorities to close large portions of interstate highways in different part of the region, including Interstate 95, a major freeway, south of the US capitol.

US Senator Tim Kaine was among the hundreds of drivers stuck on I-95 for hours. “I started my normal 2 hour drive to DC at 1pm yesterday. 19 hours later, I’m still not near the Capitol,” Kaine said via Twitter.

Police in Virginia cautioned drivers that downed trees and black ice were still halting traffic on interstates, primary and secondary roads across the state.

Maryland State police responded to 220 crashes and 263 disabled or unattended vehicles. "There's still concern for icy conditions today so please proceed with caution," the police said on Twitter.

Meanwhile, two of three airports, serving the Washington area continued experiencing significant problems with flight arrivals and departures. More than 150 flights were canceled or delayed at Reagan National Airport, while Baltimore-Washington International Airport reported over 130 cancellations or delays, flightarrival.com reported.

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Iraqi Forces Shoot Down Two Drones Targeting Air Base Hosting US Troops - Coalition

WASHINGTON, January 4 (Sputnik) – Iraqi forces on Tuesday shot down two explosives-laden drones targeting an air base in Western Iraq that houses US troops in the second such attack in 24 hours, the US-led coalition said.

"Two drones approaching Ain al-Asad Air Base were shot down outside the base's vicinity without casualties early this morning," the coalition said via Twitter, citing the Security Media Cell of Iraq.

The latest attack comes on the heels a similar incident on Monday, when the Iraqi air defense system shot down two explosives-laden drones over the diplomatic zone at the Baghdad airport. An Iraqi security source who provided Sputnik with several photos of the wreckage of Monday's attack that showed the drones bearing the inscription "Revenge for Soleimani."

Monday marked the second anniversary of the assassination of Qasem Soleimani, the commander of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' elite Quds Force, who was killed in a US airstrike on the outskirts of Baghdad on January 3, 2020.

On December 22, 2021, Iraq's Joint Operations Command confirmed the withdrawal of coalition forces from Iraq except for military advisers. A group of advisers of the international coalition arrived in Iraq on December 30, according to Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi.