



**United States Department of State**

***Washington, D.C. 20520***

November 7, 2022

Case No. FL-2022-00062

Mr. Gary Ruskin  
U.S. Right to Know  
4096 Piedmont Avenue, #963  
Oakland, CA 94611

Dear Mr. Ruskin:

As we noted in our letter dated September 26, 2022, we are processing your request for material under the Freedom of Information Act ("FOIA"), 5 U.S.C. § 552. The Department of State has identified an additional 11 responsive records subject to the FOIA. Upon review, we have determined that five records may be released in full and six records may be released in part.

An enclosure explains the FOIA exemptions and other grounds for withholding material. Where we have made redactions, the applicable FOIA exemptions are marked on each record. All non-exempt material that is reasonably segregable from the exempt material has been released and is enclosed.

We will keep you informed as your case progresses. If you have any questions, your attorney may contact Assistant United States Attorney, April Seabrook, at [April.Seabrook@usdoj.gov](mailto:April.Seabrook@usdoj.gov) or (202) 252-2525. Please refer to the case number, FL-2022-00062, and the civil action number, 22-cv-01130, in all correspondence about this case.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Diamonece Hickson", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Diamonece Hickson  
Chief, Litigation and Appeals Branch  
Office of Information Programs and Services

Enclosures: As stated.

## **The Freedom of Information Act (5 USC 552)**

### **FOIA Exemptions**

- (b)(1) Information specifically authorized by an executive order to be kept secret in the interest of national defense or foreign policy. Executive Order 13526 includes the following classification categories:
- 1.4(a) Military plans, systems, or operations
  - 1.4(b) Foreign government information
  - 1.4(c) Intelligence activities, sources or methods, or cryptology
  - 1.4(d) Foreign relations or foreign activities of the US, including confidential sources
  - 1.4(e) Scientific, technological, or economic matters relating to national security, including defense against transnational terrorism
  - 1.4(f) U.S. Government programs for safeguarding nuclear materials or facilities
  - 1.4(g) Vulnerabilities or capabilities of systems, installations, infrastructures, projects, plans, or protection services relating to US national security, including defense against transnational terrorism
  - 1.4(h) Weapons of mass destruction
- (b)(2) Related solely to the internal personnel rules and practices of an agency
- (b)(3) Specifically exempted from disclosure by statute (other than 5 USC 552), for example:
- |                |   |
|----------------|---|
| ARMSEXP        | Arms Export Control Act, 50a USC 2411(c)                    |
| CIA PERS/ORG   | Central Intelligence Agency Act of 1949, 50 USC 403(g)      |
| EXPORT CONTROL | Export Administration Act of 1979, 50 USC App. Sec. 2411(c) |
| FS ACT         | Foreign Service Act of 1980, 22 USC 4004                    |
| INA            | Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 USC 1202(f), Sec. 222(f) |
| IRAN           | Iran Claims Settlement Act, Public Law 99-99, Sec. 505      |
- (b)(4) Trade secrets and confidential commercial or financial information
- (b)(5) Interagency or intra-agency communications forming part of the deliberative process, attorney-client privilege, or attorney work product
- (b)(6) Personal privacy information
- (b)(7) Law enforcement information whose disclosure would:
- (A) interfere with enforcement proceedings
  - (B) deprive a person of a fair trial
  - (C) constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy
  - (D) disclose confidential sources
  - (E) disclose investigation techniques
  - (F) endanger life or physical safety of an individual
- (b)(8) Prepared by or for a government agency regulating or supervising financial institutions
- (b)(9) Geological and geophysical information and data, including maps, concerning wells

### **Other Grounds for Withholding**

- NR Material not responsive to a FOIA request excised with the agreement of the requester

**From:** (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**To:** Feith, David (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Subject:** RE: Urgent change in statement  
**Date:** Mon, 11 Jan 2021 20:49:12 +0000

David,

We need to make a two changes.

Existing language:

(b)(5)

Existing language:

(b)(5)

Thank you.

(b)(6)



(b)(6)

Chief of Staff  
Bureau of Arms Control, Verification and Compliance  
U.S. Department of State  
HST Room 5950

Office: (b)(6)  
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OpenNet: (b)(6)@state.gov  
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**From:** Feith, David (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Sent:** Monday, January 11, 2021 1:35 PM  
**To:** Yu, Miles (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov>; Ortagus, Morgan D (b)(6)@state.gov>; Buangan, Richard L (b)(6)@state.gov>; DiNanno, Thomas G (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Cc:** (b)(6)@state.gov>; Stilwell, David R (b)(6)@state.gov>; Keshap, Atul (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Subject:** RE: 11am meeting in 7312

Miles and team –

Many thanks for the valuable meeting earlier. Please see edited statement attached. It's cut to 949 words and incorporates the edits we discussed. (b)(5)

(b)(6)

The one tweak I couldn't make was (b)(6) (about questions vs. declarative sentences), but (b)(6) kindly said he will do some spinning on that.

Appreciate urgent reads.

Thanks.

--

David Feith  
Deputy Assistant Secretary



Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs (EAP)  
U.S. Department of State

(b)(6)

(b)(6) @state.gov

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**From:** (b)(6) @state.gov

**Sent:** Monday, January 11, 2021 10:58 AM

**To:** Feith, David (b)(6) @state.gov; Ortagus, Morgan D (b)(6) @state.gov; Buangan, Richard L

(b)(6) @state.gov; DiNanno, Thomas G (b)(6) @state.gov

**Cc:** (b)(6) @state.gov; Stilwell, David R (b)(6) @state.gov; Keshap, Atul

(b)(6) @state.gov; (b)(6) @state.gov

**Subject:** RE: 11am meeting in 7312

I'll be there.

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**From:** Feith, David (b)(6) @state.gov

**Sent:** Monday, January 11, 2021 10:55 AM

**To:** Ortagus, Morgan D (b)(6) @state.gov; Buangan, Richard L (b)(6) @state.gov; (b)(6)

(b)(6) @state.gov; DiNanno, Thomas G (b)(6) @state.gov

**Cc:** (b)(6) @state.gov; Stilwell, David R (b)(6) @state.gov; Keshap, Atul

(b)(6) @state.gov; (b)(6) @state.gov

**Subject:** 11am meeting in 7312

(b)(6) thanks. And confirming Dinanno (cc'ed).

EAP will be there a little late, around 1105. Thanks all.

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**From:** Feith, David

**Sent:** Monday, January 11, 2021 10:20 AM

**To:** Ortagus, Morgan D (b)(6) @state.gov; Buangan, Richard L (b)(6) @state.gov

**Cc:** (b)(6) @state.gov; Stilwell, David R (b)(6) @state.gov; Keshap, Atul

(b)(6) @state.gov

**Subject:** RE: WSJ: China Allows WHO Experts in to Investigate Covid-19 Origins

All – I'm meeting Miles at 11am in his office, 7312.

AVC Tom Dinanno will join too.

Morgan – any chance you can join?

Thanks.

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**From:** PA Press Clips <PAPressMediaMonitors@state.gov>

**Sent:** Monday, January 11, 2021 9:02:01 AM

**To:** PA Monitoring Group <PAMonitoringGroup@state.gov>

**Subject:** WSJ: China Allows WHO Experts in to Investigate Covid-19 Origins

China Allows WHO Experts in to Investigate Covid-19 Origins

U.N. agency's top official earlier criticized Beijing for holding up mission

By Chun Han Wong

Updated Jan. 11, 2021

HONG KONG—China has agreed to allow a team of World Health Organization experts to enter the country to investigate the origins of the coronavirus pandemic, days after the United Nations agency's top official criticized Beijing for holding up the mission.

The WHO experts are scheduled to start their mission on Thursday and will be working with Chinese scientists in studying the contagion's origins, China's National Health Commission said in a brief statement on Monday.

A health commission official earlier said the WHO team would be traveling to the central Chinese city of Wuhan, where the coronavirus was first detected and which became the first Covid-19 hot spot.

A WHO spokeswoman said the agency welcomed China's announcement. "We look forward to working closely with our Chinese counterparts on this critical mission to identify the source of the virus and its route of introduction to the human population," she said in an emailed response to queries.

Last week, in a rare rebuke against Beijing, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus voiced disappointment that China still hadn't given permission to the U.N. agency's investigators to enter the country—an unusual sign of tensions between the WHO and one of its most important members.

The WHO has been negotiating with China's government over the past year to get information on how the coronavirus might have first crossed into humans, as well as access to sites in Wuhan.

Answers could help prevent another virus lurking in animals from making a similar leap, epidemiologists say, as well as help clear up questions over how long the virus had been circulating, or which early mutations enabled it to spread and kill more than 1.9 million people world-wide as of Monday.

At a news briefing last week, Dr. Tedros said several scientists on the WHO team started traveling from their home countries last week after Beijing had agreed to allow entry, but the agency was then told Chinese officials hadn't completed the necessary permissions for the team's arrival. Dr. Tedros said Chinese officials have assured him that "China is speeding up the internal procedure" that would allow the mission to begin.

China's Foreign Ministry said last week that Beijing and the WHO were still discussing details such as when the scientists would visit the country.

The WHO rarely criticizes the national governments that fund its budget and elect its leaders, though the agency has at times struggled to get Beijing's cooperation on issues related to the Covid-19 pandemic. In late January of last year, the WHO panel tasked with declaring a public health emergency expressed frustration that epidemiological data sent from China was too imprecise and paltry to act upon.

(b)(6)



**From:** David Feith (b)(6)  
(b)(6)  
GibbsJJ@state.gov (b)(6)@state.gov>;  
**To:** (b)(6)@state.gov (b)(6)@state.gov>;  
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(b)(6)@state.gov (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Subject:** Re: Department Press Briefing – February 9, 2021  
**Date:** Fri, 19 Feb 2021 11:18:15 -0500

Story this morning from WSJ makes it all the more important that we learn as much as possible about the sick researchers inside the WIV before the start of the known outbreak. Everything in this story would be consistent with the outbreak beginning with a cluster of researchers inside the WIV on the dates the USG knows about.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/covid-19-was-spreading-in-china-before-first-confirmed-cases-fresh-evidence-suggests-11613730600>

Few excerpts here:

--New evidence from China is affirming what epidemiologists have long suspected: The coronavirus likely began spreading unnoticed around the Wuhan area in November 2019, before it exploded in multiple different locations throughout the city in December.

--This, and other evidence, suggest the coronavirus might have jumped to humans sometime during or shortly before the second half of November, she said, sickening too few people to attract attention until it led to an explosive outbreak in Wuhan. By December, the virus was spreading much more widely, both among people who had a link to the market, as well as others with no tie.

--The first scientifically documented case of Covid-19 was symptomatic on Dec. 1, 2019, but Chinese authorities say the first confirmed case became ill on Dec. 8 and the first with links to the market got sick on Dec. 12. A doctor who treated the Dec. 1 patient said he was an elderly man who had other chronic illnesses and couldn't speak, and his exact date of symptoms onset was unclear as it had been estimated by relatives.

--It is unsurprising investigators haven't found large clusters before December 2019, Dr. Wertheim said, with fewer than 20 people infected by the end of November, according to his study's model. But eventually, the virus did start to spread, with cases doubling every four to five days in December, the scientist said. Viruses can't circulate for long in a population before they diversify genetically, and that likely started to happen between mid-November and mid-December, he said.

On Mon, Feb 15, 2021 at 2:41 PM David Feith (b)(6) wrote:  
WSJ editorial today, including citing Daszak's absurd CNN exchange. Now WSJ and WAPO have both called for USG to share more on the sick researchers

(<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/02/05/coronavirus-origins-mystery-china/?arc404=true>).

[https://www.wsj.com/articles/who-are-the-covid-investigators-11613401955?mod=opinion\\_lead\\_pos2](https://www.wsj.com/articles/who-are-the-covid-investigators-11613401955?mod=opinion_lead_pos2)

### Who Are the Covid Investigators?

Members of a WHO origin probe have conflicts of interest.

By The Editorial Board

Feb. 15, 2021 10:12 am ET

The world needs to learn all it can about the origins of the novel coronavirus, and the World Health Organization has been investigating. But there's increasing reason to question the effort due to China's lack of cooperation and conflicts of interest on the WHO team.

A Beijing-approved WHO delegation recently concluded a 12-day visit to Wuhan, where the virus emerged more than a year ago. The group visited local hospitals and sites like the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) and Huanan Seafood Market. But such field trips aren't very helpful without unhindered access to raw data. The Chinese government, which controls research into Covid-19's origin, has limited WHO access to such information.

Chinese officials are spinning that Covid-19 came from outside China. Some Communist Party functionaries have suggested the virus was imported through frozen food, but few scientists take the idea seriously. Many believe it arrived through "zoonotic spillover," passing perhaps from bats, through another species, to humans. Another theory is that the virus came from a laboratory such as the one in Wuhan.

The WIV has conducted controversial "gain of function" research on coronaviruses. Such experiments can provide viruses with new capabilities—such as the ability to infect a different species. The U.S. State Department has said "several researchers inside the WIV became sick in autumn 2019" and had "symptoms consistent with both COVID-19 and common seasonal illnesses." This is important to investigate.

Yet the recent WHO trip ended with a propaganda coup for Beijing. Peter Ben Embarek, head of the WHO team, declared the lab hypothesis "extremely unlikely" and "not in the hypotheses that we will suggest for future studies." Mr. Embarek said he had spoken with lab personnel extensively, and "they're the best ones to dismiss the claims." But apparently the frozen-food theory was worth looking into.

This was too much even for WHO director-general Tedros Ghebreyesus. "The expert team is still working on its final report," he clarified last week. "All hypotheses remain open and require further study." But who ensures that?

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One prominent member of the WHO team is zoologist Peter Daszak. Also part of the Lancet COVID-19 Commission, Mr. Daszak has vowed to investigate “with an open mind” and “not be bound by preconceived ideas.”

Yet emails obtained by the nonprofit U.S. Right to Know show that Mr. Daszak long ago made up his mind about the lab-leak theory. In February 2020, he helped organize a statement in the Lancet condemning “conspiracy theories suggesting that COVID-19 does not have a natural origin.” In one email, Mr. Daszak wrote that the document should “not be identifiable as coming from any one organization or person.” But EcoHealth Alliance, the global nonprofit he leads, played an outside role.

His interest is understandable. The British-born U.S. citizen has deep ties with the WIV. Millions of U.S. government dollars went to his organization to fund research at the Chinese institution. Mr. Daszak, who has consistently defended the Chinese government, didn’t respond to a request for comment.

“You’re looking for small clusters of outbreaks that went to a clinic because they were severe and their symptoms were just like Covid,” Mr. Daszak said during a CNN interview from Wuhan earlier this month. “That didn’t happen. We didn’t see that in the data earlier than December.” Never mind that Washington said it found exactly that at the WIV.

While Mr. Daszak touted the “really remarkable openness from China,” other experts from the WHO committee complained about political pressure and uncooperative hosts blocking access to important data. The Australian team member Dominic Dwyer in particular deserves credit for speaking candidly.

Also of concern is Marion Koopmans, who oversees the viroscience department at the Erasmus University Medical Center in Rotterdam, Netherlands. A decade ago Ms. Koopmans’s deputy, Ron Fouchier, made international news by modifying a deadly flu virus to spread between ferrets. If an investigation finds it likely that the Covid-19 pandemic was caused by gain-of-function research, that would have repercussions for labs around the world, including at Erasmus MC. A spokesman for the organization didn’t respond to a request for comment.

A WHO spokesman told us that “we wanted to ensure a well-represented international team with geographic and topic area expertise balance.” That makes sense, and such a team would consult scientists like Ms. Koopmans and Mr. Daszak. But their critical role as investigators undermines confidence in the probe.

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Donald Trump’s criticism of WHO was often dismissed as politically self-interested, but the inquiry has unnerved the organization’s supporters as well. “We have deep concerns about the way in which the early findings of the COVID-19 investigation were communicated and questions about the process used to reach them,” U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said in a Saturday statement. Deep concerns? Such as?

“Please don’t rely too much on US intel: increasingly disengaged under Trump & frankly wrong on many aspects,” Mr. Daszak tweeted last week. Making as much of the intelligence as possible available, and vocally and clearly raising U.S. concerns, is the best way for the White House to respond to this spin from China and its apologists.

On Wed, Feb 10, 2021 at 9:43 AM David Feith <(b)(6)> wrote:  
Team, fysa. Sent this yesterday to various folks (new and old) around the building. Hope all’s well.

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **David Feith** <(b)(6)>  
Date: Tue, Feb 9, 2021 at 6:27 PM  
Subject: Fwd: Department Press Briefing – February 9, 2021  
To:

Folks — flagging lot of interest in COVID and the lab leak hypothesis at the top of today’s State press briefing. SPOX gave repeated careful answers stating that:

- (1) USG wants to see WHO evidence,
- (2) USG will compare WHO info with USG info/intel, and
- (3) the new Admin is neither criticizing nor endorsing the previous Admin’s Jan. 15 statement on evidence of a possible lab leak, which itself asserted no conclusions on the origin of COVID.

(b)(5)

Of course, in light of the WHO team deciding outrageously to end inquiry into the lab leak possibility (while at the same time saying it will look further into the frozen food theory), greater USG scrutiny of the evidence is all the more important.

Other useful references, while we’re at it:

<https://www.google.com/amp/s/nymag.com/intelligencer/amp/article/coronavirus-lab-escape-theory.html> and

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/02/05/coronavirus-origins-mystery-china/?arc404=true>.

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **U.S. Department of State** <[usstatebpa@public.govdelivery.com](mailto:usstatebpa@public.govdelivery.com)>  
Date: Tue, Feb 9, 2021 at 5:54 PM  
Subject: Department Press Briefing – February 9, 2021  
To: (b)(6)

You are subscribed to Press Releases for U.S. Department of State. This information has recently been

updated, and is now available.

## **Department Press Briefing – February 9, 2021**

*02/09/2021 05:35 PM EST*

Ned Price, Department Spokesperson

1:34 p.m. EST

**MR PRICE:** Good afternoon. I just have one thing at the top, and then we'll get started.

The United States is deeply concerned about the absence of an election implementation agreement in Somalia. While this is an issue for Somalis to resolve, the United States views immediate elections as critical to Somalia's future. Consensus can be reached. We call on Somalia's leaders to resume their dialogue urgently so that national elections can take place now. The impasse hinders pressing reform and counterterrorism efforts, and continued delays will only increase the risk of instability.

It is the responsibility and the duty of national and regional leaders to act in the interests of the people of Somalia, who, of course, deserve the best from their leaders. Partial, parallel, or alternative election processes, including prolonged interim governing arrangements, would increase prospects for instability and be a major setback for Somalia. The United States opposes the use of violence by any party. We remain committed to the development of democracy in Somalia, and we want Somalis to enjoy the long-term stability, prosperity, and peace they deserve.

With that, Matt, do you want to kick us off?

**QUESTION:** Thanks, Ned. I've got a question about COVID, actually two, but they're kind of – well, they're obviously related, but they're on different things. So I'm going to just start with the first one, and then other people can go. And we'll get back to the second one unless someone else asks it in the meantime.

You have seen, I imagine, the WHO statement out of Wuhan or out of China today saying that they do not believe that corona – that the coronavirus was the result of a lab leak. You will also know, having been alive for the last year, that the previous administration, including the previous secretary of state, had suggested on numerous occasions that the virus may have gotten out as a result of a leak from a lab. The WHO statement or finding, whatever you want to call it, today says that that does not appear to be the case, and so I am wondering what you guys make of this.

**MR PRICE:** Well, Matt, when it comes to the report you're alluding to or the findings you're alluding to, I think in the first instance we look forward to receiving the report and the data from the WHO investigation. Broadly speaking, we have expressed our concerns regarding the need for full transparency and access from China and the WHO – access from China and the WHO to all information regarding the #earliest days of the pandemic. It's imperative that the world learns as much as possible about the earliest days of the COVID-19 pandemic so that we can understand its origins and so, importantly, we can prevent future biological catastrophes.

Now, you referenced statements from the previous administration. If I'm not mistaken, I believe this



department on January 15th put out a fact sheet, and in that fact sheet it was not conclusive regarding the origins of the coronavirus. So where we are today is that we look forward to receiving this report and the full data and to digging into that ourselves, knowing that we do need that full transparency.

**QUESTION:** Okay. Well, so you've put a premium on full transparency thus far. And recognizing that it is not finished yet, are you satisfied? Are you pleased with the transparency that the Chinese have given to the WHO team?

**MR PRICE:** Well, I think the jury is still out. I think, clearly, the Chinese, at least heretofore, had not offered the requisite transparency that we need and that just as importantly, again, the international community needs so that we can prevent these sorts of pandemics from ever happening again. This goes back to one of the very first actions that President Biden took as president when he re-engaged with the WHO.

Look, we know that there needs to be international cooperation if we are going to be able to be in a position to staunch future outbreaks or epidemics before they become pandemics. The WHO is leading this investigation. We clearly support this investigation. We recognize there is an urgent need for an investigation. But I wouldn't want to be conclusive yet about any sort of cooperation that the WHO may or may not have received from China.

**QUESTION:** But thus far, are you pleased with the cooperation that you have seen that they have gotten or are you —

**MR PRICE:** Again, I wouldn't want to be conclusive before we've seen the report. I think it's premature for us to go there.

Yeah.

**QUESTION:** Same topic. As Matt referenced, Secretary Blinken's predecessor has said there was enormous evidence supporting the lab theory. Is it the Secretary's view that that's not the case, that there is not enormous evidence?

**MR PRICE:** The Secretary's view is the view of the department, and that is that we need to see this report. We look forward to seeing this report. We're supportive of the WHO investigation. And I think more broadly too, we can speak to our own efforts. We will work with our partners and also draw on information collected and analyzed by our own intelligence community to evaluate the report once we've received it as well as the data from the WHO evaluation.

So look, I think rather than rush to conclusions that may be motivated by anything other than the science, we want to see where that data leads us, where that science leads us, and our conclusions will be predicated on that.

Yes.

**QUESTION:** But just following up on that —

**MR PRICE:** Let's move it around a little bit now.

**QUESTION:** Yeah, just following up on that, the Chinese have suggested that maybe that you should expand the investigation because the cases only – the first cases were in December 2019 and there have been cases elsewhere in the world. Do you think that there should be investigations into the origins elsewhere, or do you think this focus should remain on Wuhan?

**MR PRICE:** Well, we are talking in this case about the origins of the coronavirus. I don't think there is any reasonable person who would argue that the coronavirus originated elsewhere, so that is why our focus is on this WHO investigation. We look forward, again, to seeing the report, to seeing the underlying data, to using what we may have within our own reach based on our own intelligence and analysis to corroborate what the WHO has found and to reach our own conclusions.

Yes.

**QUESTION:** Following up on what Matt and John said, the previous administration had a great deal of intelligence and other evidence about what it believed was the origin of the coronavirus, and you guys presumably have access to the same intelligence. The secretary – previous secretary came out and said, as John said, that he believed there was significant evidence of a possible lab origin. Are you guys – why can you not draw conclusions from the evidence that they were drawing conclusions from? And are you then not ruling out the possibility that there was a lab origin to the virus?

**MR PRICE:** Well, I would note a couple things. Number one, I've certainly seen the reports of what the WHO seems to have found. And those reports indicate they, at least in this initial stage, have reached a conclusion vis-a-vis the origins of the virus. But again, we want to see that for ourselves.

What I can speak to regarding what you have heard from this department prior to January 20th, I would point you to the January 15th fact sheet. The January 15th fact sheet was very clear that it was inconclusive. It didn't give credence to one theory over another. That is why, again, we are looking forward to receiving this full WHO report, to reviewing it, to reviewing the underlying data, and to cross-referencing what may be in our own holdings with that.

Yes.

**QUESTION:** Ned, so part of this was they said that the lab theory they don't think should be in the hypothesis that we will suggest for future studies. So does the State Department agree that we should cease that vein of inquiry and stop investigating whether or not it did come from a lab?

**MR PRICE:** The State Department, again, wants to see the report. We want to see the underlying data. We intend to marry that underlying data with what is in our own broader holdings, to include within our Intelligence Community. We are going to base our conclusions on nothing other than the data, nothing other than the science. And based on that, we'll come to a conclusion.

**QUESTION:** One more on the WHO. The previous administration as well made the argument that the WHO allegedly was influenced by China, and that was one of the reasons that the previous administration moved to exit it. Are you confident with how the WHO is handling this? Do you feel confident that whatever they reach will be independent and not unduly influenced by one country?

**MR PRICE:** Well, this goes back to what I was saying before. It also goes back to what I was saying yesterday in a very different context, that across the board the United States believes as a general matter that

when we engage, when we are at the table, we can help shape world events, we can help shape institutions. When we are not within the WHO, when we're not acting in that capacity, we don't have any influence to see to it that the WHO functions as the way it was intended to function, the way we hope it would – it should function.

So clearly, by re-engaging with the WHO, the United States will be in a position to push any necessary needed reforms. And to be clear, there are necessary and needed reforms. Just as any institution or just about any institution, the WHO is far from perfect. That is precisely why we re-engaged it, why President Biden announced our intention to re-engage it on his first day in office on January 20th.

**QUESTION:** So you've made reference several times to the January 15th State Department report saying it's inconclusive. You also said at one point that you don't want to rush to a conclusion that might be motivated by something other than science. I think that's a quote, unless I've gotten my notes wrong, which is possible, but I think that was pretty much what you said. Are you suggesting that the previous administration's or the previous Secretary's comments about this were motivated by something other than science?

**MR PRICE:** Matt, I – my orientation from this podium will be to look forward, not to look back. I am talking about our orientation. We are going to be guided by the science; we are going to be guided by the data. I wouldn't want to characterize the actions of the previous administration. I'm here to characterize our own actions.

**QUESTION:** Well, but – yeah, but you did, because you said that —

**MR PRICE:** No, I didn't, Matt. I said our actions will be guided by the data and guided by the science.

**QUESTION:** You said that you were not going to rush to conclusions that might be motivated by something other than science.

**MR PRICE:** Correct.

**QUESTION:** Suggesting to all but the most – I don't know – a slug that the previous administration was motivated by something other than science. Are you —

**MR PRICE:** Matt —

**QUESTION:** Are you saying that you're not trying to suggest that? Is the slug wrong?

**MR PRICE:** There was – I haven't diagrammed the sentence, Matt, but I think there was one subject in that sentence, and it was us. I never raised the previous administration. I don't intend to from this podium.

Yes.

**QUESTION:** Can I ask some more on this? Do you think that the U.S.'s absence in this interim from the WHO has made it less objective in things like this? Do you think its objectivity was damaged by not having the U.S. in the room to be involved in these discussions and these decisions?

**MR PRICE:** Well, I think what is undeniable is that the U.S. had not been engaged with the WHO during a

critical period. That is precisely why on the campaign trail then-candidate Biden pledged to reenter the WHO on his first full day – on his first day in office. That is precisely why on his first day in office he made good on that promise. Again, when we are at the table, when we are taking part, when the United States is present, when we're engaged, whether that's with the WHO, with UN bodies, with other elements, we can see to it that our interests and our values are there, that they are being represented. And I think when it comes to the WHO, that's precisely what we're going to do.

Yes.

**QUESTION:** During his confirmation hearing, Secretary Blinken said that the administration intends to join COVAX. Do you have any update on that effort and whether or not you'll provide a certain amount of funding for the vaccine distribution?

**MR PRICE:** So I don't have an update for you on specific funding. I think what I can say generally is that the United States will support multilateral efforts in the international COVID-19 public health and humanitarian response, including Access to the COVID-19 Tools Accelerator and the COVAX facility. In addition, we'll also be taking steps to provide congressional-appropriated funds to Gavi, which will support international vaccine procurement and distribution. We'll also develop a framework for providing surplus U.S. Government vaccine doses to countries in need once there is sufficient supply in the United States, including through the COVAX facility as appropriate.

And just to anticipate a follow-on question, we believe and we know that we can do both, that we can support these humanitarian efforts and these global efforts while ensuring that we have a safe and equitable access to the vaccine here in the United States to our own citizens, which of course is our priority in the first instance.

Yes, Rich.

**QUESTION:** Thanks, Ned. In your evaluation of the current refugee resettlement system, what kind of challenges do you have getting to 125,000 next year, and will that require an investment beyond what Congress has been providing over the past few years?

**MR PRICE:** Well, what I can say is that this is a priority of the President's. It is a priority of the President's because it is very much in our DNA to be a country that welcomes, that provides refuge, that provides safe haven to those in need. This of course was a priority that you heard from then-candidate Biden. It was, of course, something that the President has spoken to in recent days.

The White House has set an ambitious target. There is a target for this fiscal year; there's a target for the next fiscal year. And of course, as with many elements of our policy, many processes that we look to, it will take some time for us to get to those targets, precisely because, in this case, the U.S. refugee admissions process has – had essentially come to a standstill in recent years. And so there will be an effort within this building, with our interagency partners, to see to it that we can revive that program, that program that has important humanitarian functions, that has important strategic functions, that is reflective of who we are as an American people. Of course, this won't happen overnight, just because it will take some time to get those engines back up and running. But the President is committed to it.

**QUESTION:** What's your assessment of what those engines are like right now? Is it —

**MR PRICE:** Well, I think I just said the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, of course, has been profoundly underutilized in recent years. And so we are starting from a very slow rolling speed. But again, it is the President's commitment that we ensure this program is up and running in a way that provides refuge, provides relief, provides safe haven to those fleeing violence, conflict, persecution the world over. Again, it has humanitarian value, strategic value, and it's reflective of who we are. And that's why we're making it a priority.

Lalit.

**QUESTION:** Thank you. Thank you, Ned. Three years into this – three weeks into this administration, top leadership of this government have spoken to their Indian counterparts. Last one was yesterday, when the President spoke with Prime Minister Modi. From this podium, can you articulate for us what would India-U.S. relationship would look like in the next four years?

**MR PRICE:** Sure. Let me give you just some broad top lines. And I think you probably saw that Secretary Blinken today spoke with his Indian counterpart, Foreign Minister Jaishankar. I think I would start by saying the U.S.-India Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership is both broad as well as multifaceted. We'll continue to engage at the highest levels of our government to deepen cooperation on many fronts, and we are confident that the strong and upward trajectory of our partnership will, in fact, continue.

India is one of the most important partners in the Indo-Pacific region to us. We welcome India's emergence as a leading global power and its role as a net security provider in the region. We cooperate on a wide range of diplomatic and security issues, including defense, nonproliferation, regional cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, counterterrorism, peacekeeping, the environment, health, education, technology, agriculture, space, and oceans. And of course, that list is not exhaustive. We also work closely —

**QUESTION:** It sounded pretty exhaustive.

**MR PRICE:** (Laughter.) I could go on. We also work closely in international organizations, and we welcome India joining the Security Council in last month of this year for a two-year term. We also remain India's largest and most important trading partner, with total bilateral trade increasing to \$146 billion in 2019. U.S. companies, of course, are a large source of India's foreign direct investment.

And then finally, I would just highlight the people-to-people ties, the broad and important people-to-people ties. Across this country, nearly 4 million Indian Americans call the United States home, contributing in their communities and proudly serving their country in uniform.

**QUESTION:** One more question.

**MR PRICE:** Sure.

**QUESTION:** Several leaders of the Democratic Party, including Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal, Vice President Harris in her previous role as a senator, have spoken and raised concerns about India's human rights situation, including the farmers' protest, and previously Kashmir CAA, and other issues. We saw it mentioned it Biden campaign, some of the policy documents. When Secretary Blinken spoke to his Indian counterpart, this issue was raised by him?

**MR PRICE:** Well, what I can say – and this applies not only to India but to every partner of ours across the



board – we are committed to supporting democratic values, including a free and open civil society and the strong rule of law. We regularly engage with the Government of India – including, as you referenced and I alluded to, today – on our shared commitment to democratic values. We believe it's the bedrock for the U.S.-India relationship. And it's actually in keeping, as you know, with India's own democratic values, its pluralistic values, and its history of tolerance. So we regularly engage with our Indian counterparts on —

**QUESTION:** One more – can I ask one more on China? In the last one year, China has aggressively tried to intrude upon, encroach upon Indian territories. What is the administration's position on that?

**MR PRICE:** Well, we're closely monitoring the situation. We note the ongoing talks between the governments of India and China, and we continue to support direct dialogue and a peaceful resolution of those border disputes. We are concerned by Beijing's pattern of ongoing attempts to intimidate its neighbors. As always, we'll stand with friends, we'll stand with partners, we'll stand with allies to advance our shared prosperity, security, and values in, in this case, the Indo-Pacific.

**QUESTION:** A very quick one: Is a Quad summit in the works?

**MR PRICE:** So we don't have anything to announce at this time. What I would say generally is that the Quad is a key example of the United States and our closest partners, including, in this case, India, pulling together for the good of a free and open Indo-Pacific region. We view the Quad as having essential momentum and important potential, and that's why we're going to build on it by deepening cooperation on areas of traditional focus – and that includes maritime security – while also working closely with Quad partners to confront some of the defining issues of our time. That of course includes COVID-19; it includes climate. It includes – going back to our previous conversation – democratic resilience as well.

**QUESTION:** Thank you.

**MR PRICE:** Yeah. Sorry, Iran?

**QUESTION:** On Iran, yes.

**MR PRICE:** Iran, okay.

**QUESTION:** Hi. Mouhamed Elahmed with Al Jazeera Arabic. So Iran's intelligence minister warned that Iran would seek nuclear arms if cornered by the West. So how do you respond to such threats, which is the first indication yet from Iran that it would seek obtaining nuclear arms if pressured more by the U.S. and its allies?

**MR PRICE:** Well, it's not yet clear to us that Mahmoud Alavi was speaking for anyone but himself. I would say that we, of course, took note of those remarks. They are very concerning. Would also note – and I referenced this yesterday as well – that Iran has an obligation under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty – the NPT – never – never, never, never – permanent prohibition to acquire nuclear weapons, and it reaffirmed that commitment under the JCPOA. I think that's where we'd leave our reaction.

Yes. Yeah.

**QUESTION:** Do you have a response to the UN report saying that there has been cooperation between Iran and North Korea on ballistic missile development? And what does that – what conclusion do you draw from

that about the possibility of cooperation with Iran? Are you – do you mistrust their intentions even more, given this cooperation?

**MR PRICE:** Well, I don't think it really changes our strategic orientation to Iran. If the old adage is trust and verify, in this case it may be mistrust and verify. When it comes to this report, we've seen the press reporting, of course. We won't comment on a UN report that has not yet been published, but it is true that we continue to use a variety of nonproliferation tools to work to prevent the further advancement of Iran's missile program and its ability to proliferate this technology to others, including North Korea. And this includes working with our partners to stop specific shipments of equipment and technology to these programs, using our engagement in multilateral fora to raise awareness of Iran's missile activities, and to urge countries to take steps to address these activities, and finally imposing nonproliferation sanctions pursuant to our domestic authorities against entities supporting Iran's missile program.

That's why we've also said that our goal is not only to have Iran come back into full compliance with the JCPOA, but then to use the JCPOA, which we would seek to in the first instance lengthen and strengthen, as a platform for follow-on agreements to include other areas of Iran's malign activities. And that includes, of course, its ballistic missile program.

**QUESTION:** Thank you.

**MR PRICE:** Yeah.

**QUESTION:** In terms of North Korea, could you give us an update on how much progress the administration has made towards working on – working out its new approach to North Korea and how it's going to convince the government there to give up its nuclear weapons?

**MR PRICE:** Well, we are now, what, a little over two weeks into this administration, so I – that would be my first stipulation. But I will say when it comes to that approach, we will adopt a new approach that keeps the American people and our allies safe, and that will begin through a policy review of the state of play in North Korea. And we're going to do that in close consultation and coordination with the Republic of Korea, with Japan, with other allies and partners on ongoing pressure options and potential for future diplomacy.

Our focus in formulating this new policy and approach and undertaking these consultations will be on reducing the threat to the United States and our allies, as well as improving the lives of the North the South Korean people. And as I think you have heard us say before, at the core, we do remain committed to the denuclearization of North Korea but don't have any additional details to read out at this time.

Shaun. North Korea?

**QUESTION:** Just is the administration concerned at all that a delay of engaging with the North Koreans could result in them doing something to get the United States attention – testing a nuclear weapon or launching a delivery system?

**MR PRICE:** I think we would be more concerned with the prospect of not closely coordinating with our partners – in this instance, of course, the Republic of Korea and Japan. You've heard us say it, whether it's North Korea, whether it's Iran, whether it is any other global challenge: In the first instance, we want to make sure we are on precisely the same page to make sure our allies and partners know that we are there for

them, that we have their back, that we are on this diplomatic endeavor together. So that's our first —

**QUESTION:** The U.S. alliances when it comes to East Asia — the Japanese, the South Koreans — not always on the exact same page when it comes to the North Korean threat. Are you getting the sense as you're doing that outreach that you are on the same page?

**MR PRICE:** Well, that's exactly why we're doing it. I think the risk in moving too soon, whether the issue is Iran, whether the issue is North Korea, is that we don't bring along our allies and our partners with us. And it's very important that we do the diplomatic legwork that — before we undertake any approach — that we — and just that we know what our strategic objectives are, but as importantly, our partners and our allies also know what our strategic objectives are. And of course the underlying goal there is to harmonize them, to make sure our approach is coordinated and, in turn, the most effective.

Shaun. Shaun.

**QUESTION:** Sure. Could we go to Myanmar, to Burma?

**QUESTION:** No, could you stay on both North Korea and Iran?

**MR PRICE:** Okay.

**QUESTION:** Just for a second. You say a new policy and a new approach. Does that mean that we should not expect to see President Biden or Secretary Blinken flying to Asia, meeting with Kim Jong-un? Is that what you mean by that? And do you mean that you believe that the previous administration's approach to North Korea was a failure?

**MR PRICE:** I am not going to speak to the previous administration's approach. I am just stating facts about where we are and I'm speaking to the review that we are undertaking. When it comes to where Secretary Blinken or President Biden might fly, I wouldn't expect them to fly anywhere anytime soon out of the country. I would expect when we are prepared to travel that you will see Secretary Blinken going first to our close allies and partners, and I would imagine that would include to our Asian allies early on.

**QUESTION:** And then you said in reference to Iran that they had said as part — you said that Iran had said as part of the JCPOA that they would never, never, never, never — maybe you only said it three times — acquire a nuclear weapon. Does this administration really believe that?

**MR PRICE:** The Nonproliferation Treaty imposes a permanent ban on a non-nuclear state obtaining a nuclear weapon.

**QUESTION:** Yeah, I know that.

**MR PRICE:** We absolutely believe that.

**QUESTION:** But —

**MR PRICE:** We believe strongly in the nonproliferation regime; we believe strongly in the Nonproliferation Treaty that undergirds that regime.



**QUESTION:** Yeah, but Ned, you – of course that's what it said and I believe that's what it says as well. Do you believe that Iran is actually committed to this?

**MR PRICE:** We believe that – well, we know that Iran is still a party to the treaty. We believe —

**QUESTION:** You know what, you also believed that Russia was a party to the Open Skies agreement, and you just said – you said just a couple days ago that they weren't – and the INF Treaty – and you said that they weren't adhering to it.

**MR PRICE:** Yeah. What we know —

**QUESTION:** So there's a big difference between signing up to a treaty or an agreement and actually complying with it.

**MR PRICE:** Well —

**QUESTION:** So do you actually believe that Iran is serious and is full-on on never, never, never acquiring a nuclear weapon?

**MR PRICE:** We know that is Iran's obligation under the Nonproliferation Treaty. We also know, as we have discussed here, that Iran is far out of compliance with its JCPOA obligations. That is why we have continued to reiterate the point that Iran needs to resume that full compliance with its JCPOA obligations, and from there, we'll pursue the path of diplomacy.

Shaun.

**QUESTION:** Can we go to Myanmar? Could you provide an update with – of any diplomacy that's gone on recently? You mentioned yesterday standing with the people of Burma. Can you explain what, if anything, the U.S. can do to that? And do you have any – specifically any comment on actions in the past day? Today the military authorities ransacked the offices of the NLD, Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy, and there was the use of force on some protesters.

**MR PRICE:** Yeah. Well, what I would say broadly is that we strongly condemn violence against demonstrators. All individuals in Burma have rights to freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly, including for the purposes of peaceful protest. We repeat our calls for the military to relinquish power, restore democratically elected government, release those detained, and lift all telecommunication restrictions, and to refrain from violence. You saw in the readouts that have been issued in recent days – recent hours even – by this building, by the White House that Burma has been a constant refrain in our engagement with leaders around the world.

You saw the very strong statement emanate from the UN Security Council late last week on Friday, I believe it was. We are continuing to make this a priority. We are making no bones about where we stand when it comes to the military's need to relinquish power. As you've also heard us say, we are undertaking a careful review of the assistance that we provide to Burma and with an eye towards ensuring that those responsible for this coup do face significant consequences.

Yes.

**QUESTION:** Is it still the case that the U.S. hasn't had any contact with the generals who made this coup? And I guess related to that, you've been talking about you're talking to allies who might have closer relationships with Myanmar. Do you know if any of those allies or any other of the countries you've been talking to have been able to talk directly to the senior general —

**MR PRICE:** Yeah.

**QUESTION:** — Senior General Min Aung Hlaing?

**MR PRICE:** So look, I will speak for this building. I think I said yesterday that we had made attempts both informal and formal to reach Aung San Suu Kyi in the hours and days after the coup. Those efforts were denied. There are countries in the region that do have an — closer relationships with some of those behind these actions. I wouldn't want to speak for them, but I can tell you the international community is attempting every avenue to ensure that democracy and civilian leadership is restored in Burma. It's precisely why it has continued to be a refrain in the readouts you've seen from this building, from the White House, and why I expect you will hear more about our policy course of action in the coming days.

Yes.

**QUESTION:** Venezuela. A GAO report concluded yesterday that U.S. sanctions against Maduro's regime maybe have exacerbated the humanitarian crisis there. Is that going to compel the Biden administration to find another way aside from sanctions to force Maduro from power even if they are targeted, as Secretary Blinken has suggested they might be?

**MR PRICE:** Well, what I would say in the first instance is that the — the U.S. is the largest donor of humanitarian aid for the Venezuelan regional crisis. We are committed to supporting Venezuelans who are suffering due to the crisis caused by the Maduro regime. The illegitimate regime's repression, corruption, and mismanagement have left millions of people in Venezuela in need of humanitarian aid. And it's created one of the worst migration crises ever seen in the Western Hemisphere. An estimated 5.4 million people have fled the country. We have been and we remain extensively engaged in the good faith efforts of the interim government of Venezuela to bring relief to the Venezuelan people who struggling with poverty and health needs. And we do remain the largest donor of humanitarian aid for the Venezuelan regional crisis, having provided more than \$1.2 billion to help people affected by the crisis both in Venezuela and across the region. This amount includes more than \$47 million in humanitarian assistance specifically to support water and sanitation, case management, and disease surveillance in response to COVID-19.

Sanctions, I — to your question, are designed to allow for the provision of humanitarian assistance and the commercial sale of export — and export of agricultural commodities, food, medicine, medical devices to Venezuela. We do remain the second-largest food exporter to Venezuela as well. President Biden, as I think you have heard him say in recent days even, understands the pain the current crisis in Venezuela is inflicting on Venezuelans and their families. We know that that pain is the result of one individual and one regime, and that is the corrupt Maduro regime and the dictatorship of Nicholas Maduro.

**QUESTION:** But given that the sanctions in this GAO report have actually been identified to exacerbate the humanitarian situation, has that changed your thinking on what exactly you might do that are aside from sanctions?

**MR PRICE:** We are always looking for ways to support the people of Venezuela. And we are looking for

ways to support their democratic aspiration, their humanitarian need. And we'll continue to do that. I think the point remains that the United States has stood with the people of Venezuela in providing them this aid and in doing all that we can to ensure that our pressure on the Maduro regime is not worsening the humanitarian implications and the humanitarian suffering of the Venezuelan people. Of course, as we review this, as we review our sanctions policy across the board, if there are ways that we can provide additional humanitarian assistance, if there are ways that we can further alleviate the suffering of the Venezuelan people, we will certainly do so.

I know we've gone on very long. We'll go one in the back.

**QUESTION:** I've got a question about Belarus since you talked about the Day of Solidarity with the people of Belarus. Is the new ambassador planning to go to Minsk to present her credentials to Alexander Lukashenko, or do you see her more as kind of an envoy to the opposition at this point?

**MR PRICE:** Well, the ambassador-designate, as I think you know, was traveling to partner countries last week. Again, here, we are coordinating closely with our European partners on this challenge. I don't have any update for you on her plans, any plans to travel to Belarus. I think there is a lot we can do to support the people of Belarus from this building and in tandem with our partners across the European continent as well.

**QUESTION:** On Russia, sir. It's kind of late. The EU's top diplomat has sort of signaled a hardening stance of the EU towards Russia over Navalny, and the treatment he received in Moscow got a bit of attention. So is the U.S. considering sort of – is this going to potentially accelerate your imposition of sanctions on Russia related to Navalny?

**MR PRICE:** We have been moving expeditiously and with alacrity since day one of this administration to ensure that our maneuvers to hold the Russian regime accountable for its malign activity across the board – to ensure that we did just that. Of course, in the early days of this administration, we saw a violent crackdown on Russian citizens who took to the streets to do nothing more than to exercise the rights that they are guaranteed under the Russian constitution. We are – the DNI is evaluating a whole series of malign activities. We, of course, are taking into account Russia's egregious actions in this case and its human rights abuses more broadly. But we have always been moving as quickly as possible when it comes to policy maneuvers you may well hear about going forward.

I think with that, we'll call it a day.

**QUESTION:** Wait, wait. Hold on one second. You said you're moving – since taking office, you've been moving expeditiously and with alacrity. So what have you done?

**MR PRICE:** I think —

**QUESTION:** You've announced a review, but what have you actually —

**MR PRICE:** We have announced a review, I think, in day —

**QUESTION:** Well, I can announce a review of my Netflix. So what —

**MR PRICE:** Well, Matt – Matt, reviews – reviews do reach their culmination.

**QUESTION:** Well, okay. So are you suggesting —

**MR PRICE:** And so this is a not a review for the sake of a review.

**QUESTION:** Well, okay, fair enough. So are you suggesting that the — that with alacrity and expeditiously, these reviews will come to a conclusion very soon and —

**MR PRICE:** I am suggesting that we are moving expeditiously and with alacrity. I wouldn't want to put a timeframe on it, but I think you have clearly seen us take a number of actions, coordinate with our allies and our partners, leave no doubt in our public statements where we stand.

**QUESTION:** Well, wait. No, I haven't seen a number of actions. What are the actions that have been taken?

**MR PRICE:** You haven't seen the G7 statement that was issued shortly into this administration? You haven't seen the Secretary speak out? You haven't seen the President speak out? You haven't seen the President direct his DNI to undertake a review of a number of malign activities? We have been very consistent on this, Matt.

**QUESTION:** That's a lot of talk. That's not action. I mean, don't you remember growing up, "Actions speak louder than words"?

**MR PRICE:** And Matt — Matt —

**QUESTION:** Announcing a review is not exactly taking action.

**MR PRICE:** Matt, we are not undertaking a review just for the sake of a review.

**QUESTION:** Gotcha. I hope.

**MR PRICE:** The review will come to a culmination and conclusion. Thank you very much, everyone.

**QUESTION:** Thank you.

**MR PRICE:** We'll do this again tomorrow.

(The briefing was concluded at 2:17 p.m.)

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# Might SARS-CoV-2 Have Arisen via Serial Passage through an Animal Host or Cell Culture?

A potential explanation for much of the novel coronavirus' distinctive genome

Karl Sirotkin\* and Dan Sirotkin

Despite claims from prominent scientists that SARS-CoV-2 indubitably emerged naturally, the etiology of this novel coronavirus remains a pressing and open question: Without knowing the true nature of a disease, it is impossible for clinicians to appropriately shape their care, for policy-makers to correctly gauge the nature and extent of the threat, and for the public to appropriately modify their behavior. Unless the intermediate host necessary for completing a natural zoonotic jump is identified, the dual-use gain-of-function research practice of viral serial passage should be considered a viable route by which the novel coronavirus arose. The practice of serial passage mimics a natural zoonotic jump, and offers explanations for SARS-CoV-2's distinctive spike-protein region and its unexpectedly high affinity for angiotensin converting enzyme (ACE2), as well as the notable polybasic furin cleavage site within it. Additional molecular clues raise further questions, all of which warrant full investigation into the novel coronavirus's origins and a re-examination of the risks and rewards of dual-use gain-of-function research.

same genetic signatures behind as a natural jump but occurring in a much shorter period of time.

The genetic signatures in question includes two distinctive features possessed by SARS-CoV-2's spike-protein: the unique sequence in the receptor binding domain (RBD), a region known to be critical for SARS-CoV-2's utilization of human angiotensin converting enzyme (ACE2), which is the cell surface receptor used by both SARS-CoV and SARS-CoV-2 for fusion with target cells and subsequent cell entry. The second feature is the presence of a polybasic furin cleavage site, which is also known as a multibasic cleavage site (MBS)—a four amino acid insertion with limited sequence flexibility—within the coronavirus's novel spike-protein, that is not found in SARS-CoV or other lineage B coronaviruses. This furin cleavage site, which is poly or multibasic by definition

## 1. Introduction

To date, the origins of SARS-CoV-2 remain in doubt, and its behavior enigmatic: It has been reported that "the virus acts like no microbe humanity has ever seen."<sup>[1]</sup> Although based on sequence analysis many prominent virologists and other eminent scientists have concluded that the novel coronavirus causing the current pandemic was not designed or manipulated in a laboratory and was the result of a natural zoonotic jump,<sup>[2]</sup> this assertion fails to fully account for all possible origins of two unique genomic characteristics found in SARS-CoV-2, and ignores the long history of serial passage as a method to manipulate viral genomes. The long-standing practice of serial passage is a form of gain-of-function research that forces zoonosis between species, and requires the same molecular adaptations necessary for a natural zoonotic jump to occur within a laboratory, leaving the

since its composed of multiple basic amino acids, is an important virulence feature observed to have been acquired by fusion proteins of avian influenza viruses and Newcastle Disease Virus either grown under experimental conditions or isolated from commercial animal farms—settings that mimic the conditions of serial laboratory passage. In fact, no influenza virus with a furin cleavage site has ever been found in nature,<sup>[3]</sup> and it is a feature that has been thoroughly investigated in the literature since it appears to allow the influenza viruses that carry it to establish a systemic multiorgan infection using different cell types including nerve cells,<sup>[3]</sup> is correlated with high pathogenicity, and also plays a key role in overcoming the species barrier.<sup>[4]</sup> More generally, despite the fact that not all serially passed viruses have demonstrated an increase in pathogenicity, the fact remains that every highly pathogenic avian influenza virus, defined by having a furin cleavage site, has either been found on commercial poultry farms that create the pseudo-natural conditions necessary for serial passage, or created in laboratories with gain-of-function serial passage experiments.<sup>[3]</sup>

Although they only emerge under artificial conditions in influenza viruses, these furin cleavage sites are found within several branches of the coronavirus family tree. However SARS-CoV-2 is the only lineage B coronavirus found with one, and the only other coronaviruses known to have them are only at most 60% identical to this novel coronavirus.<sup>[5]</sup> An intriguing

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clinical correlate is that furin cleavage sites within influenza viruses are associated with lymphopenia in infected mice, and with neurological conditions following replication in the brains of ferrets,<sup>[6]</sup> both of which are clinical manifestations observed in hospitalized patients infected by SARS-CoV-2 and suffering from COVID-19.<sup>[1]</sup> This indicates that furin cleavage sites may be an example of the convergent evolution that dominates virus–host interactions, since viral proteins evolve convergently and often accumulate many of the same linear motifs that mediate many functionally diverse biophysical interactions in order to manipulate complex host processes.<sup>[7]</sup> It is possible that this novel coronavirus gained its furin cleavage site through recombination in an intermediate host species, however there are also two laboratory processes that may have imbued SARS-CoV-2 with its furin cleavage site which will be discussed below.

Without incorporating the historical and biological implications of serial viral passage either through lab animals *in vivo* or through cell cultures *in vitro*, it is impossible to comprehensively evaluate whether SARS-CoV-2 is the result of a laboratory leak or a natural zoonotic jump. Moreover, despite the published consensus being that SARS-CoV-2 arose naturally, because these publications universally ignore the scenario of the widely used practice of laboratory serial passage, this latter scenario deserves a thorough investigation. Especially since serial passage through a live animal host simply forces the same molecular processes that occur in nature to happen during a zoonotic jump, and *in vitro* passage through cell culture mimics many elements of this process—and neither necessarily leaves any distinguishing genetic traces.

## 2. The History of Viral Serial Passage

The dual-use gain-of-function research tool of serial passage was first applied to a strain of H1N1 Swine Flu, a variant of the pandemic influenza virus that was genetically modified before it either leaked out of a Soviet lab or was introduced as part of an attenuated vaccine trial in 1977. Although no one has ever taken responsibility for the introduction of this virus, it would become the first known example of a virus created by serial passage leaving a lab, which was later determined due to its inexplicable genetic distance from any known sister strain.<sup>[8]</sup> This extra distance would be expected since serial passages artificially accelerates genetic divergence between taxa, resulting in the accumulation of genetic distance at a much faster rate than it occurs in a natural setting.

Then in 1979, just 2 years after the introduction of this modified H1N1 Swine Flu, a different Soviet lab leaked weaponized anthrax out through an improperly maintained exhaust filter, and Soviet authorities convincingly blamed the deaths on contaminated local meat. This cover up withstood a formal inquiry conducted in 1986, and was not revealed to be a fabrication until 1992, when an analysis of dispersion patterns revealed that the victims were not those working with the supposedly contaminated meat, but instead all lived downwind from the Sverdlovsk weapons lab and its improperly maintained exhaust vent. Therefore, there is a history of denying laboratory leaks on the commercial meat industry that dates back about 40 years, an

effective excuse that provided the Soviets with an alibi that held up for nearly 2 decades.

The Soviet strain of serially passaged H1N1 Swine Flu was likely being developed as part of a vaccine program, one of the humane goals of gain-of-function research that exist alongside riskier and more troublesome ones like developing bioweapons. Its emergence ignited the debate between the risks and rewards of dual-use gain-of-function research—causing it to become the poster virus for the dangers this protocol posed.<sup>[8]</sup>

This debate would largely fade in the decades that followed, until two separate teams used genetic manipulation followed by serial passage between ferrets to create mammal-transmissible H5N1 Bird Flu strains of influenza virus in 2011 that had the gain-of-function of being transmissible by aerosol. The first team was led by Dr. Ron Fouchier and conducted at the Erasmus Medical Center in the Netherlands, and demonstrated that as few as five mutations prior to serial passage were sufficient to create a modified strain of the H5N1 Bird Flu that could be transmitted by aerosol while remaining highly lethal.<sup>[9]</sup> The creation of this highly virulent strain that was said by a reporter to be able to “make the deadly 1918 pandemic look like a pesky cold,”<sup>[10]</sup> and was contentious enough to cause the scientists working on them to prepare for a media storm<sup>[11]</sup>—a storm that rolled in on the back of a second similar experiment.

Instead of only tweaking the H5N1 Bird Flu in a few places before serial passage, Dr. Yoshihiro Kawaoka of the Universities of Tokyo and Wisconsin used genetic engineering to combine genes from the H1N1 Swine Flu as well as the H5N1 Bird Flu to create a chimeric virus that was then serially passed through ferrets, creating another airborne virus with potentially pandemic properties.<sup>[12]</sup> Both experiments created a modified genome that appeared to be the result of natural, albeit accelerated, selection since the process of serial passage forces the mutations selected for in natural zoonotic jumps, and masks the direct genetic engineering done on the viruses. These experiments were viewed by many as being sufficiently dangerous that they should not be published,<sup>[13]</sup> however they were both eventually released with certain methodological and sequence details left out.

In the years that followed, gain-of-function serial passage through ferrets was used to increase the virulence of the H7N1 Bird Flu as well as allowing for its aerosol transmission without first introducing any mutations.<sup>[14]</sup> Additionally, the H1N1 Bird Flu was also found to become airborne and increase in virulence after *in vivo* passage through swine.<sup>[15,16]</sup> And although serial passage in the laboratory does not invariably increase viral pathogenicity, highly pathogenic influenza viruses all contain furin cleavage sites,<sup>[16]</sup> which only emerge after serial passage in laboratories or pseudo-naturally on commercial animal farms.

The process of sequential passage through animal hosts or cell cultures leaves a genome that appears natural and not purposefully manipulated since it effectively mimics the natural process of zoonosis, and leaves a genome that appears to be the result of natural selection so long as its relationship to related strains of virus is ignored. However, the artificial generations added by forced serial passage creates the artificial appearance of evolutionary distance, which was the characteristic of the H1N1 Swine Flu Soviet leak in the 1970s that lead researchers

to conclude it had been constructed in a lab, and is exactly what is found with SARS-CoV-2, which is distant enough from any other virus that it has been placed in its own clade.<sup>[17]</sup>

## 2.1. Serial Passage and Its Molecular Signatures

Although serial passage mimics many of the natural zoonotic processes that occur during a natural zoonotic jump, because serial passage artificially condenses a natural phenomenon into a small temporal window, some subtle differences can be found. In addition to the inexplicable genetic distance from its sister strains, which screams out for an intermediate relative to complete the phylogenetic picture, SARS-CoV-2 has a remarkably strong affinity for spike-protein binding to ACE2—some 10–20 times higher than SARS-CoV's.<sup>[18]</sup> That affinity may have emerged after mutational events either in an intermediate natural host or after a zoonotic jump into humans that theoretically could have occurred earlier than the first documented infection, which would give it time to increase that significantly. So logically, it could also have emerged via selection after serial passage through laboratory cell cultures or laboratory animals as well. And regarding the second distinctive feature found in the novel coronavirus: If other viruses have been observed to acquire furin cleavage sites by passage under experimental laboratory conditions, then such a mechanism is theoretically possible for SARS-CoV-2 as well.<sup>[14]</sup>

In the case of influenza viruses like those mentioned above, their gain-of-function furin cleavage sites are thought to be a result of two different molecular processes. The first is either nucleotide insertions or substitutions that are able to be rescued and then eventually selected for due to the high multiplicity of infection found in serial passage protocols.<sup>[19]</sup> And the second is the recombination of multiple viral RNAs inside a host cell,<sup>[20]</sup> which may also include additional viruses introduced through accidental laboratory co-infections.

Unlike influenza viruses, serial passage through ferrets has not been recorded in the literature for coronaviruses. However, since several branches of coronavirus have furin cleavage sites, a molecular pathway for their emergence must exist and may reemerge during serial passage. Several factors weigh into the probability that coronaviruses can gain furin cleavage sites following serial passage: The frequency of evolutionary motifs meant to deal with virus–host interactions that are often shared between viruses, the observations that when the infectious bronchitis coronavirus (IBV) coronavirus is serially passed through chickens it developed notable mutations along its spike-protein genes,<sup>[21]</sup> and the fact that when a lineage A bovine coronavirus was subject to *in vitro* serial passage through cell lines, a 12-nucleotide insert found within only a small minority of the pooled viruses spike-protein region was strongly selected for and quickly emerged as the dominate strain.<sup>[22]</sup> These findings all point to the possibility that SARS-CoV-2 may have gained its furin cleavage site the same way influenza viruses do—through the *in vivo* serial passage between the live hosts that presents the immune challenges and intense selective pressure necessary for the recombination and mutations that lead to its emergence to occur. And just like influenza viruses are only able to preserve their furin cleavages in artificial environments since the heightened

virulence they impart kills their hosts before they can propagate in a natural setting, based on the known taxonomy lineage B coronaviruses do not appear to be able to support furin cleavages in nature.

There is no doubt that the acquisition of the furin cleavage site was one of the key adaptations that enable SARS-CoV-2 to efficiently spread in the human populations compared to other lineage B coronaviruses, and provides a gain-of-function.<sup>[23]</sup> In addition to the possibility of obtaining a furin cleavage site through natural recombination in a secondary host or through serial passage either in a laboratory or on a commercial farm, one could have been spliced directly into the novel coronavirus's backbone in a laboratory using classic recombinant DNA technology that has been available for nearly 20 years. This allows for the removal of the restriction site junctions that are the telltale sign of direct genetic manipulation and permits reassembly without introducing nucleotide changes—creating a virus without any evidence of manipulation using the aptly named “No See'm technology.”<sup>[24]</sup> So although the entire spike-protein RBD was not assembled from scratch, it is certainly plausible that the 12-nucleotide-long furin cleavage site could have been spliced directly into SARS-CoV-2. Furin cleavages already have been successfully spliced into other coronaviruses, including the IBV,<sup>[25]</sup> and even into SARS-CoV, where it increased cell-to-cell fusion in *in vitro* experiments that only examined only the spike-protein's function, which would presumably heighten its infectivity *in vivo*.<sup>[26]</sup>

Moreover, when a furin cleavage site was introduced to the IBV coronavirus spike-protein via recombination, just like influenza viruses hosting this feature, it appeared to impart it with increased lethality as well as inflict neurological symptoms that had never previously been reported in studies of the murine IBV coronavirus.<sup>[25]</sup> The presence of this cleavage site also increased damage to the respiratory and urinary systems, paralleling SARS-CoV-2 systemic multiorgan symptoms—especially reports that infection with the novel coronavirus not only targets the lungs where it binds to ACE2 receptors, but also the entire cardiovascular system,<sup>[27]</sup> the nervous system,<sup>[28]</sup> and our kidneys as well.<sup>[29]</sup> It might be more than a coincidence that the Vero cells often used in serial passage are derived from kidney epithelial cells extracted from African green monkeys, which have ACE2 receptors very similar to those found in humans and would be shared by the humanized mice that are also used for serial passage research.

## 2.2. Natural Origin, or Gain-of-Function Lab Escape?

Gain-of-function research on bat-borne coronaviruses has been ongoing for nearly a decade everywhere from the University of North Carolina to the Wuhan's Institute of Virology, which is supported by related facilities such as Wuhan's Center for Disease Control and Prevention as well as Wuhan University. A coronavirus that targets the ACE2 receptor like SARS-CoV-2 was first isolated from a wild bat in 2013 by a team out of Wuhan. This research was funded in part by EcoHealth Alliance,<sup>[30]</sup> and set the stage for the manipulation of bat-borne coronavirus genomes that target this receptor and can become airborne. Many more viruses have been collected in Wuhan over the years, and one



research expedition captured as many as 400 wild viruses,<sup>[31]</sup> which were added to a private repository that has since grown to over 1500 strains of virus,<sup>[32]</sup> meaning that the Wuhan Center for Disease Control and Prevention has a massive catalogue of largely undisclosed viruses to draw from for experiments. And in subsequent years, EcoHealth Alliance received funding for project proposals outlining gain-of-function research to be done in Wuhan, hoping to use cell cultures and humanized mice as well as "[spike]-protein sequence data, infectious clone technology, in vitro and in vivo infection experiments and analysis of receptor binding"<sup>[33]</sup> to manipulate bat coronavirus genomes—all of which are consistent with the wet-work that would be needed to engineer this novel coronavirus in a laboratory. But for whatever reason, the Wuhan Institute of Virology has refused to release the lab notebooks of its researchers, which are ubiquitous in even the simplest laboratories and are expected to be meticulously detailed given the sensitive and delicate work that takes place in BSL-4 research labs intent on documenting their intellectual property, despite the fact that these notebooks would likely be enough to exonerate the lab from having any role in the creation of SARS-CoV-2.<sup>[34]</sup>

Although it does not prove a laboratory origin, another gain-of-function experiment demonstrates one possible step along the way to engineering SARS-CoV-2: the synthetic reconstruction of the SARS coronavirus to impart this virus with a high affinity for ACE2. This involved isolating a progenitor coronavirus from civets and then serially passing it through mammalian ACE2 receptor-expressing cells—serial passage through host cell lines instead of entire hosts, which imparted a strong affinity for ACE2,<sup>[35]</sup> and another novel strain of coronavirus that was also presumably airborne. A few years after this study, more gain-of-function research was performed that involved the creation of a chimeric bat-borne coronavirus by directly manipulating the bat coronavirus spike-protein gene,<sup>[36]</sup> which created a coronavirus so virulent that it evoked the following dire warning from Simon Wain-Hobson, a virologist with the Pasteur Institute in Paris: "If the [new] virus escaped, nobody could predict the trajectory."<sup>[37]</sup>

Although SARS-CoV-2's efficient solution for ACE2 binding has been accurately described as something that could not be intentionally engineered nucleotide-by-nucleotide,<sup>[2]</sup> it could well be selected for after serial passage through ferrets or cell cultures in a lab. The only origin for the SARS-CoV-2 spike-protein RBD that the sequence data excludes is the deliberate manufacturing and introduction of the entire SARS-CoV spike-protein RBD sequence to create SARS-CoV-2. Otherwise, there are no genetic data to distinguish among natural and engineered possibilities at the present time.

### 2.3. Ferreting Out the Signs of Serial Passage

Curiously, studies examining SARS-CoV-2's infectivity in ferrets found that it spreads readily among them, and also appears airborne in that animal model.<sup>[38]</sup> This lends support to the idea that ferrets may have been used for serial passage since viruses typically take a significant many months if not years to acclimate enough to spread at all among any new species, nonetheless become airborne, which requires further mutations.

This relationship was further supported by reports out of the Netherlands that the novel coronavirus had spread among thirteen different mink farms there, and also to at least one farm in Denmark<sup>[39]</sup> and to another in Spain where 87% of the mink were infected.<sup>[40]</sup> Minks are a closely related subspecies of ferret that can produce fertile offspring together, and so the fact that not only did the virus spread to fifteen different farms in three countries, but also appears to have spread from minks into farm workers<sup>[41]</sup> indicates that accidental commercial serial passage through minks could have played a role in its creation, as an alternative to laboratory ferrets. Nevertheless, regardless of where any possible serial passage occurred, the fact that SARS-CoV-2 spreads from humans to minks and then back to humans demonstrates a high affinity for both species, despite neither nominally being a natural reservoir. Further support for the possibility that serial passage through lab ferrets or through-out mink farms played a role in the genesis of this novel coronavirus is provided by a preprint that notes the obvious ease with which it passes through the air between ferrets, since SARS-CoV-2 was transmitted through the air to three out of four indirect recipient ferrets monitored for airborne passage of the novel coronavirus.<sup>[42]</sup> It seems reasonable to think that SARS-CoV-2's apparent affinity for ferrets and minks should lead to an investigation of mink farms in the Hubei province where the novel coronavirus was discovered, since a viable pathway for its emergence could be infected bats defecating on commercial mink farms, which would loosely parallel the emergence of MERS-CoV from herds of camels following putative fecal contamination by local bats.<sup>[43]</sup>

The prospect that serial passage through lab animals or on commercial farms may have played a role in the creation of SARS-CoV-2 is also raised by an April 2020 preprint, which appears to have been retracted after Chinese authorities implemented the censorship of any papers relating to the origins of the novel coronavirus.<sup>[44]</sup> This paper found that coronaviruses that target the ACE2 receptor bind with ferret cells more tightly than any other species except the tree shrew, which only scored about 2% higher. Tree shrews have also been used for serial viral passage, and have been promoted as a preferable animal host for laboratory experimentation since they are cheaper, smaller, easier to handle, and closer to humans evolutionarily and physiologically than ferrets.<sup>[45]</sup> However, one does not exclude the other as a possible host, and a recent preprint examining SARS-CoV's binding affinity in humans raises additional questions about its initial emergence. It found that the novel coronavirus appears to be far more adapted to human ACE2 receptors than those found in bats, which is unexpected given that bats are the virus's assumed source, and which lead the lead research to observe that SARS-CoV-2 was perfectly adapted to infect humans since its first contact with us, and had no apparent need to for any adaptive evolution at all.<sup>[46]</sup>

Although the novel coronavirus also appears to have a high affinity for the pangolin ACE2 receptor,<sup>[47]</sup> phylogenetic analysis of the neutral sites that best determine shared heritage<sup>[48]</sup> and a distinctive amino acid sequence both indicate that pangolins are unlikely to have served as an intermediate host,<sup>[47]</sup> so this affinity is likely due to the convergent motifs that often mark viral evolution and not shared heritage. The unexpected immediate

affinity for humans was also reflected by another preprint, which observed that SARS-CoV-2 appeared just as adapted to humans at the very start of its epidemic as SARS-CoV was in the latest stages of its emergence,<sup>49</sup> an unexpected finding since viruses are expected to mutate substantially as they acclimate to a new species.<sup>50</sup> SARS-CoV-2's muddled origins are made even more Gordian by a study published March 2018 that examined people who live in villages about a kilometer away from bat caves. This study revealed that only 2.7% of those villagers had antibodies indicating any past exposure to bat coronaviruses. The authors also sampled people living in Wuhan, and found no evidence of exposure to SARS-CoV-like coronaviruses at all.<sup>51</sup>

This means there is very little serological evidence of any exposure to these coronaviruses even in Chinese villagers living in close proximity to bat caves, and at the epicenter of the current outbreak—no previous exposure was found at all. These data do not support the idea that SARS-CoV-2 was circulating in humans prior to the outbreak began in Wuhan in the early winter or fall of 2019, making a zoonotic jump even more unlikely since natural jumps leave wide serological footprints in their new host populations as early variants of a prospective virus make limited and unsuccessful jumps into individuals of the new host species, a trial-and-error that must occur before mutations that allow adaptation to a new host species are selected.<sup>50</sup> However these results do not rule out a much earlier jump into humans somewhere outside Hubei province, an alternative that is awaiting empirical support.

Taken together, the available evidence does not point definitively toward a natural origin for SARS-CoV-2, rather, much of it is more consistent with what would be found if the novel coronavirus had arisen from serial passage of a “precursor” progenitor virus in a lab, or from bats infecting a commercial mink farm somewhere in China, which would also provide the conditions for serial passage. However, more evidence is required before a conclusive judgement can be made one way or the other.

Further research around SARS-CoV-2's affinity to ferrets and minks, as well as other possible intermediate hosts seems warranted, and certainly the examination of all past gain-of-function serial passage research by the scientific community at large should occur to determine what other definitive genomic signatures serial passage leaves besides the creation of furin cleavage sites, in case more of those can be found in this novel coronavirus. Two additional unique genomic signature are already being researched, as one preprint indicates that SARS-CoV-2 possesses a genomic region not found in other coronaviruses that appears to cloak the novel coronavirus from white blood cells, a characteristic also found with HIV.<sup>52</sup> And the second preprint identifies a region on the spike-protein gene found in no other bat-borne coronavirus that is nearly identical to superantigenic and neurotoxic motifs found in some bacteria, which may contribute to the immune overreaction that leads to the Kawasaki-like multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children, and cytokine storms in adults.<sup>53</sup> Given the unique traits found in SARS-CoV-2 and all the open questions there still are around its emergence, until either a natural or laboratory origin is conclusively demonstrated both avenues should be robustly investigated by the scientific community.

### 3. Conclusions and Outlook

The history of gain-of-function research is one of science's most significant and troubling, especially since the Nuremberg Code, research scientists' Hippocratic Oath, dictates that experiments that could endanger human life should only occur if the potential humanitarian benefits significantly outweigh the risks.<sup>54</sup> It seems ill-advised to rule out the possibility that gain-of-function techniques such as serial passage may have played a role in the creation of SARS-CoV-2 until more definitive data are collected, and when the Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation has calculated that the odds that any given potential pandemic pathogen might leak from a lab could be better than one in four.<sup>55</sup>

The release of the H1N1 Swine Flu in 1977 first initiated the discussion about the moral and physical hazards involved with dual-use gain-of-function research, and it was the creation of extraordinarily virulent H5N1 Bird Flu strains—using the same technique of serial passage through an animal host in a lab—that contributed to the NIH imposing a moratorium on dual-use gain-of-function research from 2014 until 2017, after which it was relaxed explicitly to allow influenza strains as well as coronaviruses to be studied. This moratorium was meant to limit “the potential to create, transfer, or use an enhanced potential pandemic pathogen.”<sup>56</sup> However, just as an increased pace of research into influenza vaccines increased the odds that a leak would occur leading up to the 1977 release of H1N1 Swine Flu, which is the most often cited as originating from a laboratory leak,<sup>81</sup> it would follow that an increased pace of research into coronaviruses over the past few years would have increased the odds that a lab leak of one would occur; after all, these viruses were pinpointed back in 2006 as a viable vector for an HIV vaccine<sup>57</sup> and research into a pan-coronavirus vaccine has been ongoing for decades.

And whether or not gain-of-function research is determined to have played a role in SARS-CoV-2's emergence, the fact that it creates opportunities for pandemic viruses to leak out of labs calls for a re-examination of the moratorium against this practice, because the emergence of this novel coronavirus has demonstrated that the international public health community is not prepared to handle the leak of a pandemic virus. Furthermore, none of the gain-of-function research conducted since 2014 has provided humanity with any tools at all to fight back against the ongoing pandemic caused by this novel coronavirus.

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### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

### Keywords

coronavirus, COVID-19, gain-of-function, intermediate host, pandemic, SARS-CoV-2, serial passage, virology

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## U.S. MISSION GENEVA DAILY NEWS CLIPS

April 24, 2020

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**True or False: Children are not the drivers of the coronavirus pandemic**

Swissinfo - Apr 23, 2020

By Geraldine Wong Sak Hoi

A claim by Switzerland's head of infectious diseases that children are not the main vectors of Covid-19 has not stopped many parents from wondering if it really is safe to send their children back to school next month.

A day after the government announced the re-opening of primary schools, set for May 11, Daniel Koch clarified his position on the role played by children in transmitting the novel coronavirus.

"Children are most certainly not the drivers of this epidemic," Koch, a key figure in the government's response to the crisis, said on April 17.

"Of course, there are children who have been infected, mostly by their parents. But children are not vectors [and] are not really impacted [by the virus]."

This week Koch repeated these reassurances as several online petitions against the return to school garnered thousands of signatures from worried parents and teachers.

The lack of ample data on the role children play in transmitting Covid-19 may be driving this uncertainty, as experts also appear divided on how to interpret emerging research in this area.

**Fewer infections among children**

In many countries, far fewer children than adults have tested positive for Covid-19. In Switzerland, people under 20 accounted for just 859 of the 28,100 positive cases registered by April 22 – roughly 3%. There are similarly low rates of infection in the United States (2%), China, (2.2%), Italy (1.2%) and Spain (0.8%).

It is possible that cases are underreported, since children are less likely to experience symptoms – a study of over 2,000 minors with Covid-19 in China, for example, found that over 90% were asymptomatic or had mild symptoms – and many countries have not tested systematically for the virus.

Many countries have also reported fewer cases of children being hospitalised. Death from Covid-19 among children is rare. To date, no child under 20 has died from the virus in

Switzerland. Experts are still trying to understand why the disease seems to be less severe in children.

The infection rates may be low, but according to some experts, this does not mean children are not susceptible to catching the virus.

In one analysis, scientists followed 391 people who contracted the virus in Shenzhen, southeastern China, along with nearly 1,300 of their close contacts, and found that 7%-8% of the contacts aged under 10 later tested positive – similar to the rate of adult infection.

### **Evidence is still emerging**

Once children are infected, the next piece of the puzzle is knowing to what extent they transmit the disease. But since relatively few cases involve children, there is little data to rely on and little consensus among experts on the conclusions that can be drawn.

After analysing some 2,500 paediatric cases of Covid-19, many of which were mild or asymptomatic, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said “patients with less serious illness and those without symptoms likely play an important role in disease transmission”. But the CDC also pointed out that its sample contained missing data.

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control is more cautious [external link](#), saying “there is still some uncertainty” about the role children play in transmission. Daniel Koch said that his own statement was based on discussions with Swiss paediatricians specialising in infectiology.

One of them, Christoph Berger, told the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*: “There is some evidence to suggest that children and adolescents are not the main drivers of the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic.”

The case of a nine-year-old boy who contracted Covid-19 in the French Alps but did not transmit the disease, despite having contact with over 170 people, led experts who investigated his case to conclude that children probably don't play an important role in virus transmission.

The child, who was also infected with the flu and a common cold at the time, had a low viral load – or few viral particles – in his body, along with mild symptoms. This low level of infection may explain why he did not infect people around him.

"It's likely that this happens to many children," Kostas Danis, one of the lead investigators, told swissinfo.ch. "They have fewer or milder symptoms, so they're less likely to transmit the disease."

Studies of family clusters also suggest that children are catching the virus from adults, who tend to be harder hit by the virus, Danis added.

School closures doing little to slow spread of virus

Despite the pushback in Switzerland and elsewhere in Europe against the re-opening of schools, closing them in the first place may not even have much effect on the spread of Covid-19. A team in the UK this month said that school closures have a greater impact on slowing the spread of viruses, such as influenza, that have a higher transmission rate in children than in adults.

And according to these researchers, the reverse appears to be true for the new coronavirus: children appear less likely to transmit the disease than adults, so school closures may actually be less effective in the current crisis than other measures, like social distancing.

"I don't think we will see an increase in the number of cases because of the schools [re-opening]," said Danis, an epidemiologist at the French public health office. "The risk [of contracting the virus] is low – it would be higher in settings with more symptomatic adults."

### **Verdict: Uncertain**

Exactly what role children play in transmitting the novel coronavirus remains one of the many unanswered questions of this crisis. Evidence is still emerging, but the existing data is leading some – though not all – experts to suggest that children appear less likely than adults to transmit the disease.

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### **Switzerland opens spas, saunas and bars in hotels despite coronavirus lockdown**

The Local – April 23, 2020

Hotels in Switzerland are as of now allowed to open bars, spas, saunas and wellness facilities - but only for hotel guests.

The Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) issued updated guidance on Thursday which expressly allowed hotels to open a range of services.



The list given by the FOPH, published in the *Tages Anzeiger*, includes bars, saunas and wellness centres, spas and bike rental outlets.

These facilities are however restricted only to hotel guests and cannot therefore be accessed by the general public.

In order to be allowed to open, these facilities will need to be compliant with the country's social distancing and hygiene rules.

### **Hotels open in Switzerland**

Unlike in neighbouring Germany, France and Italy, hotels have not been forced to close in Switzerland.

In justifying the original decision to keep hotels open back in March, Health Minister Alain Berset said that the goal was to keep things as normal as possible.

"“The hotels are necessary so that normal work processes can continue. That’s why we decided to leave them open,” he said in March.

“But without the restaurants being accessible to external guests. The restaurants in hotels should only be open to hotel guests.”

While hotel restaurants were allowed to remain open for the duration of the crisis, other facilities such as spas and wellness centres - as well as bars - were closed until the guidance issued by the FOPH on Thursday.

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### **Blood study shows five percent of Genevans have contracted coronavirus**

The Local.ch - 23 April 2020

Five percent of Geneva residents - approximately 27,000 people - have contracted the coronavirus, according to an antibody study which shows that the virus is much more widespread than previously thought.

The test shows that 5.5 percent - or just over one in 20 - residents have been infected with Covid-19.

The number is more than five times higher than the 4,700 confirmed infections as per cantonal authorities.

Official figures suggest that approximately 28,000 people in the entire country have been infected, giving rise to speculation that the real number of infected Swiss is much higher.

The study began on April 6th and will continue to the end of May, eventually testing 5,600 people.

The researchers have a capacity to test approximately 200 people per hour to see if they have previously been infected with Covid-19.

The goal of the study is to get an insight into how widely the virus has spread throughout the population, thereby producing valuable data as to the true mortality rate of the virus as well as strategies for developing so-called herd immunity among the population.

The official infection numbers of a variety of countries have been cast in significant doubt, as countries with deficient testing regimes will not be able to properly identify how many cases actually exist in the population.

Official figures are also heavily reliant on accurate government reporting, which can be subject to political influence.

For instance, recent studies have indicated that the actual infection count in China, where the outbreak began, is four times higher than currently reported.

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### **Pompeo says U.S. may never restore WHO funds; Democrats insist it must**

Reuters – April 23, 2020

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said a fundamental reform of the World Health Organization was needed following its handling of the coronavirus pandemic and that the United States, the WHO's biggest donor, may never restore funding to the U.N. body.

As Pompeo launched fresh attacks on the U.N. body on Wednesday, Democrats in the U.S. House of Representatives accused the Trump administration of trying to "scapegoat" the WHO to distract from its handling of the coronavirus outbreak.

In a letter to President Donald Trump, they called for the immediate restoration of U.S. funding, which Trump suspended last week accusing the WHO of being "China-centric" and of promoting China's "disinformation" about the outbreak.

Pompeo told Fox News late on Wednesday there needed to be "a structural fix of the WHO" to correct its "shortcomings."

Asked if he was not ruling out a change in leadership of the WHO, Pompeo replied: "Even more than that, it may be the case that the United States can never return to underwriting, having U.S. taxpayer dollars go to the WHO."

The WHO has denied the Trump administration's charges and China insists it has been transparent and open.

The United States has been the biggest overall donor to the WHO, contributing over \$400 million in 2019, roughly 15% of its budget. Senior U.S. officials last week told Reuters Washington could redirect these funds to other aid groups.

Earlier on Wednesday, Pompeo said the United States "strongly believed" Beijing had failed to report the outbreak in a timely manner, in breach of World Health Organization rules, and that WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom did not use his ability "to go public" when a member state failed to follow those rules.

Pompeo said the WHO had an obligation to ensure safety standards were observed in virology labs in the Chinese city of Wuhan, where the outbreak began, and its director-general had "enormous authority with respect to nations that do not comply."

The acting head of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) said on Wednesday the United States would assess if the WHO was being run properly and look for alternative partners outside the body.

The possibility of the U.S. ceasing its funding definitively to the global body is contingent upon Trump succeeding in his bid for re-election in the November presidential vote, against the presumptive Democratic nominee Joe Biden.

The U.S. Congress controls federal spending, and could pass legislation to guarantee funding for the WHO. However, to become law it would need to garner enough support, including from Trump's Republicans, not just to pass but to override a likely veto.

According to a Reuters tally, the coronavirus pandemic has killed more than 180,000 people worldwide, including nearly 48,000 in the United States, making it the worst-hit country by official statistics.

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### **U.S. threatens WHO with permanent cash cutoff**

Washington Times - 4/23/2020  
Rowan Scarborough

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo says the U.S. may "never return" to funding the World Health Organization because of the way it operates, including the COVID-19 crisis.

And, in a second demand, Mr. Pompeo told Fox News' Laura Ingraham Wednesday night that WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom may have to step down before Washington restarts suspended contributions of nearly \$1 billion of WHO's 2.4 billion annual budget.

Asked about such a demand, Mr. Pompeo said, "I think that's right, Laura. Even more than that, it may be the case that the United States can never return to underwriting, having U.S. taxpayer dollars go to the WHO. We may need to have even bolder change than that."

President Trump cut off funds after what the administration believes were a series of WHO actions that dovetailed with communist China misleading the world on the spread of coronavirus in the city of Wuhan and elsewhere in the country.

The Chinese Communist Party asserted in January the virus was not contagious, a claim the U.S. views as a lie. Yet, the WHO endorsed the claim before the world. WHO also declared as late as Jan. 23 that what became the COVID-19 disease was not a global health emergency.

After China condemned Mr. Trump decisions to restrict Chinese travel into this country, Mr. Tedros also criticized the ban.

Mr. Tedros, a microbiologist, is a former cabinet member in Ethiopia's leftist regime who sought a "strategic partnership" with China shortly after taking control of WHO in 2017.

Meanwhile, Mr. Pompeo said the Chinese communists still will not let American experts into China to exam a laboratory in Wuhan researching bat-carried viruses. The U.S. suspects the virus in its natural state may have been carried outside by a lab worker who infected the city. Mr. Pompeo also said American scientists need to inspect the wild meat market in Wuhan

which the Chinese government initially said was the source of coronavirus carried by horseshoe bats.

"We're still trying to get that information," he said.

Ms. Ingraham played a clip of former Secretary of State John Kerry saying the Trump administration needs to cooperate with China on issues such as cyber warfare.

As a matter of state policy, the Chinese government repeatedly hacks innocent Americans to steal their personal data, including a massive attack in 2015 on the Office of Personal Management that netted 24 million personnel files.

Government officials also say China military hackers steal Americans' intellectual property. The Justice Department has indicted China's giant telecommunications firm, Huawei, for such criminal acts.

Mr. Pompeo said that Mr. Trump abandoned President's Obama's soft approach to China.

He said, "President Trump has taken a fundamentally different view with China than President Obama did and Secretary Kerry did, whether it was the unfair trade relationship the President is attempting to untangle, whether it's being serious with China that says when you conduct cyber attacks against us we're not going to tolerate that. And here, even in this, we'd love to find a way to cooperate with the Chinese, frankly, on all of those things. But it takes a partner who is willing to do that. And as you described, the biggest threat isn't our ability to work with China on cyber; it's to make sure that we have the resources available to protect ourselves from Chinese cyber attacks."

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## **Pompeo Hints At U.S. Alternative To World Health Organization After Coronavirus (The National Interest)**

The National Interest - 4/23/2020

Matthew Petti

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo hinted that the United States could create its own alternative to the World Health Organization in a Thursday interview with Laura Ingraham of FOX News.

The Trump administration has cut all U.S. funding to the World Health Organization (WHO) amid accusations that the international medical body helped cover for China's mishandling of the novel coronavirus. Pompeo suggested that the United States would demand drastic changes before restoring its relationship with the organization—if at all.

"I think we've got to take a real hard look at the WHO and what we do coming out of this," he said. "We need a fix. We need a structural fix for the WHO."

Ingraham asked Pompeo whether it was possible that the United States could call for WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus's resignation.

"No, I think that's right, Laura," he responded. "Even more than that, it may be the case that

the United States can never return to underwriting—having U.S. taxpayer dollars go to the WHO. We may need to have even bolder change than that.”

“Yeah, make our own organization,” Ingraham responded, before changing the topic to the controversy around the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

U.S. officials have anonymously alleged that the novel coronavirus, which first emerged in the central Chinese city of Wuhan, first infected members of the public in a laboratory accident at the virology center.

Pompeo did not endorse the theory, but said that China has not been transparent enough about the origins of the virus.

“We still don’t have the transparency and openness we need in China, and it is the World Health Organization’s responsibility to achieve that transparency,” he told Ingraham. “You recounted what happened in January and the delayed announcement about the pandemic, and the fact that China had asked them not to announce, and the World Health Organization didn’t do that.”

The Trump administration and its supporters are not alone in expressing concern about Chinese influence at the World Health Organization.

Bernie Sanders campaign co-chair Rep. Ro Khanna (D-Calif.) has called for using U.S. funding for the WHO as leverage to demand transparency and counter Chinese influence.

China’s rivals in its near abroad have also clashed with the WHO over allegations of Chinese influence.

Japanese deputy prime minister Taro Aso has referred to the body as the “Chinese Health Organization.” Taiwan, an autonomous island that China considers a renegade Chinese province, claims that the WHO ignored its early warnings because the public health body refuses to recognize the Taiwanese government.

Even the Iranian government, a close ally of Beijing, has expressed serious doubts about the officially-reported coronavirus statistics in China.

“What’s been great is to see other countries around the world to begin to recognize the WHO’s failures as well,” Pompeo told Ingraham.

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## **China Donates \$30 Million to World Health Organization in Show of 'Support' After Trump Pulls Funding**

Newsweek - 4/23/20

By Eddy Rodriguez

China announced Thursday that it would donate \$30 million to the World Health Organization to “show support” to the United Nations’ health agency.

“China and its people will show support and confidence to WHO by this donation,” Geng Shuang, the deputy director for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs told the press,

according to a report by the *Nikkei Asian Review*, a Japanese newspaper. Chinese contributions to the WHO now total \$50 million for the past month.

Geng also commended the WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus for "playing an important role in encouraging international cooperation to prevent the spread of the virus."

The gesture comes after President Donald Trump announced he would pull funding from WHO April 14, citing that his administration is investigating the actions taken by the agency early on in the pandemic.

"Today I am instructing my administration to halt funding of the World Health Organization while a review is conducted to assess the World Health Organization's role in severely mismanaging and covering up the spread of the coronavirus," Trump said at the time.

The president said the U.S. provides "between \$400 million and \$500 million" to the WHO annually, which the agency confirmed amounts to about 16 percent of their funding, according to the *Nikkei Asian Review*.

"As the [WHO's] leading sponsor, the United States has a duty to insist on full accountability," Trump said.

The president derided the WHO's criticism of his move to halt travel from China to the U.S, a decision recommended to the president by Dr. Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. Fauci has said on multiple occasions that banning travel from China, which was the epicenter of the pandemic early on, helped slow the spread of the infection.

"The reality is that the WHO failed to adequately obtain, vet, and share information in a timely and transparent fashion. The world depends on the WHO to work with countries to ensure that accurate information about international health threats is shared in a timely manner and if it's not to independently tell the world the truth as to what is happening. The WHO failed in this basic duty and must be held accountable," the president said.

Trump also pointed to comments made by the WHO in January that said COVID-19 was not transmittable through human-to-human contact, and the agency's failure to follow up with "credible" sources in China that contradicted official government statements.

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## **WHO warns COVID-19 pandemic will not end any time soon**

AFP - April 23, 2020

GENEVA: The global coronavirus crisis will not end any time soon, with many countries still in the early stages of the fight, health experts have warned as researchers revealed the first US deaths from the disease came weeks before the alarm was raised there.

The COVID-19 pandemic has killed more than 180,000 people and infected 2.6 million, and nations are struggling to check its spread with social distancing measures and lockdowns, while trying to repair their virus-ravaged economies.

Some have started to slowly ease restrictions as pressure mounts on governments to find ways to reopen their societies after tens of millions of jobs were wiped out.

But World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus on Wednesday cautioned that the struggle is far from over.

"Make no mistake: we have a long way to go. This virus will be with us for a long time," he said.

"Most countries are still in the early stages of their epidemics. And some that were affected early in the pandemic are now starting to see a resurgence in cases."

The comments came after the director of the US Centers for Disease Control asked Americans to prepare for a second, possibly more devastating, wave of coronavirus infections.

The United States is the hardest-hit country on the planet, with more than 46,500 coronavirus deaths and nearly 840,000 infections.

Researchers have now revealed that the first COVID-19 fatalities in the country happened weeks earlier than previously thought — meaning the current US tally is likely far short of reality.

The newly confirmed COVID-19 deaths on February 6 and February 17 were in California's Santa Clara county, where Stanford University researchers found that the true number cases was at least 50 times higher than the confirmed official figure.

But pressure is growing on authorities to ease restrictions to boost the economy, which is reeling from the pandemic.

President Donald Trump, who is keen to restart the US economy, issued rare criticism of a Republican state governor on Wednesday, after Georgia allowed small businesses to reopen.

"It's too soon," the president said.

The explosion of coronavirus cases across the United States has overwhelmed healthcare facilities, from the most developed parts like New York City to the Native American territory of the Navajo Nation in the southwest, where a lack of running water and poor infrastructure has made the situation worse.

"Right here in the middle of the most powerful nation, the United States of America, our citizens don't have the luxury of turning on a faucet to wash your hands with soap and water," Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez told AFP.

### **Vaccine trials**

The WHO and other health experts have warned that strict containment measures like lockdowns should remain until there is a viable treatment or vaccine for the coronavirus.

There was a ray of hope on that front in Europe, where Germany announced Wednesday that human trials for a vaccine will start by next week.

It is only the fifth such effort to have been authorised worldwide, and is a significant step in making a vaccine "available as soon as possible", Germany's regulatory body said.

But even at the current, rapid pace of development, an effective prophylactic could be several months away.

In Europe — where the death toll climbed past 110,000 — some countries have slightly eased coronavirus measures, but bans on large gatherings have been extended.

Finland said it would maintain a ban on gatherings of more than 500 people until the end of July, while hard-hit Spain said it did not expect to lift its strict lockdown until mid-May.

"We must be incredibly careful in this phase," said Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez.

Vietnamese authorities eased social distancing measures as cases in the country plateaued, with experts saying the apparent success was down to aggressive containment measures and contact tracing.

Vietnam's Communist government has reported just 268 coronavirus cases and no deaths, despite its long and porous border with China — where the virus first emerged late last year.

#### **'I feel helpless'**

The pressure on governments everywhere to ease the economic pain is growing by the day, with tens of millions unemployed and several countries at risk of famine.

With movement and travel severely restricted, sectors from small business to tourism and aviation have been hammered.

Providing more evidence of the scale of devastation, the UN's International Civil Aviation Organisation said Wednesday the pandemic could mean 1.2 billion fewer passengers worldwide, with hundreds of billions of dollars slashed off airline revenues.

The economic suffering is intense for the people of Dharavi, the largest slum in India, who have been unable to leave home to eke out a living as factory workers or maids and chauffeurs to the well-heeled residents of Mumbai.

Home to an estimated one million people, the massive slum has been under a strict lockdown, with police drones patrolling to make sure no one goes outside.

"I feel helpless at times and worry about my family and neighbourhood," one Dharavi resident, in hospital for COVID-19 treatment, told *AFP*.

"Looking at so many people losing lives due to infections makes me feel terrible. Will we ever recover from this?"

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**WHO to Launch Initiative to Share COVID-19 Drugs, Tests and Vaccines: Statement**



By Reuters - April 23, 2020

GENEVA — The World Health Organization (WHO) said it would announce a "landmark collaboration" on Friday to speed development of safe, effective drugs, tests and vaccines to prevent, diagnose and treat COVID-19.

The Geneva-based agency, in a brief statement issued late on Thursday, said the initiative with partners aims to make technologies against the disease caused by the novel coronavirus "accessible to everyone who needs them, worldwide", but gave no details.

The GAVI vaccine alliance, Gates Foundation and Global Fund are among traditional large donors to the U.N. agency, in addition to its 194 member states.

WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on April 6 that he planned to announce an initiative to accelerate the research, development and production of vaccines and also design mechanisms for equitable distribution.

"WHO is committed to ensuring that as medicines and vaccines are developed they're shared equitably with all countries and people," Tedros said at the time.

"While we're looking for vaccines, unless we break the barriers to equitable distribution of the products, whether it's vaccines or therapeutics, we will have a problem, so we need to address the problem ahead of time," he said.

"There should not be a divide between the haves and the have-nots." Tedros also praised Costa Rica's President Carlos Alvarado for a proposal to create a voluntary pool of rights to tests, drugs and vaccines with free access or licensing on "reasonable and affordable terms for all countries."

"Tedros supports equitable access," a European diplomat told Reuters on Thursday. "The big challenge, apparently, will not be the development of a vaccine but then how to ensure broad roll-out for everybody."

The initiative is expected to include a stockpile for use in poor countries, such as the WHO currently has for influenza vaccines should a flu virus evolve into a pandemic.

During the H1N1 swine flu pandemic in 2009, there were bottlenecks in regulatory processes and vaccine yields were lower than expected, a subsequent WHO review found. There was criticism that distribution of vaccines was not equitable as wealthier countries were able to purchase more.

Gilead Sciences Inc's experimental coronavirus drug failed its first randomized clinical trial, the Financial Times reported on Thursday, but the drugmaker said the results from the study in China was inconclusive as it was terminated early.

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## **U.N. Chief Warns Coronavirus Is 'Fast Becoming a Human Rights Crisis'**

AP - April 23, 2020

By Edith M. Lederer

(UNITED NATIONS) — U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said Thursday that the coronavirus pandemic is "a human crisis that is fast becoming a human rights crisis."

The U.N. chief said in a video message that there is discrimination in the delivery of public services to tackle COVID-19 and there are "structural inequalities that impede access to them."

Guterres said the pandemic has also seen "disproportionate effects on certain communities, the rise of hate speech, the targeting of vulnerable groups, and the risks of heavy-handed security responses undermining the health response."

He warned that with "rising ethno-nationalism, populism, authoritarianism and a push back against human rights in some countries, the crisis can provide a pretext to adopt repressive measures for purposes unrelated to the pandemic."

In February, Guterres issued a call to action to countries, businesses and people to help renew and revive human rights across the globe, laying out a seven-point plan amid concerns about climate change, conflict and repression.

"As I said then, human rights cannot be an afterthought in times of crisis — and we now face the biggest international crisis in generations," he said.

The secretary-general said he was releasing a report Thursday on how human rights must guide the response to the virus and recovery from the pandemic. Neither he nor the report name any countries or parties responsible for human rights violations.

Guterres said governments must be "transparent, responsive and accountable," and stressed that press freedom, civil society organizations, the private sector and "civic space" are essential.

The report said governments also need to take action to mitigate the worst impacts of COVID-19 on jobs, livelihoods, access to basic services and family life.

Guterres said any emergency measures — including states of emergency — must be "legal, proportionate, necessary and non-discriminatory, have a specific focus and duration, and take the least intrusive approach possible to protect public health."

"Emergency powers may be needed but broad executive powers, swiftly granted with minimal oversight, carry risks," the report warned. "Heavy-handed security responses undermine the health response and can exacerbate existing threats to peace and security or create new ones."

The report said the best response is proportionate to the immediate threat and protects human rights.

"The message is clear: People — and their rights — must be front and center," Guterres said.

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## **UN's Development Goals Threatened by a World Economy Facing Recession**

Inter Press Service (IPS) - Apr 23 2020

**UNITED NATIONS**, The UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), described as an integral part of its highly-ambitious development agenda, may be in deep trouble.

Aimed at addressing some of the global challenges the world faces— including extreme poverty and hunger, inequalities in incomes and gender, climate change and environmental degradation— the SDGs now seem threatened by a world economy facing a brutal recession.

With a 2030 deadline, the SDGs are in near disarray, as the coronavirus pandemic has decimated the economies of both rich and poor countries—even as warning signs reflect a possibly massive rise in poverty and hunger worldwide.

The slump in the global economy has triggered a recession in several donor nations, including Japan, the US, UK, France, Germany and China, among others.

In its most recent report released April 14, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) warned that the world is facing its worst downturn since the Great Depression of the 1930s, and the global economy would contract by 3.0 percent in 2020.

This was a significant reversal from early this year when the IMF predicted the world economy would outpace 2019 and grow by 3.3 percent in 2020.

Ambassador Mona Juul of Norway, President of the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), told delegates April 23 that COVID-19 shows "it is more important than ever to focus on the implementation of the SDGs." Therefore, issues such as resource mobilization, illicit finance, debt and women's empowerment must be priorities," she said.

Still, at the United Nations, several lingering questions remain: What are the new obstacles facing the implementation of SDGs? Will they survive an uncertain future?

Will donor nations help rescue the development agenda? And will the General Assembly be forced to push back the 2030 deadline?

Tariq Ahmad, Oxfam America's Senior Policy & Research Advisor told IPS: "We are seeing COVID-19 wreak havoc on the global economy, which is felt acutely in the homes and communities of the most vulnerable among us".

The economy downturn, he said, paints a dismal picture of what resources will be available to finance the SDGs. This crisis could push half a billion more people into poverty unless urgent and drastic action is taken.

A recent Oxfam brief has called for an Economic Rescue Plan For All, suggesting how the world could help finance UN's estimated needs while the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has called on governments to mobilize at least \$2.5 trillion dollars to support developing economies in order to tackle the pandemic and prevent a global economic collapse.

And a new study by the UN University's World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER) predicts that the COVID-19 pandemic could increase global poverty by as much as half a billion people, or 8% of the total human population. This would be the first time that poverty has increased globally in thirty years, since 1990.

In its annual Global Report on Food Crises, an international alliance of UN, governmental and non-governmental agencies, said, at the end of 2019, 135 million people across 55 countries and territories experienced acute food insecurity.

But the coronavirus pandemic is expected to make the situation worse and negatively impact on hunger and food insecurity, specifically in the developing world.

Jens Martens, executive director of Global Policy Forum, (a civil society think tank based in New York and Bonn), told IPS the COVID-19 pandemic not only has serious consequences

for the health situation in many countries of the world but it will also have a massive impact on the implementation of almost all SDGs.

"The looming global recession will dramatically increase unemployment, poverty and hunger worldwide," he said.

The situation, he pointed out, is even more serious because the macroeconomic situation in many countries of the global South had already deteriorated before the outbreak of the virus.

A vicious circle of debt and austerity policies have threatened socio-economic development from Argentina to Lebanon, he warned.

"The food situation had also deteriorated in many countries, even before COVID-19, for example, due to the locust plague in East Africa".

Without effective multilateral counter-measures, Martens argued, inequality between rich and poor countries will increase considerably.

"COVID-19 is thus also a global wake-up call for international cooperation and solidarity", he declared.

In a report released April 20, the World Food Programme (WFP) said the COVID-19 pandemic could almost double the number of people suffering acute hunger, pushing it to more than a quarter of a billion by the end of 2020.

The number of people facing acute food insecurity stands to rise to 265 million in 2020, up by 130 million from the 135 million in 2019, as a result of the economic impact of COVID-19, according to a WFP projection.

Ahmad said one of the ways to free up vital resources to tackle the issues of hunger and poverty would be to cancel the debt of developing nations.

For example, Oxfam also jointly warned of the risk in West Africa, of 50 million people threatened by hunger and malnutrition in the coming months.

Meanwhile, Ghana is spending 11 times more on servicing its debts than it is on health. The costs of the debt burden are paid by the poorest people, in cuts to government services, while women are the hardest hit.

Aid is a critical ingredient to help finance the response. Of the estimated 2.5 trillion USD need, the UN estimates a need of 500 billion in new official development assistance (ODA).

In a soon to be released report, Oxfam estimated almost 300 billion of this should be provided by traditional northern donors. And there are still some fundamental flaws in the current system that prevent aid from supporting local responders on the front line of care.

"This crisis is the time for bold and visionary choices for our collective future. It's time for donors to profoundly transform their aid to build a world that is free from poverty, that is more equal, feminist and sustainable. COVID-19 could set back the fight against poverty by decades – we must now act and build a better future," he declared.

Asked if the 193-member UN General Assembly should postpone the 2030 deadline to achieved SDG targets, Martens said postponing the deadline for achieving the SDGs because of COVID-19 would send out completely the wrong signal.

On the contrary, he said, the coronavirus crisis shows how important these multilateral goals are, and how fatal it was that governments have not taken their implementation seriously enough since 2015.

Key SDG targets like the development of social protection systems, universal health care and a functioning public infrastructure must be given top priority. Only in this way can the

current crisis be overcome and future crises prevented. This also requires effective policies of global solidarity, said Martens.

"What we need now is a Solidarity Summit under the auspices of the United Nations to deal with the social and economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in an integrated manner", he declared.

Asked about the postponement, Ahmad said "pushing back the SDG deadline won't help pull anyone who is facing poverty or hunger – instead we need to see sweeping action across the globe to help offset some of this crisis' worst impacts on the world's most vulnerable".

The challenge here is not time, it's political will, he noted.

"This is an unprecedented daunting global challenge, but we must meet it both with urgent action that saves lives now and interventions that create a more fair system going forward, like the cancellation of debt for developing nations, and other support to help families stay healthy and safe until they are able to earn a living again."

Even before COVID-19, he said, "we were dangerously behind on meeting many of the SDGs, but if this moment has taught us anything, it's that we are able to make massive shifts in how we all live and cooperate to tackle a joint challenge – we must see the same approach taken to meet the Sustainable Development Goals."

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## **The coronavirus crisis shows the risks of scientific collaboration with China**

By Josh Rogin - Columnist

Washington Post - April 24, 2020

Since [my column last week](#) revealing safety concerns regarding the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV), some Western scientists have come to the defense of the lab and its scientists. Their perspectives are important, but many of them seem to overlook a crucial point: that all scientific research in China must ultimately subordinate itself to the dictates of the Chinese Communist Party.

This shouldn't be a controversial assertion. This has been the case for decades, and the message has been amply reinforced by the party's efforts to cover up the [covid-19 outbreak](#). The Chinese government has systematically thwarted scientific investigation that would either implicate or exonerate the lab — or shed light on alternative theories. The Wuhan [seafood market](#) that Beijing originally cited as the outbreak's point of origin was sanitized before any real scientific examination.

The Chinese government won't share actual virus samples from the earliest cases. The Shanghai lab that first released the coronavirus genome was shut down for "[rectification](#)." All research on the virus origin in China is now restricted. Critics have been disappeared.

"The Party and state ruthlessly intervene in research, punish truth-tellers, make inconvenient facts disappear, and manipulate data and history to put their interests above all others," said historian Glenn Tiffert, a visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution, in an email. "This is not to malign PRC scientists, many of whom have the highest probity but may find themselves facing impossible choices. It is the system they must survive in."

As my earlier column stated, there is no firm evidence to prove the WIV or the nearby Wuhan Center for Disease Control and Prevention lab were connected to the outbreak. Nevertheless, the American friends of Shi Zhengli, the WIV scientist who led the project on bat coronaviruses, have rallied to her defense.

"I have no conflicts of interest," said Peter Daszak, president of the EcoHealth alliance, which has worked with Shi's team since 2003, in an email. "I realize that many of the scientists I collaborate with work directly for the Chinese Govt including Zhengli. . . . My only interest in not having Zhengli implicated in this is that I am extremely confident she has done nothing wrong."

Daszak argues the data suggests that natural spillover is much more likely than a lab accident and that the research Shi was conducting was low-risk.

Jonna Mazet, professor of epidemiology at the University of California at Davis, was the director of the U.S. Agency for International Development's \$200 million Predict program, which spent 10 years trying to anticipate the next viral pandemic, before the Trump administration cut almost all of its funding last September. Shi was Predict's principal investigator in China.

Mazet told me she did not believe it was likely the coronavirus escaped from the Wuhan lab, but, she acknowledged, "Absolutely, accidents can happen."

Shi herself didn't think the lab-accident theory was so crazy. In March, she told Scientific American that, when questions about the lab's link to the outbreak arose, she frantically searched her lab's records to uncover any mishandling of experimental materials. In February, her lab was first to publish that the novel coronavirus likely came from bats. The closest related known virus was in her lab, called SARSr-CoV-RaTG13, but it is not directly related to the one that produces covid-19. In early February, Shi sent a message to her friends on WeChat that said, "I swear with my life, [the virus] has nothing to do with the lab."

Helping build a lab in China to support virus research on the front lines seemed logical, and Shi was surely trying to do good science. But when the pandemic hit in her city, the party took over. "Like all other forms of knowledge in the [People's Republic of China], science is not open on principle; it is only open as far and as long as it suits the Party," Tiffert said.

The clash between national security officials and the U.S. scientific community over China was already heating up before covid-19. In December, the Moffitt Cancer Center fired its chief executive and five other officials for not disclosing they were being paid by the Chinese government under its Thousand Talents recruitment program. In January, the chair of Harvard's chemistry department was arrested and charged with hiding his own paid participation in that program.

In January, the FBI arrested and charged Chinese researcher Zheng Zaosong, who was caught with 21 stolen vials of biological samples in a sock in his luggage. In most countries, showing up with vials in a sock would raise questions. In China, the government welcomes collaboration with open arms and steals science at the same time.

Rather than battle each other, national security officials and scientists in the West must work more closely together to make sure any scientific collaboration with China is as free from abuse as possible. The Party's political interests must not come before public health.

According to its own [website](#), on July 1, 2019, the Wuhan Institute of Virology held an event to celebrate the 98th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party. The meeting's theme was "Do not forget the original intention and remember the mission." Shi's

life is dependent on her doing exactly what the Chinese government says. But our lives can't be.

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## China rejects Pompeo's request for access to Wuhan lab

By Louis Casiano | Fox News – April 24, 2020

China is rejecting calls by U.S. officials to give international inspectors access to labs to make sure dangerous pathogens similar to the coronavirus are not being released accidentally.

The U.S. is conducting an investigation into whether the virus somehow escaped from a lab in Wuhan, the initial epicenter of the pandemic that has resulted in unprecedented lockdowns and crippled the global economy.

"Any objective person will see that some U.S. politicians have been peddling lies that discredit China's anti-epidemic efforts to fuddle people's minds and deflect attention from the fact that they fell short of fulfilling their own anti-epidemic responsibilities," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said Thursday.

Shuang's statement was in response to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who called for inspections at the Wuhan Institute of Virology and other labs where Chinese scientists study coronaviruses and other pathogens.

"There are multiple labs inside of China that are handling these things," Pompeo said Wednesday at the State Department. "It's important that those materials are being handled in a safe and secure way such that there isn't accidental release.

"We have to make sure that the Chinese Government is handling those materials in an appropriate way not only in the Wuhan Institute of Virology but elsewhere," he added.

Beijing has refuted claims that COVID-19 originated in a laboratory. Intelligence operatives have begun gathering information about the Wuhan lab and are piecing together a timeline of the events following the outbreak.

U.S. officials told Fox News they have ruled out the possibility of a man-made coronavirus to be used as a bioweapon. Instead, they believe it was part of China's attempt to demonstrate that its efforts to identify and combat viruses are equal to or greater than the capabilities of the United States.

Some officials believe China purposefully covered up the virus and that the World Health Organization (WHO) is complicit. President Trump took aim at the WHO over its role in the crisis and announced last week that the U.S. will halt all funding to the group, saying it had put "political correctness over lifesaving measures."

Pompeo blasted the WHO during a Wednesday appearance on "The Ingraham Angle," saying it failed to help the U.S. gather crucial data from China.

"Look, we know it began at one [lab], but we need to figure this out," he said. "There's an

ongoing pandemic. We still don't have the transparency and openness we need in China."

In a show of support, China pledged to donate \$30 million to the WHO, in addition to a separate \$20 million cash donation.

"Our donations demonstrate the Chinese government and people's support for and trust in the WHO," Shuang said.

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## **WTO report says 80 countries limiting exports of face masks, other goods**

Reuters - 4/23/2020

Andrea Shalal

Eighty countries and customs territories have banned or limited the export of face masks, protective gear, gloves and other goods to mitigate shortages since the coronavirus outbreak began, the World Trade Organization reported on Thursday.

It said the bans were imposed by 72 WTO members and eight non-WTO member countries, but only 13 WTO members had notified the global trade body as required by its regulations.

Lack of transparency about restrictions and failure to cooperate internationally could undermine efforts to slow the spread of the COVID-19 disease, which has infected 2.64 million people around the world and killed 184,910, the WTO said.

"While the introduction of export-restrictive measures is understandable, the lack of international cooperation in these areas risks cutting off import-reliant countries from desperately needed medical products and triggering a supply shock," the WTO report said. "And by interfering with established medical supply chains, such measures also risk hampering the urgently required supply response."

Export bans and restrictions are generally prohibited in the WTO, although there are exceptions which allow temporary measures to "prevent or relieve critical shortages of foodstuffs or other products essential to the exporting contracting party."

Travel restrictions had already slowed the flow of goods needed to fight the pandemic, but export restrictions made it difficult for governments and businesses to adjust purchasing decisions and find new suppliers, the report said.

Leaders of the Group of 20 major economies last month said any emergency measures taken in response to the pandemic should be "targeted, proportionate, transparent and temporary," but new export restrictions have emerged even since then.

Last week, the United States asked China to revise new export quality control rules for protective equipment after complaints that the rules were holding up supplies.

Reuters reported on Thursday that France had expanded its list of drugs that face export restrictions despite repeated calls from the European Union to lift curbs that could cause shortages in other countries.

The WTO said restrictions could prompt others to follow suit and further reduce available



supplies.

"The long-term effects could be significant," the report said, warning that too-broad measures that stayed in place could irreparably alter supply chains and additional tariff and non-tariff barriers could spring up as a reaction.

Political fallout from the restrictions could weaken the global response to the pandemic, raising the possibility of recurring outbreaks that could affect everyone and leading to delays in getting goods to where they were needed.

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### **America is awakening to China. This is a clarion call to seize the moment**

Washington Post - 4/23/2020  
by Mitt Romney

America is awakening to China. The covid-19 pandemic has revealed that, to a great degree, our very health is in Chinese hands; from medicines to masks, we are at Beijing's mercy. Embarrassed by the revelation of this vulnerability, politicians in Washington will certainly act to remedy our medical dependence — with the usual fanfare and self-congratulation. But China's stranglehold on pharmaceuticals is only a small sliver of its grand strategy for economic, military and geopolitical domination. The West's response must extend much further — it will require a unified strategy among free nations to counter China's trade predation and its corruption of our mutual security.

In recent years, China has succeeded in disproportionately positioning its citizens and proxies with loyalties to the Chinese Communist Party in key international governing bodies, allowing it to expand its geopolitical influence. China relentlessly badgers and bribes nations to avert their leaders' eyes from its egregious abuses of Tibetans, Uighurs and other minorities — as well as its targeting of pro-democracy leaders in Hong Kong. The same methods result in the geopolitical isolation of Taiwan. All the while, China spreads pacifying propaganda throughout the world; even right under our noses, so-called Confucius Institutes peddle pro-China messages in America's colleges and high schools.

China's alarming military build-up is not widely discussed outside unclassified settings, but Americans should not take comfort in our disproportionately large military budget. The government of President Xi Jinping doesn't report its actual defense spending. An apples-to-apples analysis demonstrates that China's annual procurement of military hardware is nearly identical to ours; but because our military has missions around the world, this means that in the Pacific, where China concentrates its firepower, it will have military superiority. No wonder the Philippines and other Pacific nations have cozied up to their powerful neighbor.

Today, however, Beijing's weapon of choice is economic: The tip of its spear is global industrial predation. China not only steals technology from other nations, it massively subsidizes industries it determines to have strategic importance. Further, it employs competitive practices that have long been forbidden by developed nations, including bribery, monopoly, currency manipulation and predatory pricing.

As China ascended in the global marketplace, the West indulged its aberrant industrial policies, hoping it would move toward freedom and adherence to the international rules of

commerce. That indulgence exacted a heavy toll. For example, China achieved a breathtaking capture of the global steel market through means that are illegal or impossible elsewhere: pricing far below cost, artificially depressing currency, massive government subsidies and, to be sure, a measure of bribes. Between 2000 and 2009, China more than tripled its global share of steel production, and now it controls more than half of the world's output — resulting in steel plants shuttered around the globe and the sacrifice of hundreds of thousands of jobs.

China employs its predatory tools across the economy, from high-tech and national security sectors of nanotechnology, telecommunications and artificial intelligence to basic mining and manufacturing. A Chinese conglomerate recently acquired a dominant Indonesian stainless steel company. Indonesia just happens to be the largest producer of the world's nickel, an essential ingredient in the production of stainless steel. Suddenly, Indonesia has agreed to shut off nickel exports to any of China's foreign competitors. Another near-monopoly is born, thanks to anti-competitive tactics.

When a predator, unbound by the rules followed by its competitors, is allowed to operate in a free market, that market is no longer truly free.

As a first step, President Trump was right to blow the whistle on Xi and apply tariffs. But we must go a good deal further. We must align our negotiating strategy and policies with other nations that adhere to the global rules of trade. This means narrowing trade disputes with our friends and uniting against China's untethered abuse. China must understand that it will not have free, unfettered access to any of our economies unless it ceases to employ anti-competitive and predatory practices. It will face a simple choice: Play by the global rules, or face steep economic penalties.

Further action should be applied in national security sectors such as artificial intelligence, telecommunication and, as we now know, pharmaceuticals. The free nations must collectively agree that we will buy these products only from other free nations. In addition to protecting our security, such an agreement would incentivize our research and industrial institutions to invest in these areas, knowing that they will not be undercut by Chinese predatory practices.

China has done what we have allowed it to do; to save a few dollars, we have looked the other way. Covid-19 has exposed China's dishonesty for all to see. And it is a clarion call for America to seize the moment. When the immediate health crisis has passed, the United States should convene like-minded nations to develop a common strategy aimed at dissuading China from pursuing its predatory path.

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## **UN agency calls for \$1 trillion developing world debt write-off**

Reuters - 4/23/2020

Joe Bavier

Around \$1 trillion of debt owed by developing countries would be cancelled under a global deal proposed by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) on Thursday to help them overcome the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

The world's developing economies, which were already struggling with a rapidly growing debt

burden, must now confront a record global downturn, plummeting prices for their oil and commodities exports and weakening local currencies.

At the same time, they need to spend more money on healthcare and to protect their economies. Some 64 low-income countries currently spend more on debt service than their health systems, according to UNCTAD.

"This is a world where defaults by developing nations on their debt is inevitable," Richard Kozul-Wright, director of UNCTAD's Division on Globalisation and Development Strategies, said during a video conference with journalists.

In a report calling for a plan to relieve developing countries' debt burden, UNCTAD estimated their liquidity and financing requirements due to the pandemic amount to at least \$2.5 trillion.

High-income developing countries have debt service obligations of between \$2 to \$2.3 trillion in 2020 and 2021 alone, while middle and low-income countries have debt service obligations of \$700 billion to \$1.1 trillion.

Having poured some \$8 trillion into stimulus for their own economies, the Group of 20 wealthy nations (G20) last week agreed to suspend the bilateral debt service payments by the world's poorest countries until the end of the year.

"It's kicking the can down the road," Kozul-Wright said. "You extend the problem and you pretend it's going to go away in two or three years time if growth picks up in the world economy. We don't think this is credible."

UNCTAD calculated the G20's debt moratorium would cover \$20 billion of public debt to official bilateral creditors. An additional \$8 billion would be included if all private creditors joined the initiative, and a further \$12 billion if all multilateral creditors did as well.

That has little impact on the developing world's overall debt burden, the agency said, and the money would need to be paid back with interest at the end of the suspension.

Instead, it called for a "Global Debt Deal" that would grant initial one-year debt standstills on request, which could be extended after a review and would include a stay on all creditor enforcement actions.

Debt relief and restructuring programmes would follow to ensure long-term debt sustainability, a process that would require significant debt cancellation.

Using as a benchmark the case of post-war Germany, which saw about half its debt cancelled, UNCTAD calculated the figure for developing economies would be around \$1 trillion.

An independent debt authority would oversee the process rather than the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, which are among poor countries' leading creditors and therefore not impartial, according to UNCTAD.

Kozul-Wright said it was in the interest of wealthy nations to support a plan allowing developing countries to concentrate their resources on fighting the new coronavirus rather than their external debt.

"This is not a charity exercise," he said. "The health pandemic will eventually hit much of the south. If that happens there will be a blowback in terms of health to countries that thought

they had somehow conquered this virus. That's almost inevitable."

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## **EU seeks multi-trillion euro fund to recover from coronavirus**

Reuters - 4/23/2020

Jan Strupczewski and Robin Emmott

Divided European Union leaders began their search on Thursday for a joint financial fund of up to 2 trillion euros to help recover from the coronavirus pandemic and avoid economic collapse in the bloc's poorer south.

With the EU's summit building under lockdown — along with most of Europe — the 27 leaders met via video conference to consider proposals including a bigger common budget, giving grants to stricken economies, or selling bonds together to raise funds.

Europe is facing a severe economic shock from the spread of COVID-19, the respiratory disease caused by the novel coronavirus, which has also led to border closures across the bloc and left member states fighting over medical supplies.

European Central Bank Governor Christine Lagarde told the leaders the pandemic could cut between 5% and up to 15% of their economic output, a diplomatic source said.

A Reuters poll this week showed that the euro zone's economic growth for 2020 was forecast to contract 5.4%, which would make it the worst year since the common currency was introduced in 1999. That is still better than the International Monetary Fund's latest forecast for a decline of 7.5%.

Mario Centeno, who will address EU leaders as head of the euro zone finance ministers, said huge regional divergences because of the crisis would be "poisonous for our democracies."

"We are only as strong as our weakest member," Centeno, who is Portuguese, said in a video before the summit. That message was echoed by European Parliament President David Sassoli, who said the bloc needed to avoid a "disastrous spiral."

"We need to make sure that we emerge with a stronger version of Europe, with a stronger sense of community," he said after briefly joining leaders at the start of their meeting.

But with Italy and Spain hit far harder than Germany by the crisis, old enmities have surfaced across the bloc. Reaching agreement among euro zone finance ministers two weeks ago on a 500 billion euro rescue scheme was torturous, as the Netherlands refused an Italian demand to issue common debt.

## **DEAL UNLIKELY ON THURSDAY**

This time, senior EU diplomats said there was consensus that a recovery fund needed to be large enough to meet the challenge of a pandemic that will shrink economies.

Finland's Prime Minister Sanna Marin told the country's main business daily Kauppalehti that Finland, which along with Austria, Germany and the Netherlands is against joint debt, is "open and constructive about the debate on the stimulus fund."

But leaders are unlikely to reach a deal on Thursday, facing a rancorous debate on how much money is needed, how to raise it, how to spend it, to what extent governments would be responsible and what maturities any joint debt might have.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, speaking before the summit, said she backed using the EU's multi-year budget for relaunching growth in the world's biggest trading bloc.

Spain, the world's second most affected country after the United States, says it wants a 1.5 trillion euro coronavirus recovery fund to award grants, rather than loans, while France wants a fund that could issue common EU debt.

France has sought to ease opposition in Germany and the Netherlands to the joint issuance of debt by proposing a temporary recovery fund strictly focused on future investments.

#### EUROBONDS BY ANOTHER NAME?

An internal Commission note prepared for Thursday's summit showed it was proposing to produce 2 trillion euros of spending and investment through the EU's 2021-2027 joint coffers and a recovery fund.

If agreed, the Commission would release most of the spending in 2021-22 as a mix of free grants and repayable loans after issuing bonds against guarantees the 27 EU member states would agree for their joint budget.

The Commission will be asked to make more specific proposals around May 6 and the bloc's leaders could have another discussion on that in June.

Any final decision may take even longer, because of the complexity of talks over the EU budget, called the Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF), and bitter divisions in the bloc over the scale and scope of the necessary recovery financing.

Some saw a silver lining in the crisis, arguing that the adage of further European integration through crisis held true.

"We are slowly heading towards some form of joint debt. We'll never call it 'coronabonds' or 'eurobonds' and it will be raised by the Commission, rather than member states together," said a senior EU diplomat involved in preparing the summit.

"There will be plenty of fights ahead to nail it down. But we are moving into a territory that would have been beyond the pale before the coronavirus crisis."

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#### **Trump officials eye blocking uranium from Russia, China to help U.S. nuclear industry**

Reuters - 4/23/2020

Timothy Gardner

Trump administration officials on Thursday recommended granting U.S. energy regulators the ability to block imports of nuclear fuel from Russia and China and detailed plans for setting up a government stockpile of uranium sourced from domestic miners.

The recommendations are meant to address growing concern in Washington that the United States has ceded its global leadership in nuclear technology in recent decades, and to boost domestic nuclear power producers and uranium miners suffering from a lack of investment.

Energy Secretary Dan Brouillette told reporters on a call that the report from the Nuclear Fuel Working Group was a "road map for what we think needs to be done to not only revitalize but re-establish American leadership in this entire industry."

President Donald Trump created the working group last July after rejecting a request by two U.S. uranium mining companies, Energy Fuels Inc [UUUU.A] and Ur-Energy Inc [URG.A], seeking quotas for domestic uranium production to protect them against foreign competition.

The report recommended enabling the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to deny imports of certain uranium supplies from Russia and China for national security purposes.

It also recommended that the Commerce Department extend the Russian Suspension Agreement, which established a maximum cap for imports of Russian uranium to 20% of the U.S. market, "to protect against future uranium dumping." It suggested "further lowering the cap" on Russian imports in the agreement, which expires this year.

The report mentioned TVEL, a unit of Russian state-owned Rosatom, which launched a project in 2008 to develop replacement fuel for reactors using U.S. technology abroad and in the United States. That project is on hold, but would pose a risk to the U.S. nuclear industry if revived, it said.

The report also recommended the U.S. government set up a uranium reserve allowing it to make direct purchases of uranium from domestic producers. Trump's budget released in February proposed \$1.5 billion over 10 years for the creation of a uranium reserve, but Congress has yet to act on it.

Brouillette said it was possible Trump would issue executive orders to support the findings of the report, which also sought to boost research and development of new reactor technologies, and streamline permitting for uranium mining.

America Fitzpatrick, a senior representative of The Wilderness Society environmental group, said her organization opposed efforts to bolster the U.S. nuclear industry and worried that it would increase mining near national parks.

"Enriching special interests with taxpayer resources so they can plunder national treasures like Bears Ears and the Grand Canyon will harm our land, water and public health," she said.

Energy Fuels Inc and Ur-Energy Inc, as well as more than two dozen Western state lawmakers, have argued that U.S. nuclear generators rely too heavily on foreign suppliers, including Russia, China and Kazakhstan. Canada has also long been a top supplier of uranium to the United States.

Maria Korsnick, chief executive of the Nuclear Energy Institute, the industry's lobby group, thanked "the administration for its support to revitalize and bolster" the sector.

The U.S. nuclear energy industry is virtually emissions-free but suffering from high safety costs and low prices for natural gas, a competitor in generating power. Since 2013, about nine nuclear plants have closed, and eight are scheduled to close in coming years.

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## **Why America's Accusations That China Is Testing Nuclear Weapons Harms Arms Control**

The National Interest - 4/23/2020  
Sahil Shah

In a new compliance report released last week, the United States once again accused Russia, and now China, of violating the "zero-yield" standard or threshold envisioned under the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). While "zero," "yield," and "threshold" do not appear in the text of the CTBT, the United States, Russia, China, and other negotiating parties have always held the interpretation that the Treaty bans nuclear test explosions with any yield, anywhere.

The current U.S. administration's vague and ungrounded claims pointing to possible Russian and Chinese "low-yield" nuclear testing are vexingly unsubstantiated and ultimately harm progress on arms control, strategic stability, and confidence-building. These thinly-supported claims are also counterproductive to American national security goals, especially as President Trump's team continues to propose a "new generation" of trilateral arms control agreements that would include both Russia and China. Washington cannot achieve this important goal without producing pragmatic proposals to back its vision. Instead of using the common lack of CTBT ratification between America and China as an opportunity to take what would be a tremendously positive joint step, the U.S. administration is using it to spark increased animosity.

Many worry that the U.S. accusations have been made in less than good faith. Given the general lack of enthusiasm for the CTBT in the administration, it is difficult to conclude otherwise. For example, as one of the lead negotiating countries of the CTBT and the only signatory that pays a significant single share of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO)'s operational budget, the U.S. government has done a disservice to its own diplomatic record and financial investment by leaving out any mention of the Treaty in the report. Failure to even mention the CTBT, which is a cornerstone of global non-proliferation and disarmament architecture, sends a poor message to the international community about this administration's sentiments towards the Treaty's relevance and value.

With current tensions with China heightened over the COVID-19 pandemic, the information environment is ripe for some American lawmakers to mobilize the claim that China is engaging in "low-yield" nuclear testing as a tool to withdraw Washington from the CTBT altogether. However, the concerns are seemingly based on higher activity levels at the Chinese Lop Nur test site. If the same metrics were used, the same accusations could also be leveled against American activities at the U.S. Nevada test site. Senior Chinese officials have made it clear that alleged talk in the United States about "unsigned" the CTBT and American preparations to resume nuclear testing at a shorter notice have made consensus difficult amongst the Chinese National People's Congress on the CTBT. While China says it is committed to ratification, these actions have made it far easier for China to put the onus back on America to break open the "log-jam" that is stagnating progress on the Treaty's entry-into-force.

In contrast to the unclear claims against China, the new report explicitly asserts that Russia has conducted experiments that produced nuclear yield as the result of supercritical chain reactions. However, the United States "does not know how many, if any, supercritical or self-sustaining nuclear experiments Russia conducted in 2019." Moreover, the Trump



administration offers no numbers of violations, or evidence, for the other years since the CTBT was finalized in 1996. Russia, which ratified the CTBT a number of years ago, has wholly dismissed U.S. allegations with a similar tone to China's reaction.

It has become clear that part of the issue is the semiotic slippage of what constitutes a "nuclear test." U.S. accusations over "low yield" testing concern so-called tiny "hydro-nuclear" tests that involve explosively compressing plutonium or uranium to produce a supercritical chain reaction and a nuclear yield equivalent to only grams of TNT. Scientists have long described these tests as "tickling the dragon's tail." Unfortunately, hydro-nuclear tests with a nuclear yield below that of the high explosive used to detonate the physics package are possibly undetectable or at least indistinguishable from the subcritical—or "zero-yield"—tests technically allowed under the CTBT.

Thus, issues over "low-yield" nuclear testing are impossibly difficult to verify unless physical, on-site transparency inspections occur. In any case, hydro-nuclear tests of little to no nuclear yield are not going to provide Russia or China any militarily-significant advantages over America, and the utility of these tests varies based on previous test and design experience. In view of this, it is important to note that the United States, which has conducted more nuclear tests than any country, has no technical need for resuming any level of nuclear testing either.

One should not forget that the CTBT's billion-dollar-plus, intricate array of sensors has exceeded expectations over the past two decades in its ability to detect nuclear tests anywhere and at any time. This was made clear when the International Monitoring System (IMS) detected a North Korean nuclear test with a yield of less than one kiloton in 2006. Twenty years prior to this, when technical experts were finalizing the parameters for the CTBT verification regime, they aimed at a global detection capability threshold of one kiloton. Since that 2006 test, the CTBT's International Monitoring System (IMS)'s capacity has risen from less than 60 percent to 90 percent completion, continually improving its accuracy and agility along the way.

While hundreds of IMS sensors listen to rhythms emanating from all corners of the planet, any anomalies that may be a nuclear test are assessed in real-time by an international group of technologists and scientists. Cross-correlation methods can be used to pinpoint even low-yield tests, as seen in the aforementioned North Korea case, but the system is not completely infallible. Anxieties over "low-yield" nuclear tests are one of the many reasons why consultation and clarification, confidence building measures, and on-site inspections are key parts of the CTBT.

If these new accusations against China and Russia are meant to pave a path for a U.S. exit from the treaty, it is crucial that lawmakers and their national security advisors do not take Administration accusations at face value, but actually aim to understand the CTBT and its technical merits. Moreover, it is the job of the U.S. intelligence community to analyze activities that have implications for a country's international obligations. If the intelligence community has information regarding Chinese or Russian activities that indicate behavior inconsistent with the CTBT, it should make it explicitly known. As has been done in the past, the Director of National Intelligence could appoint a panel of scientific experts from outside the intelligence community to review and report on whatever information, if any at all, underpins these claims.

All CTBT signatories, including all five major nuclear powers, share a responsibility to herald the treaty into force—a task which requires America and China to ratify. Without entry-into-force, the CTBTO's international team of trained scientists cannot conduct intrusive, short-notice, and physical on-site inspections. Until then, it would be logical for the United States, China, and Russia to solve any concerns through the other options afforded to them under

Zarif was referring to Saddam Hussein, the former Iraqi president who before being overthrown by the United States had gone to war with Iran. The tweet was accompanied by a map that noted the U.S. is thousands of miles away from the Persian Gulf, whereas the Persian Gulf makes up most of Iran's shoreline.

But the Persian Gulf also includes large amounts of international waters and is an important trade route that the United States has made an effort to protect — particularly the Strait of Hormuz, which is the gateway to the Persian Gulf. Iran last summer seized a foreign oil tanker in the strait and engaged in other actions that led the U.S. to attempt to form an international coalition to protect the waterway from Iranian aggression.

In the recent encounter that angered Trump, 11 Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Navy vessels made aggressive maneuvers near American ships, including multiple crossings of one ship, the Puller, with a 50-yard closest point of approach and within 10 yards of another ship, the Maui's, bow, a 5th Fleet statement said.

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### **UN, EU warn Israel against West Bank annexation**

UN's Middle East envoy says move would be 'devastating' to a two-state solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Aljazeera – April 23, 2020

The United Nations and the European Union have warned Israel not to annex parts of the occupied West Bank.

The UN's special Middle East envoy Nickolay Mladenov on Thursday said such a move would be a "devastating blow" to the internationally-backed two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as the EU said annexing Palestinian territory "would constitute a serious violation of international law".

Earlier this week, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his main rival Benny Gantz signed a coalition agreement that includes a clause to advance plans to annex parts of the West Bank, including Israeli settlements, starting on July 1.

Reporting from the UN, Al Jazeera's James Bays said the formation of a government in Israel has brought the question of annexation into focus.

"The new coalition government in Israel makes the prospect of the annexation of parts of the West Bank much more likely. That means that areas currently seen as occupied under international law, would be brought under Israel's sovereignty. At least that's how Israel would see it," he said.

In a video briefing with the UN Security Council, Mladenov warned that "the dangerous prospect of annexation by Israel of parts of the occupied West Bank is a growing threat", and said such a move would violate international law.

The envoy said annexation would also "deal a devastating blow to the two-state solution, close the door to a renewal of negotiations, and threaten efforts to advance regional peace."

Separately on Thursday, the EU's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, said the bloc of 27 member countries does not recognise Israeli sovereignty over the Palestinian territory and

that it will "continue to closely monitor the situation and its broader implications, and will act accordingly".

## **US plan**

Netanyahu's pro-settler base is eager to move forward with annexation while the friendly administration of United States President Donald Trump is in office.

The White House's long-awaited Mideast plan, unveiled earlier this year, envisions leaving parts of the West Bank under permanent Israeli control. The Palestinians have rejected the plan as biased.

Israel captured the West Bank during the 1967 Mideast war. Since then, more than 700,000 Israelis have moved into settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Most of the international community considers Israel's West Bank settlements illegal according to international law and an obstacle to a two-state solution to the conflict.

The Palestinians seek all of the West Bank and East Jerusalem as part of an independent state. Annexation of West Bank settlements would infuriate the Palestinians and Israel's Arab neighbours, and eliminate any lingering hopes of establishing a viable Palestinian state.

The Netanyahu-Gantz deal stipulates that any Israeli action would need US backing, and must take into account Israel's peace treaties with neighbouring Jordan and Egypt.

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## **U.S. must demand transparency of Chinese debt in any debt restructuring deals: senators**

Reuters – April 24, 2020

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The United States must insist that developing countries disclose debt and other obligations to China as part of any future debt restructuring deal or international aid package, 16 senior Republican senators told the Trump administration.

Senate Banking Committee Chairman Mike Crapo, Senate Finance Committee Chairman Chuck Grassley and the other senators said in a letter the United States should support debt restructuring for poor countries hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic, falling commodity prices and the appreciation of the U.S. dollar.

But any financial agreements should require disclosure of a country's debts to China or legal obligations under its Belt and Road infrastructure initiative, they told Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in the letter dated April 22 and reviewed by Reuters

Chinese institutions should also agree to renegotiate the underlying debt of developing countries without a political quid pro quo, they said in the previously unreported letter.

"Short of this, U.S. and other Western taxpayers would be in essence bailing out Chinese financial institutions and enabling China's debt-trap diplomacy," the senators wrote.

The International Monetary Fund last week forecast that the pandemic would cause a 3% contraction in the global economy.

The crisis is hitting developing countries and emerging markets particularly hard, and has raised the spectre of a major wave of debt restructuring once the crisis abates.

The Group of 20 major economies - which include China - and the Paris Club group of creditors last week agreed to suspend official bilateral debt payments for the world's poorest countries through the end of the year, with private creditors backing the measure on a voluntary basis.

But experts say more significant steps, including debt restructuring and cancellation, will likely be needed, given the dire economic conditions triggered by the pandemic.

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) on Thursday called for cancellation of \$1 trillion of debt owed by developing countries.

The United Nations estimates that developing countries will need to pay back or refinance \$2.7 trillion in debt by the end of 2021, not counting billions of dollars in additional loans needed to combat the pandemic and mitigate its economic impact.

Much of the developing countries' debt is held by China, which aggressively stepped up public and private lending in Africa and other developing regions over the past decades, often demanding much tougher terms and higher interest rates than Western creditors.

Led by U.S. Senator David Perdue, a senior member of the Senate Banking Committee, the letter noted that many loans carried nondisclosure agreements and some 50% of China's loans to developing countries were not reported or included in data compiled by the World Bank, the IMF or credit-rating agencies.

China also engaged in predatory lending practices and demanded extensive collateral, raising the prospect that countries could lose sovereign property or strategic assets as part of a debt relief deal with China, the senators wrote.

"The U.S. must ... closely monitor countries now buckling under Chinese-issued debt. Through U.S.-led institutions like the IMF and the World Bank, the U.S. should support offering debt restructuring to these countries as needed," they said.

The United States, the dominant shareholder in the IMF, should demand that any country that requests IMF or international aid "be transparent in all outstanding finances and legal obligations, including BRI agreements and Chinese debt."

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## **U.S. Gives Greenland \$12 Million But Says It's Not a Bid to Buy**

Bloomberg - 23 avril 2020

*By Nick Wadhams*

The U.S. is giving \$12.1 million in aid to Greenland but denies the help is part of a long-term scheme to buy the island from Denmark, regardless of what President Donald Trump may have said in the past.

While the money involved is small, it's revived a furor in Denmark over reports last year that

Trump was musing about purchasing Greenland. The U.S. is seeking to counter growing assertiveness in the Arctic by Russia and China.

The \$12.1 million will go toward priorities including tapping Greenland's abundant mineral resources, promoting tourism and boosting ties with the island's people, a senior State Department official told reporters on condition of anonymity. The U.S. also plans to open a consulate in Nuuk, the capital, within several months.

Greenland's government said Thursday that the aid package would "benefit the economic development of Greenland, including the mineral industry, tourism and education."

"It takes time to develop closer relationships with other countries," Greenland Premier Kim Kielsen said, according to a government statement. "But this good news confirms that our work on building a constructive relationship with the United States is fruitful."

U.S. Ambassador to Denmark Carla Sands wrote in an opinion column in Danish media outlet Altinget on Wednesday that it was meant in part to counter Russia's "aggressive behavior and increased militarization in the Arctic" and China's "predatory economic interests" in the region.

### **'Crossed the Line'**

But the funding angered some officials in Denmark. Karsten Hønge, a member of the foreign affairs committee with the Socialist People's Party, said the move "clearly crossed the line" and was trying to sow divisions in Denmark.

Trump canceled a planned trip to Denmark last year after Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen dismissed as absurd Trump's desire to buy Greenland, which was reported by the Wall Street Journal. Trump called the prime minister's remark "nasty" and "inappropriate."

The senior administration official said there was no internal U.S. process underway to buy Greenland.

Nonetheless, binding Greenland closer to the U.S. has been a priority for the Trump administration for some time. A person familiar with U.S. plans, who asked not to be identified discussing private deliberations, said the idea was to rebuff Chinese and Russian influence and win over Greenland's residents, with the eventual goal of buying the island if possible.

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### **Greenland ready to take U.S. aid but won't accept conditions**

AP - 4/23/2020

Jan M. Olsen

Greenlanders said Thursday they welcome U.S. investment in their island, but the money has to come without conditions.

The U.S. administration is expected to announce the opening of a U.S. Agency for International Development office at the new American consulate in the capital, Nuuk, and confirm at least \$12 million in new aid projects.

The announcement, expected Thursday in Washington, will come less than a year after President Donald Trump drew derision for expressing an interest in buying Greenland, which is part of the Danish Realm. Already, suggestions of a greater U.S. presence in Greenland have been met with criticism in Greenland and in Denmark.

The Inuit government said in a statement preceding the announcement that the U.S. government had decided to allocate \$12.1 million for projects in Greenland, focused on economic development including the mineral industry, tourism and education. The local government said it had accepted the offer.

"This good news confirms that our work on building a constructive relationship with the United States is fruitful," Greenland Premier Kim Kielsen said.

"It is positive that the increased cooperation between Greenland and the U.S. is reflected in tangible results in the form of funding for projects in Greenland."

The funds are expected to be implemented primarily as consultancy and advisory assistance from U.S. experts, as well as through existing programs under the U.S. State Department, the government said.

Aaja Chemnitz Larsen from the left-leaning IA opposition party called it a "charm offensive."

"The Americans are welcome if they want to invest in Greenland," she told The Associated Press. "But it is important to make sure that Greenland doesn't owe anything back to the United States. We are skeptical about what they really want besides influence."

She added that it must clear "what the money should be spent on."

Jon Rahbek-Clemmensen, an associate professor with the Royal Danish Defense College in Copenhagen, said the United States has been missing out on its Arctic strategy, giving Russia and China a head-start in the Arctic, and is now coming back with a large sum of money.

"The United States has been caught napping and not seen Russia strengthening its military presence in the Arctic and China trying to make investments in Greenland," he said. "They are now trying to get back at having a presence in the Arctic" and they are doing it "with a big fanfare."

An op-ed earlier this week by the American ambassador to Denmark, Carla Sands, previewed the announcement and said the U.S. would be "the preferred partner in the Arctic." That sparked harsh reactions in Denmark.

"They have clearly crossed the line," said Carsten Hoenge, an outspoken member of the left-leaning Socialist People's Party that supports the Social Democratic minority government. "We must draw a line in the ice cap."

Soeren Espersen of the opposition Danish People's Party told Danish broadcaster DR that financial aid "is something you say about third world countries when you provide development aid. But Greenland is not a developing country. It is a Western democracy. I think it's reprehensible."

Greenland covers 2.166 million square kilometers (836,000 square miles) but has a population of only 56,000, mainly Inuits.



Last August, Trump's desire to buy Greenland emerged in press reports in Washington. Kielsen said then that the island was not for sale, adding: "Greenland is not Danish. Greenland is Greenlandic. I persistently hope that this is not something that is seriously meant."

Retreating ice could uncover potential oil and mineral resources in Greenland which, if successfully tapped, could dramatically change the island's fortunes. But no oil has yet been found in Greenlandic waters and 80% of the island is covered by an ice sheet that is up to 3 kilometers (2 miles) thick, which means exploration is only possible in coastal regions.

Even there, conditions are far from ideal, due to the long winter with frozen ports, 24-hour darkness and temperatures regularly dropping below minus 20 Fahrenheit (minus 30 Celsius) in the northern parts.

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## **Virus warnings for Ramadan as some pandemic shutdowns ease**

AP - 4/23/2020

Elaine Kurtenbach and E.Lederer

The world inched toward a new phase in the coronavirus crisis on Thursday, as some countries like Vietnam and New Zealand with few new cases moved toward ending their shutdowns while others like Singapore and Japan were tightening measures to prevent a surge in infections.

Like the U.S., many countries are moving from crisis mode to figuring out how to live with the virus by modifying pre-pandemic routines with precautions, more testing and containment of flare-ups, mindful of the potential for future waves of the virus.

Authorities in the capital of Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim majority nation, extended to May 22 strict disease-fighting restrictions with the approach of Ramadan, which begins with the new moon this week.

With traditional, communal meals for the poor, large fast-breaking dinners with family and friends and cultural events after sunset canceled, the world's 1.8 billion Muslims find themselves cut off from much of what makes the month special.

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan bowed to the country's religious clerics, refusing to close mosques despite an appeal from the Pakistan Medical Association warning such gatherings are like a petri dish for the spread of the virus in a country that has a fragile health care system.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres urged Muslims to "focus on our common enemy — the virus," and repeated an earlier appeal for an immediate cease-fire for all conflicts. In a separate message, he urged countries to provide equitable help to all, saying the pandemic was "a human crisis that is fast becoming a human rights crisis."

Some leaders are using the crisis as a pretext for repressive measures, Guterres said. "The message is clear: People — and their rights — must be front and center," he said.

The United Nations has warned that tens of millions of people risk starvation as the

coronavirus pandemic, a plague of locusts in Africa and other disruptions prevent food from reaching the world's most vulnerable populations in places like Yemen and South Sudan.

A report released Wednesday estimated that at least 135 million people are at acute risk of starvation due to conflicts and other factors. The report was compiled before shutdowns, border closures and freezes on transport activities began disrupting food supplies.

In response, the EU pledged 20 billion euros (\$22 billion) for helping bridge such disruptions to provide help to vulnerable communities globally.

While some parts of the world are just beginning to grapple with the pandemic, in China authorities reported no new deaths and just 10 new cases on Thursday. The number of people hospitalized dropped to 959, with 63 considered serious cases.

China has reopened many businesses. Middle and high school seniors preparing for exams are returning to classes. But a ban on foreign arrivals and strict quarantine measures remain in place to prevent an influx of new cases from abroad or fresh infections among those thought to have recovered or who had no symptoms but could still be spreading the virus.

Neighboring Vietnam, which moved quickly to close its borders and trace coronavirus cases, has reported no new cases in the past three days and is preparing to loosen restrictions.

"I feel blessed that we can feel safe and life is getting back to normal. I'm proud of the country," Nguyen Thi Thuy said after reopening her coffee shop for the first time in nearly a month.

One of her first customers, Nguyen Ngoc Tri, said the lockdown was "frustrating." But he added, "everyone has to sacrifice and do their part for the safety of the community."

New Zealand, which announced just three new cases of the coronavirus on Thursday, remained on strict lockdown, with 1,451 confirmed cases and 16 deaths, but was preparing to ease limits next week.

But the virus continues to pop up unexpectedly.

Singapore has been reporting hundreds of new cases daily, exceeding 10,000 in total, with the vast majority of new infections traced to crowded migrant worker dormitories.

Japanese officials said more crew members on a cruise ship docked in Nagasaki have tested positive, raising the total on board to 48. The Italian-operated Costa Atlantica has been docked since late January for repairs and maintenance and has no passengers. Officials planned to test all the remaining crew by Friday. They also are investigating how the virus got on board since the crew has stayed on the ship since mid-March.

The coronavirus has infected more than 2.6 million people and killed about 183,000, including more than 45,000 in the United States, according to a tally compiled by John Hopkins University from official government figures.

The true numbers are undoubtedly far higher, since testing is limited and counting methods vary. Most people infected suffer from only mild or moderate symptoms and survive.

But the crushing death toll has left many people cautious and they may need weeks, or even months, to regain confidence and resume normal activities. Future waves of outbreaks could reverse any gains in the interim, Dr. Robert Blendon, a Harvard professor of health policy and political analysis, said.

As President Donald Trump shifts to what White House officials call a new chapter in the response, officials face a challenge in reassuring the public while ensuring enough precautions are taken as communities emerge from shutdowns to prevent fresh onslaughts of cases.

"People will watch the cases and listen to the major public health leaders, and if there's a conflict, that will slow things even greater," Blendon said.

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### **'Sadness' and Disbelief From a World Missing American Leadership**

The coronavirus pandemic is shaking bedrock assumptions about U.S. exceptionalism. This is perhaps the first global crisis in more than a century where no one is even looking for Washington to lead.

NYT - April 23, 2020  
By Katrin Bennhold

BERLIN — As images of America's overwhelmed hospital wards and snaking jobless lines have flickered across the world, people on the European side of the Atlantic are looking at the richest and most powerful nation in the world with disbelief.

"When people see these pictures of New York City they say, 'How can this happen? How is this possible?'" said Henrik Enderlein, president of the Berlin-based Hertie School, a university focused on public policy. "We are all stunned. Look at the jobless lines. Twenty-two million," he added.

"I feel a desperate sadness," said Timothy Garton Ash, a professor of European history at Oxford University and a lifelong and ardent Atlanticist.

The pandemic sweeping the globe has done more than take lives and livelihoods from New Delhi to New York. It is shaking fundamental assumptions about American exceptionalism — the special role the United States played for decades after World War II as the reach of its values and power made it a global leader and example to the world.

Today it is leading in a different way: More than 840,000 Americans have been diagnosed with Covid-19 and at least 46,784 have died from it, more than anywhere else in the world.

As the calamity unfolds, President Trump and state governors are not only arguing over what to do, but also over who has the authority to do it. Mr. Trump has fomented protests against the safety measures urged by scientific advisers, misrepresented facts about the virus and the government response nearly daily, and this week used the virus to cut off the issuing of green cards to people seeking to emigrate to the United States.

"America has not done badly, it has done exceptionally badly," said Dominique Moïsi, a political scientist and senior adviser at the Paris-based Institut Montaigne.

The pandemic has exposed the strengths and weaknesses of just about every society, Mr. Moïsi noted. It has demonstrated the strength of, and suppression of information by, an authoritarian Chinese state as it imposed a lockdown in the city of Wuhan. It has shown the

value of Germany's deep well of public trust and collective spirit, even as it has underscored the country's reluctance to step up forcefully and lead Europe.

And in the United States, it has exposed two great weaknesses that, in the eyes of many Europeans, have compounded one another: the erratic leadership of Mr. Trump, who has devalued expertise and often refused to follow the advice of his scientific advisers, and the absence of a robust public health care system and social safety net.

"America prepared for the wrong kind of war," Mr. Moisi said. "It prepared for a new 9/11, but instead a virus came."

"It raises the question: Has America become the wrong kind of power with the wrong kind of priorities?" he asked.

Ever since Mr. Trump moved into the White House and turned America First into his administration's guiding mantra, Europeans have had to get used to the president's casual willingness to risk decades-old alliances and rip up international agreements. Early on, he called NATO "obsolete" and withdrew U.S. support from the Paris climate agreement and the Iran nuclear deal.

But this is perhaps the first global crisis in more than a century where no one is even looking to the United States for leadership.

In Berlin, Germany's foreign minister, Heiko Maas, has said as much.

China took "very authoritarian measures, while in the U.S., the virus was played down for a long time," Mr. Maas recently told Der Spiegel magazine.

"These are two extremes, neither of which can be a model for Europe," Mr. Maas said.

America once told a story of hope, and not just to Americans. West Germans like Mr. Maas, who grew up on the front line of the Cold War, knew that story by heart, and like many others in the world, believed it.

But nearly three decades later, America's story is in trouble.

The country that helped defeat fascism in Europe 75 years ago next month, and defended democracy on the continent in the decades that followed, is doing a worse job of protecting its own citizens than many autocracies and democracies.

There is a special irony: Germany and South Korea, both products of enlightened postwar American leadership, have become potent examples of best practices in the coronavirus crisis.

But critics now see America failing not only to lead the world's response, but letting down its own people as well.

"There is not only no global leadership, there is no national and no federal leadership in the United States," said Ricardo Hausmann, director of the Growth Lab at Harvard's Center for International Development. "In some sense this is the failure of leadership of the U.S. in the U.S."

Of course, some countries in Europe have also been overwhelmed by the virus, with the number of dead from Covid-19 much higher as a percentage of the population in Italy, Spain and France than in the United States. But they were struck sooner and had less time to

prepare and react.

The contrast between how the United States and Germany responded to the virus is particularly striking.

While Chancellor Angela Merkel has been criticized for not taking a forceful enough leadership role in Europe, Germany is being praised for a near-textbook response to the pandemic, at least by Western standards. That is thanks to a robust public health care system, but also a strategy of mass testing and trusted and effective political leadership.

Ms. Merkel has done what Mr. Trump has not. She has been clear and honest about the risks with voters and swift in her response. She has rallied all 16 state governors behind her. A trained physicist, she has followed scientific advice and learned from best practice elsewhere.

Not long ago, Ms. Merkel was considered a spent force, having announced that this would be her last term. Now her approval ratings are at 80 percent.

"She has the mind of a scientist and the heart of a pastor's daughter," Mr. Garton Ash said.

Mr. Trump, in a hurry to restart the economy in an election year, has appointed a panel of business executives to chart a course out of the lockdown.

Ms. Merkel, like everyone, would like to find a way out, too, but this week she warned Germans to remain cautious. She is listening to the advice of a multidisciplinary panel of 26 academics from Germany's national academy of science. The panel includes not just medical experts and economists but also behavioral psychologists, education experts, sociologists, philosophers and constitutional experts.

"You need a holistic approach to this crisis," said Gerald Haug, the academy's president, who chairs the German panel. "Our politicians get that."

A climatologist, Mr. Haug used to do research at Columbia University in New York.

The United States has some of the world's best and brightest minds in science, he said. "The difference is, they're not being listened to."

"It's a tragedy," he added.

Some cautioned that the final history of how countries fare after the pandemic is still a long way from being written.

A pandemic is a very specific kind of stress test for political systems, said Mr. Garton Ash, the history professor. The military balance of power has not shifted at all. The United States remains the world's largest economy. And it was entirely unclear what global region would be best equipped to kick-start growth after a deep recession.

"All of our economies are going to face a terrible test," he said. "No one knows who will come out stronger at the end."

Benjamin Haddad, a French researcher at the Atlantic Council, wrote that while the pandemic was testing U.S. leadership, it is "too soon to tell" if it would do long-term damage.

"It is possible that the United States will resort to unexpected resources, and at the same time find a form of national unity in its foreign policy regarding the strategic rivalry with China,

which it has been lacking until now," Mr. Haddad wrote.

There is another wild card in the short term, Mr. Moïsi pointed out. The United States has an election in November. That, and the aftermath of the deepest economic crisis since the 1930s, might also affect the course of history.

The Great Depression gave rise to America's New Deal. Maybe the coronavirus will lead the United States to embrace a stronger public safety net and develop a national consensus for more accessible health care, Mr. Moïsi suggested.

"Europe's social democratic systems are not only more human, they leave us better prepared and fit to deal with a crisis like this than the more brutal capitalistic system in the United States," Mr. Moïsi said.

The current crisis, some fear, could act like an accelerator of history, speeding up a decline in influence of both the United States and Europe.

"Sometime in 2021 we come out of this crisis and we will be in 2030," said Mr. Moïsi. "There will be more Asia in the world and less West."

Mr. Garton Ash said that the United States should take an urgent warning from a long line of empires that rose and fell.

"To a historian it's nothing new, that's what happens," said Mr. Garton Ash. "It's a very familiar story in world history that after a certain amount of time a power declines."

"You accumulate problems, and because you're such a strong player, you can carry these dysfunctionalities for a long time," he said. "Until something happens and you can't anymore."

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**U.S. MISSION GENEVA DAILY NEWS CLIPS**

April 15, 2020

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**Trump Ends US Aid to WHO, Says Not Enough Done to Stop Virus**

New York Times - By The Associated Press

April 15, 2020

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump said he was cutting off U.S. payments to the World Health Organization during the coronavirus pandemic, accusing the organization of failing to do enough to stop the virus from spreading when it first surfaced in China.

Trump, who had telegraphed his intentions last week, claimed the outbreak could have been contained at its source and that lives could have been saved had the U.N. health agency done a better job investigating the early reports coming out of China.

"The WHO failed in its basic duty and must be held accountable," Trump said at a Tuesday briefing. He said the U.S. would be reviewing the WHO's actions to stop the virus before making any decision on resuming aid.

There was no immediate comment from the Geneva-based organization on Trump's announcement. But when asked about possible U.S. funding cuts during a regular U.N. briefing earlier Tuesday, WHO spokeswoman Margaret Harris responded, "Regardless of any issues, our work will go on."

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres responded to Trump's announcement by saying now is not the time to end support for the World Health Organization, calling the WHO "absolutely critical" to the global effort to combat COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus.

Guterres said that it is possible that different entities read the facts differently but that the appropriate time for a review is "once we have finally turned the page on this pandemic."

"But now is not that time," he said, adding that it also is not the time to reduce resources for operations at the WHO or any other humanitarian group that is working to combat the virus.

The United States contributed nearly \$900 million to the WHO's budget for 2018-19, according to information on the agency's website. That represents one-fifth of its total \$4.4 billion budget for those years. The U.S. gave nearly three-fourths of the funds in "specified voluntary contributions" and the rest in "assessed" funding as part of Washington's commitment to U.N. institutions.

A more detailed WHO budget document provided by the U.S. mission in Geneva showed that in 2019, the United States provided \$452 million, including nearly \$119 million in assessed funding. In its most recent budget proposal from February, the Trump administration called for slashing the U.S. assessed funding contribution to the WHO to \$57.9 million.

More than 125,000 deaths worldwide, including more than 25,000 in the U.S., have been blamed on the coronavirus, according to Johns Hopkins University.

Last week, Trump blasted the WHO for being "China-centric" and alleging that it had "criticized" his ban on travel from China as the COVID-19 outbreak was spreading from the city of Wuhan.

The WHO generally takes care not to criticize countries on their national policies, and it was not immediately clear what specific criticism Trump was alluding to.

Trump himself showed deference to China at the beginning stages of the outbreak.



"China has been working very hard to contain the Coronavirus," he tweeted Jan. 24. "The United States greatly appreciates their efforts and transparency. It will all work out well. In particular, on behalf of the American People, I want to thank President Xi!"

Asked Tuesday about the appropriateness of seeking to cut the WHO's funding in the middle of a worldwide viral outbreak, Trump said the review would last 60 to 90 days.

"This is an evaluation period, but in the meantime, we're putting a hold on all funds going to World Health," Trump said. He said the U.S. will continue to engage with the WHO in pursuit of "meaningful reforms."

Trump has also complained that other countries give substantially less than the U.S., singling out China.

The American Medical Association immediately called on Trump to reconsider his decision.

"During the worst public health crisis in a century, halting funding to the World Health Organization is a dangerous step in the wrong direction that will not make defeating COVID-19 easier," AMA President Patrice A. Harris said in a statement.

Harris said international cooperation is needed to fight the virus, along with science and data.

"Cutting funding to the WHO, rather than focusing on solutions, is a dangerous move at a precarious moment for the world," she said.

For most people, the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough, that clear up in two to three weeks. But it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia, and death for some people, especially older adults and people with existing health problems. The vast majority of people recover.

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## **Trump announces US will halt funding to World Health Organization over coronavirus response**

By Gregg Re | Fox News - April 15, 2020

President Trump orders halt to US funding of World Health Organization

The WHO failed its basic duty and must be held accountable, says President Trump.

President Trump announced at the White House coronavirus news briefing in the Rose Garden on Tuesday that the United States will immediately halt all funding for the World Health Organization (WHO), saying it had put "political correctness over lifesaving measures."

Also at the briefing, the president said plans to ease the national economic shutdown were being finalized, and that he would be "authorizing governors to reopen their states to reopen as they see fit." At the same time, Trump made clear that he was not going to put "any pressure" on governors to reopen.

Trump read a long list of names of people in business, health care and sports who will advise him on how to restart the economy. "We have to get our sports back," Trump remarked. "I'm

tired of watching baseball games that are 14 years old."

In the meantime, Trump declared that the United States would undertake a 60-to-90 day investigation into why the "China-centric" WHO had caused "so much death" by "severely mismanaging and covering up" the coronavirus' spread, including by making the "disastrous" decision to oppose travel restrictions on China.

The United States is the WHO's largest single donor, and the State Department had previously planned to provide the agency \$893 million in the current two-year funding period. Trump said the United States contributes roughly \$400 to \$500 million per year to WHO, while China offers only about \$40 million. The money saved will go to areas that "most need it," Trump asserted.

"We have deep concerns over whether America's generosity has been put to the best use possible," Trump said, accusing the WHO of failing to adequately keep the international community apprised of the threat of the coronavirus.

"The WHO failed in this duty, and must be held accountable," Trump went on. He added that the WHO had ignored "credible information" in December 2019 that the virus could be transmitted from human to human.

As early as late December, Wuhan medical staff were suspected to have contracted the disease, indicating likely human-to-human transmissibility.

On January 4, in a statement first flagged by The National Review, the head of the University of Hong Kong's Centre for Infection warned that "the city should implement the strictest possible monitoring system for a mystery new viral pneumonia that has infected dozens of people on the mainland, as it is highly possible that the illness is spreading from human to human."

The Chinese government also began suppressing news about the virus, and even detained Doctor Li Wenliang, who has since died of coronavirus after trying to warn the international community of the threat. Nevertheless, on January 8, the WHO declared: "Preliminary identification of a novel virus in a short period of time is a notable achievement and demonstrates China's increased capacity to manage new outbreaks."

Again on January 14, the WHO simply echoed Chinese government statements: "Preliminary investigations conducted by the Chinese authorities have found no clear evidence of human-to-human transmission of the novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) identified in Wuhan, China."

By January 19, the WHO had changed its tune somewhat, but still hedged. "Not enough is known to draw definitive conclusions about how it is transmitted, the clinical features of the disease, the extent to which it has spread, or its source, which remains unknown."

Reports suggest senior WHO officials suspected human-to-human transmission from the outset.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the top infectious disease expert in the U.S. and a key member of Trump's coronavirus task force, has said misinformation from China, repeated by the WHO, had affected U.S. response efforts.

Several media organizations had also uncritically cited WHO's assurances about the coronavirus.

The Washington Post even ran a story quoting a Chinese official asking for "empathy" and slamming the White House for acting "in disregard of the WHO recommendation against travel restrictions."

Former Vice President Joe Biden, just hours after Trump announced travel restrictions on China on Jan. 31, criticized the president's "hysterical xenophobia."

"I was the one person who wanted to do it," Trump said at Tuesday's briefing, referring to the border closure.

In March, The Post finally acknowledged that critics accused China and WHO of "covering up or downplaying the severity of an infectious disease outbreak."

Amid the pandemic, footage emerged of a senior WHO official cutting off an interview after a reporter implied Taiwan, which is not a WHO member state, is independent of China. The official, Canadian doctor Bruce Aylward, initially pretended not to hear the question before terminating the Skype call with the reporter.

The United Nations Secretary-General on the World Health Organization issued a statement after Trump's remarks saying it was "not the time to reduce the resources for the operations of the World Health Organization or any other humanitarian organization in the fight against the virus," and noting that the agency has "thousands of staff" working on the outbreak.

"Once we have finally turned the page on this epidemic, there must be a time to look back fully to understand how such a disease emerged and spread its devastation so quickly across the globe, and how all those involved reacted to the crisis," the statement read. "The lessons learned will be essential to effectively address similar challenges, as they may arise in the future."

Democrats in Congress quickly voiced outrage, as well.

"Withholding funds for WHO in the midst of the worst pandemic in a century makes as much sense as cutting off ammunition to an ally as the enemy closes in," said Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt.

Sen. Robert Menendez, D-N.J., has said recently that the agency needs more money during the pandemic.

"Given the WHO's indispensable role, it is imperative that the United States increase contributions," Menendez wrote in March.

Democrats have also pointed to Trump's comments praising the Chinese government's handling of the crisis as late as February 18. Biden advisers had made similar positive comments about China as the virus spread.

The White House has made accountability for international organizations a cornerstone of its policymaking. Earlier in his presidency, Trump successfully pushed other nations to contribute more to NATO, saying that international alliance was costing the United States an unreasonably large amount of money.

As usual, the briefing Tuesday contained some flareups. At one point, Trump slammed CNN analyst and Playboy reporter Brian Karem as a "loudmouth" and even threatened to leave the briefing, as Karem refused to stop screaming questions even after his microphone had been cut off and another reporter had begun speaking.

"I told them when they put this guy here, it's nothing but trouble," Trump said. "He's a showboat. If you keep talking, I'll leave, and you can have it out with the rest of these people."

The president also shut down a reporter who insisted on mentioning that he was graciously asking a question for a colleague who couldn't be in attendance.

"Who cares?" Trump asked. "If he can't be here, that's too bad."

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### **Trump cuts WHO funding over coronavirus, global death toll mounts**

Reuters – April 15, 2020

WASHINGTON/SYDNEY (Reuters) - U.S. President Donald Trump on Tuesday halted funding to the World Health Organization over its handling of the coronavirus pandemic, drawing condemnation from infectious disease experts as the global death toll continued to mount.

Trump, who has reacted angrily to criticism of his administration's response to the worst epidemic in a century, has become increasingly hostile towards the WHO.

The Geneva-based organisation had promoted China's "disinformation" about the virus that likely led to a wider outbreak than otherwise would have occurred, Trump said.

"The WHO failed in this basic duty and must be held accountable," Trump told a White House news conference on Tuesday.

Nearly 2 million people globally have been infected and more than 124,000 have died since the disease emerged in China late last year, according to a Reuters tally.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said it was not the time to reduce resources for the WHO.

"Now is the time for unity and for the international community to work together in solidarity to stop this virus and its shattering consequences," he said in a statement.

The United States is the biggest overall donor to the WHO, contributing more than \$400 million in 2019, roughly 15% of its budget.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said he sympathised with Trump's criticisms of the WHO, especially its "unfathomable" support of re-opening China's "wet markets", where freshly slaughtered animals are sold and where the coronavirus first appeared in the city of Wuhan late last year.

"But that said, the WHO also as an organisation does a lot of important work including here in our region in the Pacific and we work closely with them," Morrison told an Australian radio station on Wednesday.

"We are not going to throw the baby out of with the bathwater here, but they are also not immune from criticism and immune from doing things better."

More than 2,200 died in the United States alone on Tuesday, a record toll according to a Reuters tally, even as the country debated how to reopen its economy.

New York City, the U.S. city hardest hit by the pandemic, revised its death toll sharply up to more than 10,000 on Tuesday, to include victims presumed to have perished from the lung disease but never tested.

U.S. health care advocacy group Protect Our Care said Trump's WHO funding withdrawal was "a transparent attempt by President Trump to distract from his history downplaying the severity of the coronavirus crisis and his administration's failure to prepare our nation,"

"To be sure, the World Health Organization is not without fault but it is beyond irresponsible to cut its funding at the height of a global pandemic," said Leslie Dach, the chair of Protect Our Care.

#### 'NOT SEEING THE PEAK YET'

After weeks of lockdowns in several European countries, the WHO said the number of new cases were tailing off in some areas, such as Italy and Spain, but outbreaks were growing in Britain and Turkey.

"The overall world outbreak - 90% of cases are coming from Europe and the United States of America. So we are certainly not seeing the peak yet," WHO spokeswoman Margaret Harris told a briefing in Geneva.

India extended a lockdown on its 1.3 billion people until at least May 3 and Prime Minister Narendra Modi said economic sacrifices were needed to save lives as the number of coronavirus cases exceeded 10,000.

New cases in mainland China dropped to 46, compared to 89 a day earlier, Chinese health officials reported on Wednesday, with one further death. Most cases were from overseas travellers returning from Russia.

Asian share markets edged higher as China moved again to cushion its economy, cutting a key medium-term interest rate to record lows and paving the way for a similar reduction in benchmark loan rates.

#### HEALTH/ECONOMY BALANCE

The global economy is expected to shrink by 3% this year, the International Monetary Fund said, marking the steepest downturn since the Great Depression.

Trump, who has declared he will decide when to lift U.S. lockdowns, suggested some Democratic state governors were "mutineers" after New York Governor Andrew Cuomo said he would refuse any order that risked reigniting the outbreak.

Trump's top infectious disease adviser, Dr. Anthony Fauci, said the president's May 1 target for restarting the economy was "overly optimistic".

Airlines have been among the hardest hit as borders have closed and citizens have been told to stay at home to slow the spread.

Chinese airlines reported a total loss of \$4.8 billion in the first quarter, the country's aviation regulator said.

The U.S. Treasury Department said major passenger airlines have agreed in principle to a \$25 billion rescue package, ensuring airline workers have jobs until October while the industry battles its biggest-ever crisis.

In New Zealand, where a strict lockdown has limited the number of cases and deaths, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced she, her ministers and public service chief executives will take a 20% pay cut for the next six months given the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic.



its voice," said Gostin.

The WHO has come under fire over some aspects of its handling of the pandemic, and has been accused of being too deferential to China, considering the Communist party's early suppression of information and punishment of whistleblowers. Much of the focus of the criticism has been on a 14 January tweet from the WHO that said "preliminary investigations conducted by the Chinese authorities have found no clear evidence of human-to-human transmission". But WHO officials also told their counterparts in technical briefings on 10 and 11 January, and briefed the press on 14 January, that human-to-human transmission was a strong possibility given the experience of past coronavirus epidemics and urged suitable precautions.

The WHO has also been attacked over its continuing exclusion of Taiwan from membership because Beijing considers it to be Chinese territory. Trump's decision to cut funding was welcomed in some quarters, including by the Hong Kong democracy activist Joshua Wong, who called the WHO an "arm of Chinese diplomacy".

Trump's pronouncement came amid sustained criticism of his failure to prepare for the epidemic, which has infected more than 600,000 people and killed more than 24,000 inside his country. The US is the worst affected country in the world in terms of infection numbers. On Wednesday it was reported that \$1,200 relief cheques for as many as 70 million people could be delayed for several days because Trump wanted his name printed on them.

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## State Department cables warned of safety issues at Wuhan lab studying bat coronaviruses

Washington Post - April 14, 2020

By Josh Rogin – Columnist

Two years before the novel coronavirus pandemic upended the world, U.S. Embassy officials visited a Chinese research facility in the city of Wuhan several times and sent two official warnings back to Washington about inadequate safety at the lab, which was conducting risky studies on coronaviruses from bats. The cables have fueled discussions inside the U.S. government about whether this or another Wuhan lab was the source of the virus — even though conclusive proof has yet to emerge.

In January 2018, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing took the unusual step of repeatedly sending U.S. science diplomats to the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV), which had in 2015 become China's first laboratory to achieve the highest level of international bio research safety (known as BSL-4). WIV issued a news release in English about the last of these visits, which occurred on March 27, 2018. The U.S. delegation was led by Jamison Fouss, the consul general in Wuhan, and Rick Switzer, the embassy's counselor of environment, science, technology and health. Last week, WIV erased that statement from its website, though it remains archived on the Internet.

What the U.S. officials learned during their visits concerned them so much that they dispatched two diplomatic cables categorized as Sensitive But Unclassified back to Washington. The cables warned about safety and management weaknesses at the WIV lab

and proposed more attention and help. The first cable, which I obtained, also warns that the lab's work on bat coronaviruses and their potential human transmission represented a risk of a new SARS-like pandemic.

"During interactions with scientists at the WIV laboratory, they noted the new lab has a serious shortage of appropriately trained technicians and investigators needed to safely operate this high-containment laboratory," states the Jan. 19, 2018, cable, which was drafted by two officials from the embassy's environment, science and health sections who met with the WIV scientists. (The State Department declined to comment on this and other details of the story.)

The Chinese researchers at WIV were receiving assistance from the Galveston National Laboratory at the University of Texas Medical Branch and other U.S. organizations, but the Chinese requested additional help. The cables argued that the United States should give the Wuhan lab further support, mainly because its research on bat coronaviruses was important but also dangerous.

As the cable noted, the U.S. visitors met with Shi Zhengli, the head of the research project, who had been publishing studies related to bat coronaviruses for many years. In November 2017, just before the U.S. officials' visit, Shi's team had published research showing that horseshoe bats they had collected from a cave in Yunnan province were very likely from the same bat population that spawned the SARS coronavirus in 2003.

"Most importantly," the cable states, "the researchers also showed that various SARS-like coronaviruses can interact with ACE2, the human receptor identified for SARS-coronavirus. This finding strongly suggests that SARS-like coronaviruses from bats can be transmitted to humans to cause SARS-like diseases. From a public health perspective, this makes the continued surveillance of SARS-like coronaviruses in bats and study of the animal-human interface critical to future emerging coronavirus outbreak prediction and prevention."

The research was designed to prevent the next SARS-like pandemic by anticipating how it might emerge. But even in 2015, other scientists questioned whether Shi's team was taking unnecessary risks. In October 2014, the U.S. government had imposed a moratorium on funding of any research that makes a virus more deadly or contagious, known as "gain-of-function" experiments.

As many have pointed out, there is no evidence that the virus now plaguing the world was engineered; scientists largely agree it came from animals. But that is not the same as saying it didn't come from the lab, which spent years testing bat coronaviruses in animals, said Xiao Qiang, a research scientist at the School of Information at the University of California at Berkeley.

"The cable tells us that there have long been concerns about the possibility of the threat to public health that came from this lab's research, if it was not being adequately conducted and protected," he said.

There are similar concerns about the nearby Wuhan Center for Disease Control and Prevention lab, which operates at biosecurity level 2, a level significantly less secure than the level-4 standard claimed by the Wuhan Institute of Virology lab, Xiao said.

That's important because the Chinese government still refuses to answer basic questions about the origin of the novel coronavirus while suppressing any attempts to examine whether either lab was involved.



Sources familiar with the cables said they were meant to sound an alarm about the grave safety concerns at the WIV lab, especially regarding its work with bat coronaviruses. The embassy officials were calling for more U.S. attention to this lab and more support for it, to help it fix its problems.

"The cable was a warning shot," one U.S. official said. "They were begging people to pay attention to what was going on."

No extra assistance to the labs was provided by the U.S. government in response to these cables. The cables began to circulate again inside the administration over the past two months as officials debated whether the lab could be the origin of the pandemic and what the implications would be for the U.S. pandemic response and relations with China.

Inside the Trump administration, many national security officials have long suspected either the WIV or the Wuhan Center for Disease Control and Prevention lab was the source of the novel coronavirus outbreak. According to the New York Times, the intelligence community has provided no evidence to confirm this. But one senior administration official told me that the cables provide one more piece of evidence to support the possibility that the pandemic is the result of a lab accident in Wuhan.

"The idea that it was just a totally natural occurrence is circumstantial. The evidence it leaked from the lab is circumstantial. Right now, the ledger on the side of it leaking from the lab is packed with bullet points and there's almost nothing on the other side," the official said.

As my colleague David Ignatius noted, the Chinese government's original story — that the virus emerged from a seafood market in Wuhan — is shaky. Research by Chinese experts published in the Lancet in January showed the first known patient, identified on Dec. 1, had no connection to the market, nor did more than one-third of the cases in the first large cluster. Also, the market didn't sell bats.

Shi and other WIV researchers have categorically denied this lab was the origin for the novel coronavirus. On Feb. 3, her team was the first to publicly report the virus known as 2019-nCoV was a bat-derived coronavirus.

The Chinese government, meanwhile, has put a total lockdown on information related to the virus origins. Beijing has yet to provide U.S. experts with samples of the novel coronavirus collected from the earliest cases. The Shanghai lab that published the novel coronavirus genome on Jan. 11 was quickly shut down by authorities for "rectification." Several of the doctors and journalists who reported on the spread early on have disappeared.

On Feb. 14, Chinese President Xi Jinping called for a new biosecurity law to be accelerated. On Wednesday, CNN reported the Chinese government has placed severe restrictions requiring approval before any research institution publishes anything on the origin of the novel coronavirus.

The origin story is not just about blame. It's crucial to understanding how the novel coronavirus pandemic started because that informs how to prevent the next one. The Chinese government must be transparent and answer the questions about the Wuhan labs because they are vital to our scientific understanding of the virus, said Xiao.

We don't know whether the novel coronavirus originated in the Wuhan lab, but the cable pointed to the danger there and increases the impetus to find out, he said.

"I don't think it's a conspiracy theory. I think it's a legitimate question that needs to be investigated and answered," he said. "To understand exactly how this originated is critical knowledge for preventing this from happening in the future."

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## **State Department leaked cables renew theories on origin of coronavirus**

FOX News - 4/14/2020

Barnini Chakraborty

A Chinese laboratory at the center of new theories about how the coronavirus pandemic started was the subject of multiple urgent warnings inside the U.S. State Department two years ago, according to a new report.

U.S. Embassy officials warned in January 2018 about inadequate safety at the Wuhan Institute of Virology lab and passed on information about scientists conducting risky research on coronavirus from bats, The Washington Post reported Tuesday.

Those cables have renewed speculation inside the U.S. government about whether Wuhan-based labs were the source of the novel coronavirus, although no firm connection has been established. The theory, however, has gained traction in recent days.

The United Kingdom has said that the idea that the virus, which has turned into a full-blown global pandemic, was leaked from a Wuhan lab is "no longer being discounted."

A member of the U.K. government's emergency committee of senior officials claimed Sunday: "There is a credible alternative view (to the zoonotic theory) based on the nature of the virus. Perhaps it is no coincidence that there is a laboratory in Wuhan."

Foreign affairs expert Gordon Chang said in a recent opinion piece on Fox News that "many Chinese believe the virus either was deliberately released or accidentally escaped from the Wuhan Institute of Virology, a P4-level bio-safety facility."

He added: "This lab, known for studying coronaviruses, is not far from the market that had been initially identified as the source of the outbreak."

In a series of diplomatic cables labeled "Sensitive But Unclassified," U.S. Embassy officials warned that the lab had massive management weaknesses, posed severe health risks and warned Washington to get involved.

The first cable, which was obtained by the Post, also sent red flags about the lab's work on bat coronaviruses and more specifically how their potential human transmission represented the risk of a new SARS-like pandemic.

"During interactions with scientists at the WIV laboratory, they noted the new lab has a serious shortage of appropriately trained technicians and investigators needed to safely operate this high-containment laboratory," the Jan. 19, 2018 cable, written by two officials from the embassy's environment, science and health sections who met with the WIV scientists, said.

The cable argued that the United States should give Chinese researchers at the Wuhan lab more support because its research on bat coronaviruses was important and dangerous. The lab had already been receiving assistance from the Galveston National Laboratory at the University of Texas Medical Branch.

The cable also called attention to Shi Zhengli, the head of the research project, who in November 2017 published a paper that showed the horseshoe bats collected from a case in Yunnan province were most likely from the same bat population that had been behind the first SARS coronavirus in 2003.

The cable states that "the researchers also showed that various SARS-like coronaviruses can interact with ACE2, the human receptor identified for SARS-coronavirus. This finding strongly suggests that SARS-like coronaviruses from bats can be transmitted to humans to cause SARS-like diseases. From a public health perspective, this makes the continued surveillance of SARS-like coronaviruses in bats and study of the animal-human interface critical to future emerging coronavirus outbreak prediction and prevention."

Despite evidence that points to dangerous practices inside the Wuhan labs, top U.S. military brass, as well as other senior officials, have told Fox News that the origins of COVID-19 did not come from a laboratory nor was it the result of a bioweapon.

"And if I could just be clear, there is nothing to that," Air Force Brig. Gen. Paul Friedrichs told Fox News last week. "Someone asked me if I was worried. That is not something that I'm worried about. I think, you know, right now what we're concerned about is how do we treat people who are sick, how do we prevent people from getting sick. But no, I am not worried about this as a bioweapon."

Still, there are others who have been trying to trace the origin of the novel coronavirus back to the Wuhan lab.

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## **UN chief: world faces misinformation epidemic about virus**

AP - 4/14/2020

Edith M. Lederer

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned Tuesday that the world is facing "a dangerous epidemic of misinformation" about COVID-19 and announced a U.N. campaign to flood the internet with facts and science to counter what he called "a poison" that is putting lives at risk.

The U.N. chief decried what he described as a global "misinfo-demic" that is spreading harmful health advice, "snake-oil solutions," falsehoods, and wild conspiracy theories.

Guterres urged social media organizations to do more to counter the misinformation and to "root out hate and harmful assertions about COVID-19."

"Hatred is going viral, stigmatizing and vilifying people and groups," he said in a video statement. "Mutual respect and upholding human rights must be our compass in navigating this crisis."

The U.N. chief said people around the world "are scared" and want to know what to do and where to turn for advice, and they need science.

U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric stressed the importance of accurate information,

He said the United Nations "will be in touch with various social media companies," adding that quite a few of them are actively trying to root out disinformation and suspending accounts of people pushing out information "that is plain wrong and dangerous."

Dujarric said the U.N. recognizes the delicate balance between free speech and misinformation, saying "that's a balancing act that is played out every day around the world even in the most free democracies."

"The secretary-general is not going to be the one to decide," Dujarric said.

"What we are doing is we will push out scientifically based information, information that will help us as a global community fight the virus," he said. "Social media companies, news organizations are making those decisions all the time, but I think it is important that we all do what we can to fight the spread of dangerous misinformation on fighting the virus."

The secretary-general saluted "journalists and others fact-checking the mountain of misleading stories and social media posts."

He called for trust in science and in institutions "grounded in responsive, responsible, evidence-based governance and leadership."

"Together, let's reject the lies and nonsense out there," Guterres said. "With common cause for common sense and facts, we can defeat COVID-19 – and build a healthier, more equitable, just and resilient world."

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## **UN says 'not the time' as Trump suspends WHO funds over pandemic**

Trump says US will suspend payments to the World Health Organization while it reviews virus warnings regarding China.

Aljazeera – April 15, 2020

US President Donald Trump said on Tuesday that he had instructed his administration to suspend funding to the World Health Organization (WHO) over its handling of the coronavirus pandemic, in a move that drew immediate condemnation.

Trump, at a White House news conference, claimed the WHO had "failed in its basic duty and it must be held accountable".

He accused the group of promoting China's "disinformation" about the virus that likely led to a wider outbreak of the virus than otherwise would have occurred.

Trump said the US would continue to engage with the WHO in pursuit of what he calls meaningful reforms. He added that the "hold" on funding would continue while the US reviews the organisation's warnings about the coronavirus and China.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said it was "not the time" to be reducing funds to the WHO or any other organisation fighting the pandemic.

"Now is the time for unity and for the international community to work together in solidarity to stop this virus and its shattering consequences," Guterres said in a statement.

The WHO did not immediately comment.

Writing on social media, Dr Nahid Bhadelia, an infectious diseases specialist and the medical director of the Special Pathogens Unit at Boston University, said withdrawing funding would be a disaster.

"Cutting 15 percent (US contribution) of WHO budget during the biggest projected pandemic of the last century is an absolute disaster," she wrote on Twitter. "WHO is a global technical partner, the platform through which sovereign countries share data/technology, our eyes on the global scope of this pandemic."

### Blame game

The US president, himself under pressure over his handling of the outbreak, has been feuding with the UN agency as he seeks to apportion blame for the gravity of the crisis.

The US has now reported more than 600,000 cases of coronavirus, the highest in the world.

Reacting to Trump's previous threats, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said last week that it was not the time for such rhetoric.

"The focus of all political parties should be to save their people. Please don't politicise this virus," Tedros said at a press briefing in Geneva last week.

"If you want to have many more body bags, then you do it.

"If you want to have many more body bags, then you do it. If you don't want many more body bags, then you refrain from politicising it ... We will have many body bags in front of us if we don't behave."

This is like suspending firefighters while they are trying to save your house from the flames, pending a review of whether the trucks arrived later than they should. The world needs to focus on fighting #covid19 not each other and it needs @WHO to do that.

<https://t.co/rl4rVkzADT>

— Kai Kupferschmidt (@kakape) April 14, 2020

Tedros, a former foreign minister of Ethiopia, also rejected Trump's suggestion that the WHO was "China-centric", saying: "We are close to every nation, we are colour-blind."

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### In the Post-Coronavirus World, Chinese Power is Overrated

A global resurgence in national self-reliance might actually be a good thing for America's place in the world.

By Salvatore Babones | Foreign Policy - April 14, 2020

On March 18, U.S. President Donald Trump invoked the Korean War-era Defense Production Act, casting himself as a “wartime president” fighting for “total victory” against an “invisible enemy”: the new coronavirus. Two days earlier, French President Emmanuel Macron had issued his own declaration of war on the coronavirus. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s coronavirus war became personal when he himself entered the casualty lists, spending a week in the hospital. Political leaders in Australia, India, South Africa, South Korea, and of course China have also cast their response to the pandemic in decidedly martial terms. In Brazil, the legislature has even tried to force the country’s president, Jair Bolsonaro, to declare war against his will.

All this talk of war inevitably raises questions about the shape of the postwar world.

Analysts polled by *Foreign Policy* all agree that the coronavirus will bring big changes, but they hold widely divergent opinions about just what it will change. Perhaps not surprisingly, each one seems to believe that the world after the pandemic will be reshaped much in the same way they predicted or warned before the pandemic.

A recurring theme in coronavirus-induced geopolitical dystopianism is the failure of U.S. leadership coupled with the rise of China. Considering we’ve been told that the war in Iraq, the global financial crisis, and the election of Trump each marked the end of American global leadership, there must be very little American leadership left to lose. There is always the possibility that this time is different and the pundits are finally right, but there are strong reasons to believe it isn’t. When the world is running smoothly, friends take U.S. support for granted, and foes take advantage of that complacency. When the going gets tough, the world rediscovers just how important U.S. leadership is.

Global leadership is one of those diffuse concepts that is hard to pin down and thus beloved of commentators who hate to be pinned down. Get down to details, and leadership becomes much more tangible. Leadership in specific regions and on specific issues is much easier to grasp, examine, and evaluate. And, in the end, it’s only real-world places and problems that count. Practical power in the world’s most consequential policy domains is the stuff of which that fabled global leadership is composed.

Looking at a map of the world, it’s easy to be alarmed by China’s coronavirus propaganda gains.

They include places as far from Beijing as Ethiopia (where China plans to build a new home for the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention), Serbia (where President Aleksandar Vucic showed up at Belgrade’s airport to greet the arrival of donated Chinese health supplies) and Venezuela (where state food stores rely on Chinese imports for nearly half of their stock). Put these propaganda gains in economic perspective, and they recede into insignificance. All of these are marginally important economies in their corner of the world.

Take Africa, where China’s key partners are Ethiopia and Angola. Their economies are dwarfed by that of Africa’s economic giant, Nigeria, which is a firm security partner of the United States. Chinese investment has provoked a popular backlash in the continent’s second-largest economy, South Africa. These geopolitical fault lines have stood the twin tests of Ebola and the Boko Haram insurgency; they’re not going to shift as a result of the coronavirus. China may pick up a few poor, vulnerable, badly governed countries as allies, but the big prizes remain firmly attached to the broader U.S.-led international system.

It’s the same story in Eastern Europe. Serbia’s public embrace of China for investment, military exercises, and even police technologies has alarmed many European observers. Yet

even as its political rhetoric faces east, Serbia maintains very strong security ties with the West. And Serbia is a relative minnow in Eastern Europe. Firm NATO allies such as Poland, the Czech Republic, Romania, and Greece have economies that range from four times to 10 times the size of Serbia's. And China has virtually no political presence in Latin America's two giants, Brazil and Mexico, which together account for more than half of the region's economic output.

In Western Europe, China's timely emergency assistance to Italy might undermine the popularity of the European Union in that country, but that's more of a problem for the EU than for NATO. Former European Commission President Jacques Delors has gone so far as to label Europe's lack of coronavirus solidarity a "mortal danger to the European Union." But the EU's structural problems go far beyond Chinese meddling, and there's no reason to believe that even a catastrophic collapse of the European project would geopolitically favor China over the United States. If anything, it would likely make NATO membership even more important to newly orphaned and newly exposed former EU members.

Shifting to Asia, the main theater of the geopolitical struggle between the United States and China is the broader Indo-Pacific, the region that runs from Japan to India, pivoting on Australia in the middle. The coronavirus pandemic certainly hasn't made China any friends in Japan, South Korea, or Taiwan.

Facing Chinese power head-on, these East Asian economic giants are virtually immune to Beijing's influence. In Australia, the pandemic has emboldened the China hawks, with stories breaking that China bought up high-quality Australian-made face masks in January but is now exporting faulty Chinese masks to Australia.

Indian sensibilities have been offended by Trump's extraordinarily undiplomatic public demands for an unproven coronavirus drug, hydroxychloroquine. But China will find it difficult to make any inroads in India while maintaining its "all-weather friendship" with Pakistan. When India wants to distance itself from the United States, it turns to Russia, not China. But Russia's economy is in freefall, so it is in no position to take advantage of any coronavirus-related stumble in U.S.-Indian relations.

The coronavirus pandemic may indeed drive a wedge further between the United States and some of its key allies, particularly in Western Europe. European countries really were outraged when Trump slapped travel restrictions on the 26 Schengen Area countries on March 11. Yet within two weeks, nearly all of them had slapped similar travel restrictions on each other. Europeans don't like the way Trump has put "America first" in response to the pandemic, but they are behaving exactly the same way. Some European countries, including Germany and France, briefly banned the export of emergency medical equipment—even within the EU's supposedly borderless common market. Germany even seized a shipment of Chinese face masks bound for Switzerland.

If there is one lingering geopolitical effect of the coronavirus pandemic, it may be this: Countries may be a little more skeptical about globalist platitudes and a little more keen to take care of themselves. But that doesn't have to be a bad thing for U.S. leadership. Quite the contrary.

The United States has been berating NATO allies for years about taking more responsibility for their own defense. Greater European self-reliance would be a boon to U.S. global power, not a challenge. And a more nationalistic, less cohesive Europe would actually promote American global leadership, as a diminished EU would be less likely to pursue a competing strategic agenda.



The two superpowers are vying to project global leadership roles during the crisis, despite deep failures in how senior officials in both nations responded to outbreaks. At the moment, Chinese officials have the power to make it easy or difficult for vital supplies to flow to the United States and other nations. The two sides must work closely to orchestrate the shipments, even as American officials harbor deep suspicions over China's "donation diplomacy," a global effort by Beijing involving planeloads of medical gear and delegations of



health experts.

The complications could bolster the arguments of some Trump administration officials that American companies should move their supply chains out of China.

On Monday, Mr. Trump signaled in a news conference that he may be ending the détente with China when he used the term "Wuhan virus," a label despised by Beijing that emphasizes the city where the virus was first detected.

Chinese regulators, embarrassed by reports of shoddy medical equipment sent to Europe, imposed a new rule on Friday mandating that customs officers inspect every shipment of masks, ventilators and other medical gear before they leave the country. That was the latest in a series of regulatory actions that had begun to hinder shipments. One American businessman said a new list of items to be inspected was so broad that it even included cotton balls. American officials said that after hearing complaints from U.S. companies, they have had to scramble to deal with the delays on a case-by-case basis.

In some cases, the Chinese authorities eventually helped untangle the snarls. But the bureaucratic bungling has exasperated American officials, who say the red tape has held up equipment at a desperate moment.

American executives are increasingly complaining of delays. Charter planes from the United States have sat empty in China for days. Millions of masks and thousands of ventilators have sat on factory and warehouse floors, sometimes for weeks.

Jacob Parker, the senior vice president at the U.S.-China Business Council, said the restrictions were "the top issue for some of the biggest companies in the world."

"It is a good intentioned policy that has a variety of unintended consequences across a variety of areas," he said. "It remains a big issue for our members."

Zhao Lijian, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, said Friday that Beijing would work with other nations "to safeguard international public health security." The country exported more than \$1.4 billion of pandemic supplies from March 1 to April 4, he said, and scores of countries had signed contracts.

However, many of the shipments are part of regular, long-term commercial arrangements between non-Chinese companies like 3M and factories or contractors in China.

The State Department appears determined to compete with China on publicity over aid. Its website says it has given nearly \$500 million in foreign aid to help with the pandemic. Last week, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a call with reporters in Europe that "there is no country in the world that will provide as much aid and assistance through multiple forms as the United States of America will."

One new rule in China dictates that supplies heading to the United States must have approval not just from the Food and Drug Administration, but now also from China's National Medical Products Administration, which many importers do not have.

The regulations have threatened to disrupt ventilator supply chains for companies like General Electric and have impeded shipments of masks managed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, according to people familiar with the matter. This week, a plane bound for Massachusetts took off with less than half of the 10 million masks it was supposed to carry. Several major makers of virus tests have struggled, too. One, PerkinElmer, has had a large shipment delayed for days, the people said.

But it is American officials who are responsible for the stalling of one batch of gear. For weeks, officials in Washington have debated whether to accept a donation of masks from the Chinese Foreign Ministry, American officials said. Though medical workers are desperate for the masks, some officials argue that taking the donation would aid China's propaganda campaign.

That debate is a sign of the growing fury and frustration in Washington over that campaign. American officials who see the Chinese Communist Party as malevolent are irate at what they view as the party's efforts to reshape the narrative of the pandemic, which spread quickly beyond central China in part because of cover-ups by officials. (The State Department did not reply to questions on the offer or its position on donations from China.)

The American officials say China is trying to turn the spotlight away from the pandemic's roots through the shipments of purchased supplies and some donations. Often, Chinese officials tell counterparts abroad that they must publicly thank China in return for the shipments, say Western officials, executives and analysts with knowledge of the exchanges.

"What is most striking to me is the extent to which the Chinese government appears to be demanding public displays of gratitude from other countries; this is certainly not in the tradition of the best humanitarian relief efforts," said Elizabeth C. Economy, the director for Asia studies at the Council on Foreign Relations. "It seems strange to expect signed declarations of thanks from other countries in the midst of the crisis."

The equipment has helped save lives, and officials around the world — among them, Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo of New York — have thanked the Chinese government or private citizens.

Chinese state-run news organizations have highlighted the exports in stories and social media posts.

Some Chinese officials abroad have been surprisingly aggressive in pushing Beijing's narrative.

Twice since late February, a Chinese diplomat in the consulate in Chicago has emailed State Senator Roger Roth, the president of the Wisconsin Senate, to ask that that Senate pass a resolution recognizing that China has taken heroic steps to fight the virus, according to reviews of the emails by The New York Times.

The emails had proposed drafts of the resolution that included lines saying that "China has adopted unprecedented and rigorous measures" and that the actions "have been effective in curbing the virus from spreading to other parts of China and the world." One sentence said that China had been "transparent and quick" with sharing information.

"I was really taken back at the brazenness of their government to try and influence what we're doing here," said Mr. Roth, a Republican.

Mr. Roth sent back a one-word reply — "Nuts" — and on March 26 introduced a resolution in the State Senate that said that the "Communist Party of China deliberately and intentionally misled the world on the Wuhan coronavirus" and that Wisconsin stood "in solidarity with the Chinese people to condemn the actions" of the party. The Wisconsin Examiner first reported on the resolution.

The diplomat, Wu Ting, did not reply to a request for comment.

"Beijing may come to regret its rapid pivot from domestic crisis to international triumphalism,

If there is going to be a silver lining to the covid-19 crisis, it should involve the plucky democracy of Taiwan getting the international support it deserves. The country of 23 million people has dealt with the pandemic as well as any. As of Tuesday, Taiwan had 393

confirmed cases and six deaths, extremely low numbers for a nation on China's doorstep. Taiwan is now even helping the rest of the world as well by churning out millions of face masks and sending them all over the globe.

Like other countries that responded effectively, Taiwan had a bad experience with SARS in 2003, so it was better prepared for an epidemic. In addition, the Taiwanese government is preternaturally configured to doubt any claim from the government of China. So it moved early under the assumption, despite assurances to the contrary from Beijing, that the coronavirus could be transmitted by humans to humans.

#### Full coverage of the coronavirus pandemic

On Dec. 31, Taiwan queried the World Health Organization about this possibility but did not receive a reply. Still, on the same day, Taiwanese health officials started screening passengers coming from Wuhan, where the virus is believed to have originated.

Taiwan's experience should be a model for the rest of us. Unfortunately, getting Taiwan's story out has been difficult because Taiwan, which boasts one of the best health-care systems in the world, is not a member of the World Health Organization nor of the World Health Assembly, the decision-making body that governs the WHO.

There's only one reason for this woeful arrangement: China.

The government in Beijing claims that Taiwan is part of China and should not be allowed representation in international organizations. Since 1971, when China joined the United Nations and Taiwan was tossed out, China has worked tirelessly to isolate Taiwan diplomatically as part of a program to force Taiwan, which today is home to one of the most vibrant democracies in Asia, to accept China as its overlord. Today, only 17 nations recognize Taiwan. The United States switched its recognition from Taipei to Beijing in 1979 but maintains a robust diplomatic presence on the island.

Today, Taiwan's contribution to the fight against covid-19 has been publicly recognized by Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission, and Shinzo Abe, prime minister of Japan. State Department officials have conducted high-level virtual briefings with Taiwanese epidemiologists and government officials. U.S. officials have praised Taiwan for sending millions of masks to the United States. But, true to form, China has reacted in typically small-minded and aggressive manner, accusing Taiwan of engaging in "mask diplomacy" and seeking to profit from the pandemic to push its independence agenda.

Since the eruption of the coronavirus, WHO officials have acted like good soldiers in China's campaign to cut off Taiwan. WHO officials have refused to answer questions about Taiwan's success at limiting the coronavirus. In late March, Bruce Aylward, an assistant director-general at the WHO, even seemed to disconnect a video interview to avoid a question about Taiwan.

At a news conference last week, the WHO gave its best pro-China performance yet. Responding to a question from a Canadian reporter about the potential erosion of the WHO's moral authority, the director-general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, launched incongruously into a tirade against Taiwan. How he came up with Taiwan as a boogeyman is truly anybody's guess. Tedros accused Taiwan's government of tolerating a campaign of death threats and racist insults against him.

"This attack comes from Taiwan," Tedros said, without providing any details. "The foreign ministry knows about this campaign and they didn't dissociate themselves."

Sure, Tedros is not a favorite in Taiwan. But there's no indication of any government support for any racist campaign against him.

Taiwan's president, Tsai Ing-wen, pushed back at Tedros's undocumented charges but added that she shares his pain. "We know how it feels to be discriminated against and isolated more than anyone else as we have been excluded from global organizations for years," she said in a post on her official Facebook page.

She invited Tedros to visit Taiwan. No doubt he will decline. But what should happen is this: Taiwan should be allowed back into the World Health Assembly, where it was an observer from 2009 to 2016, and Beijing should be told clearly that it cannot turn on and off the switch to the assembly for political reasons. Keeping 23 million people out of an organization dedicated to public health because of the whims of the Chinese Communist Party is something the world can no longer afford.

Beijing won't be happy, but there is a model for this. In 2001, China entered the World Trade Organization. Literally five minutes after Beijing's formal accession to the trading body, Taiwan was allowed in under the name "Separate Customs Territory of Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu (Chinese Taipei)." Taiwan won entry to the WTO because of pressure by the United States and other major trading nations, which told Beijing not to mess around. The global trading system was considered too important to let it be held hostage by Beijing.

Covid-19 has taught us that global health is no different.

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## **Russia says it's ready for hypersonic missile talks with U.S.**

Reuters 4/14/2020  
Alexander Marrow

Russia is ready to discuss hypersonic missiles and other arms control issues with the United States as part of wider discussions about strategic stability, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Tuesday.

Cold War-era arms control agreements have been in jeopardy as Russia's relations with the West have soured in recent years.

In August 2019, the United States pulled out of a landmark strategic arms accord, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF), citing Russian non-compliance.

Both countries are developing hypersonic missiles to expand their defence capabilities, with Russian President Vladimir Putin overseeing a test in Crimea in early January.

Such missiles, which fly several times the speed of sound and can be steered in flight, are harder to stop than other generations of weapons. Some experts fear their deployment could trigger a new nuclear arms race.

Lavrov said he wanted to speak to U.S Secretary of State Mike Pompeo again after receiving a call from him a couple of days ago during which he said Pompeo touched on resuming talks on arms control and strategic stability.

"We welcome such interest from our American partners because we have encouraged them to address these problems more actively for a long time," Lavrov said.

"We are open to talks about new promising developments, including hypersonic weapons in the context of, and I emphasise this especially, taking into account all aspects and factors that influence strategic stability, without exception."

Moscow has taken steps to mend ties with the West since the coronavirus outbreak.

Russia has flown medical supplies and equipment to the United States and Italy to help them fight the epidemic. Lavrov said Moscow was prepared to fly over more supplies should Washington request them.

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### **G-7 Backs Debt Help for Poor Nations, Split on IMF Fillip**

Bloomberg - 4/14/2020

Saleha Mohsin and William Horobin

The world's top industrial economies backed plans to help shield emerging and developing markets from the fallout of the coronavirus pandemic, although divisions remain over whether to provide the International Monetary Fund with more resources.

The Group of Seven finance ministers and central bankers said they are prepared to offer a limited moratorium on debt repayments from poor countries. They also backed the IMF's proposed new liquidity program to rapidly address a shortage of dollars in emerging markets.

"The scale of this health crisis is generating unprecedented challenges for the global economy," the group said in a two-page summary of the meeting released Tuesday, highlighting particular concerns for some of the world's poorest nations.

The G-7 also called for "urgent contributions" to an IMF fund for catastrophes and poverty reduction. U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin led the meeting, which was held virtually after a face-to-face meeting was called off due to the pandemic.

But a rift continues in the group over increasing the IMF's funding to cope with the virus, with Mnuchin blocking a request for more money, according to French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire.

Group of 20 finance ministers and central bankers are scheduled to hold a call on Wednesday.

IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva has reiterated her institution's willingness to use its \$1 trillion lending power, but has also warned that she may need governments to bolster its resources if the crisis continues for longer than expected or if there's a second wave of the disease.

The fund, which in its World Economic Outlook Tuesday predicted the "Great Lockdown" recession would be the steepest in almost a century, this week approved debt-service relief for 25 countries for six months via its Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust.

The IMF has asked Group of 20 leaders to support creating more of the reserve assets known as special drawing rights, or SDRs, as it did to the tune of \$250 billion in the 2008 financial crisis. France says around twice as much should be created now, but that would

require 85% of IMF votes, where the U.S. is the biggest shareholder.

"The U.S. response for now is negative," Le Maire told reporters early Tuesday ahead of a call with G-7 phone call.

The U.S. supports much of the IMF's work to provide quick and targeted assistance to countries in need, a Treasury Department spokeswoman said in response to a request for comment on Mnuchin's opposition to boosting the organization's funding.

Le Maire told reporters Tuesday that countries working within the Paris Club framework have agreed on a moratorium for 76 nations that are eligible for aid from the International Development Association of the World Bank. For the first time, the Paris Club agreement includes China and other Group of 20 countries.

The G-7 stands "ready to provide a timebound suspension on debt service payments due on official bilateral claims for all countries eligible for World Bank concessional financing," according to the group's statement.

The agreement covers \$12 billion in payments on bilateral government loans and \$8 billion in payments due to private creditors, Le Maire said. There are another \$12 billion of payments to multilateral organizations due in 2020 that could be added to the moratorium, he added.

The IMF's Georgieva has received full support to make available short-term loans to small groups of countries to avoid a cash crunch. It would essentially serve as a backup to a Federal Reserve campaign to keep greenbacks flowing around the world economy.

The Fed dollar swap lines to foreign central banks require Treasuries in exchange, but the IMF facility would offer the same for nations that don't hold enough U.S. debt to participate in the Fed's program.

"The advantage of an IMF short-term liquidity loan is that they can use the resources that are already allocated. It can be put in place fairly quickly," said Nathan Sheets, chief economist at PGIM Fixed Income.

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### **'Mixed picture' in Europe, COVID-19 vaccine at least 12 months off: WHO**

Reuters - 4/14/2020

Stephanie Nebehay

The number of new cases of COVID-19 is easing in some parts of Europe, including Italy and Spain, but outbreaks are still growing in Britain and Turkey, the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Tuesday.

"The overall world outbreak, 90 percent of cases are coming from Europe and the United States of America. So we are certainly not seeing the peak yet," WHO spokeswoman Dr. Margaret Harris told a briefing in Geneva.

The WHO will issue guidance to member states later in the day listing six steps that they need to ensure they have in place before starting to ease any restrictions, she said.

"The most important one is, is your transmission controlled?"

The United States has the largest epidemic currently and has been a "fantastic partner" in addition to being the largest donor to the WHO, Harris said.

"There will always be criticisms of organisations, it's important to listen criticism especially constructive criticism," she said. "And our work will go on regardless of any kind of issues."

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO director-general, voiced confidence on Monday that the United States would continue funding his U.N. agency, despite President Donald Trump's criticism of the WHO's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Russia has become China's largest source of imported cases, with a total of 409 infections originating in the northern neighbour.

"China in fact is now really focusing on looking at – apart from making sure that there are not new local cases – but their biggest threat is imported cases," Harris said.

On vaccines, Harris said: "We really shouldn't be expecting to see the vaccine at least for 12 months or longer."

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## **Spain, Austria ease lockdowns but WHO warns coronavirus 'has not peaked'**

Reuters – April 14, 2020

MADRID/LONDON (Reuters) - Spain and Austria allowed partial returns to work on Tuesday but Britain, France and India extended coronavirus lockdowns to try to rein in the most serious pandemic in a century which the World Health Organization said had "certainly" not peaked.

Nearly 2 million people globally have been infected and more than 119,200 have died, according to a Reuters tally of official figures. The epicentre has moved from China, where the virus first emerged in December, to the United States which now has the highest death toll at 23,568.

World leaders, in considering easing curbs on movement, have to balance the risks to health and the economy, as the lockdowns strangled supply lines, especially in China, and brought economic activity to a virtual halt.

The World Health Organization said the number of new cases was easing in some parts of Europe, including Italy and Spain, but outbreaks were growing in Britain and Turkey.

"The overall world outbreak, 90 percent of cases are coming from Europe and the United States of America. So we are certainly not seeing the peak yet," WHO spokeswoman Margaret Harris told a briefing in Geneva.

In Spain, restrictions have helped to slow a spiralling death rate that reached its peak in early April.



The overnight death toll from the coronavirus rose to 567 on Tuesday from 517 a day earlier, but the country reported its lowest increase in new cases since March 18. Total deaths climbed to 18,056.

But some Spanish workers expressed concern that the relaxation of restrictions could trigger a new surge.

"I would have preferred to wait 15 more days confined to home or at least one more week and then come back," said Carlos Mogorron, a 27-year-old engineer from Extremadura in western Spain.

Some activities, including construction and manufacturing, were allowed to restart. Shops, bars and public spaces are to stay closed until at least April 26.

Italy, which has the world's second highest death toll of 20,465, maintained some tight restrictions on movement. Denmark, one of the first European countries to shut down, will reopen day care centres and schools for children in first to fifth grade on April 15.

Thousands of shops across Austria were reopening on Tuesday, but the government said it was "not out of the woods" yet.

Austria acted early in its outbreak to close schools, bars, theatres, restaurants, non-essential shops and other gathering places about four weeks ago. It has told the public to stay home and work from there if possible.

Austria has reported 368 deaths in total, fewer than some larger European countries have been suffering each day. The daily increase in confirmed cases is in low single digits in percentage terms and hospitalisations have stabilised.

#### TRUMP 'CALLS THE SHOTS'

Britain, where the government has come under criticism for its slow approach to testing and for not getting protective equipment to the frontlines, has the fifth-highest death toll globally and a senior adviser to the government has said the country risks becoming the worst-hit in Europe.

The death toll in British hospitals rose to 11,329 on Monday and Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said there would be no easing of lockdown measures when they come up for review this week. The Times newspaper said on Tuesday he would extend them until at least May 7.

The government has had to defend its response to the outbreak amid questions about whether Johnson, who fell ill with the virus and was briefly in intensive care, was too slow to impose a lockdown.

French President Emmanuel Macron on Monday extended a virtual lockdown to May 11.

India, the world's second-most populous country after China, extended its nationwide lockdown until May 3 as the number of coronavirus cases crossed 10,000.

Russia might need to call in the army to help tackle the crisis, President Vladimir Putin said on Monday. Moscow warned that the capital may run out of hospital beds in coming weeks.

China's northeastern border province of Heilongjiang saw 79 new cases of imported coronavirus cases on Monday, all Chinese citizens travelling back from Russia, state media said.

As of Tuesday, China had reported 82,249 coronavirus cases and 3,341 deaths. There were no deaths in the past 24 hours.

U.S. President Donald Trump, who had predicted a return to work after Easter, defended his response to the coronavirus.

He said he did not intend to fire the leading U.S. health expert, who said that earlier intervention could have saved more lives.

Ten U.S. governors on the east and west coasts banded together on Monday in two regional pacts to coordinate gradual economic reopenings as the coronavirus crisis finally appeared to be ebbing.

At a contentious briefing with reporters, Trump lashed out at media coverage and said he had the ultimate authority to re-open the economy.

"The president of the United States calls the shots," Trump said.

Health ministers from the Group of 20 major economies will speak by video conference on April 19 to address the impact of the outbreak.

Back in Britain, broadcaster ITV came under fire after one of its leading presenters said no one knew whether a conspiracy theory that 5G masts help spread the coronavirus was true or not.

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## **Covid-19 therapy could come by end of year, vaccine in 2021**

swissinfo - April 14, 2020

Swiss pharma and business insiders predict that an effective drug therapy against Covid-19 will be available by the end of this year, but a vaccine might take a year longer than that.

"In the best-case scenario, a drug could be available before the end of 2020," said on Monday Francesco De Rubertis, director and co-founder of Medicxi, a Geneva-based venture capital company that invests in biotechnology.

In an interview with the Swiss newspaper *Le Temps*[external link](#), De Rubertis said, "We should know by the end of 2020 if any of the vaccines tested are promising. If the answer is positive, a vaccine may appear in the second half of 2021, possibly in the third quarter."

He noted that this time frame would be "exceptionally short" – less than two years after the appearance of Covid-19 – when it normally takes five to seven years to develop a vaccine. De Rubertis predicts that a vaccine will come from a large pharma or a large biotech company rather than a start-up.

Spring 2021?

Meanwhile, the chairman of the board of the Swiss reinsurance company Swiss Re reckons a vaccine will be ready "in the first quarter of 2021 at the earliest – and then it will have to go into mass production very quickly". In an interview published by the CH-Media newspaper group on Tuesday, Walter Kielholz said that the world would not return to normal until there was a vaccine against Covid-19.

However, he said he could imagine lockdown measures being relaxed soon. "Why jewellery shops or furniture stores, for example, have to remain closed is beyond me. They could resume operations if the hygiene regulations were observed. This also applies to other

shops, such as clothing stores," he said.

During a briefing on Tuesday, Margaret Harris of the Geneva-based World Health Organization [external link](#) said, "We shouldn't really be expecting to see the vaccine for 12 months or longer."

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# STATE DEPARTMENT NEWS CLIPS

Prepared for the U.S. Department of State

By TechMIS

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**TO: State Department & Staff**

**DATE: Thursday, January 7, 2021 5:00 AM ET**

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## Secretary of State

### Pompeo says U.S. considering sanctions on those involved in Hong Kong arrests (Reuters)

Reuters [1/7/2021 2:15 AM, David Brunnstrom and Kanishka Singh, Neutral]

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Washington is considering sanctions and other restrictions on those involved in the arrest of over 50 people in Hong Kong and warned it

could target the territory's economic and trade office in the United States. In a move likely to further rile Beijing, Pompeo announced in the same statement that U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Kelly Craft would visit Chinese-claimed Taiwan, which is not a UN member due to China's objections.

Pompeo also said he was "appalled" by the arrest of an American citizen as part of Wednesday's crackdown and added: "The United States will not tolerate the arbitrary detention or harassment of U.S. citizens."

Hong Kong police arrested 53 people in dawn raids on democracy activists on Wednesday in the biggest crackdown since China last year imposed a security law which opponents say is aimed at quashing dissent in the former British colony.

Among those detained was American lawyer John Clancey, a source at his firm said. Pompeo called the arrests an "outrage and a reminder of the Chinese Communist Party's contempt for its own people and the rule of law."

"The United States will consider sanctions and other restrictions on any and all individuals and entities involved in executing this assault on the Hong Kong people," Pompeo said.

He said it would also "explore restrictions against the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in the United States, and take additional immediate actions against officials who have undermined Hong Kong's democratic processes."

Pompeo's statement came after a day of turmoil in Washington that saw supporters of U.S. President Donald Trump storm the U.S. Capitol in a bid to overturn his November election defeat. Lawmakers on both sides denounced the action by Trump's supporters and called it an embarrassment to American democracy that would play into the hands of rivals like China.

"It kind of bolsters their claim that we're falling apart and they're the country of the future," Republican Senator Marco Rubio, a China hawk, told Tucker Carlson on the Fox News channel.

On Wednesday, the Chinese embassy in Washington issued an advisory on its website, warning Chinese citizens to strengthen safety precautions in light of the "large-scale demonstration" in Washington and the curfew announced by the local government.

Trump has pursued hardline policies towards China on issues ranging from trade to espionage and the coronavirus and his administration has imposed sanctions on Chinese officials for crushing Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement and other alleged rights abuses.

### **Hong Kong Activists Say Arrests Show Space for Democracy Is Rapidly Shrinking (Wall Street Journal)**

Wall Street Journal [1/6/2021 3:49 PM, Natasha Khan, Neutral]

Hong Kong activists say this week's mass roundup shows that Beijing's tolerance for democracy in the city is quickly narrowing, by branding dozens of opposition lawmakers who participated in political primaries as suspects in a plot to paralyze the city.

On Wednesday, about 1,000 police officers carried out predawn arrests of 53 people suspected of subversion for their involvement in political races held by opposition parties last summer to identify candidates for an election that had been scheduled for September. Six were arrested for organizing and planning the races and 47 for their participation.

"This is such a wide net authorities have cast on the pro-democracy camp. Everyone was involved in those primary elections," said Lee Cheuk-yan, vice chairman of the Labour Party, which had one candidate arrested, Carol Ng. "What road does this lead us down? Who will dare stand for elections again?"

The scale of the operation stunned a pro-democracy movement that was already demoralized and expecting further arrests. Officers fanned out across the city starting at around 6 a.m., knocking on doors, confiscating electronics and bringing people into police stations.

Among those arrested was an American lawyer in his 70s, John Clancey, who could be seen in a video posted on social media leaning on a cane as he was led to a police van. Others included veteran lawmakers and young political hopefuls who had been aiming to enter the legislature last year for the first time.

Police said they searched 72 locations and served four news outlets with court orders to provide information for their investigation. They said they had frozen 1.6 million Hong Kong dollars, or \$206,000, related to the campaign.

"Even for all of Beijing's crackdown over the past few months, Wednesday's raids were really still quite something," said Jeffrey Ngo, a Washington-based Hong Kong activist. "The police knocked on the doors of almost every prominent opposition figure in the city you can think of and arrested them all within the span of hours." The arrests were the latest blow to a pro-democracy movement that captured the world's attention for much of 2019, at times bringing more than a million people into the streets to demand greater democratic freedoms for Hong Kong. Those aspirations have been crippled by pandemic restrictions that have kept them off the streets this year and a national security law imposed by Beijing that gave authorities broad new powers to prosecute people for subversion, secession and colluding with foreign entities.

The arrests drew international condemnation, including from the U.S. Antony Blinken, President-elect Joe Biden's pick for secretary of state, said on Twitter that the administration "will stand with the people of Hong Kong and against Beijing's crackdown on democracy."

Peter Stano, the European Union's spokesman for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, said the arrests sent a "signal that political pluralism is no longer tolerated in Hong Kong." Before Wednesday, a total of around 40 people had been arrested under the national security law for a range of suspected offenses, including collusion and secession. Prosecutors have so far brought charges under the security law against four of those arrested, including media mogul Jimmy Lai.

Under the national security law, those accused of subversion face up to life in prison for the most serious offenses. It couldn't be determined how many of those arrested Wednesday would be charged.



The primaries at the center of Wednesday's arrests were part of an opposition strategy that was first drafted by Benny Tai, a legal academic and an architect of the Occupy pro-democracy movement in 2014, in an effort to win a majority in Hong Kong's 70-seat Legislative Council. The plan was to hold unofficial democratic primaries to avoid fielding too many candidates and diluting support, he had said. The Legislative Council elections were ultimately postponed for a year, with authorities citing the coronavirus pandemic.

Hong Kong authorities say the effort organized by the politicians went beyond the scope of a typical political campaign, accusing the opposition figures of trying to stop Hong Kong's government from functioning. Secretary of Security John Lee on Wednesday pointed to a "10-step mutual destruction plan"—a reference to an article by Mr. Tai published on the Apple Daily news site in April 2020. In the article, Mr. Tai laid out a series of potential scenarios for the opposition, which started with taking control of the Legislative Council. Then, using a series of legal mechanisms under the city's mini constitution, known as the Basic Law, the opposition would trigger the dissolution of the legislature and eventually force the chief executive to resign and Beijing to declare a state of emergency in the city.

"By the tenth step, we will be holding China's Communist Party and jumping off the cliff together," he wrote.

Ronny Tong, a pro-establishment former lawmaker and member of the government's Executive Council, a group of policy advisers to the city's chief executive, said Wednesday that there was a clear difference between holding an event to select candidates to run for office and picking them with the express intent of overthrowing the government.

"It is alleged that the sole aim was to veto every budget until the government was paralyzed and impossible to govern. That's the difference," Mr. Tong said.

While even some in the opposition saw Mr. Tai's article as radical, activists and lawyers said the individual actions laid out would have been legal. Under Hong Kong law, for example, the chief executive would be forced to resign if a budget proposal is rejected twice. Going after Mr. Tai and other politicians, they said, only further reduced the already limited space for any opposition figures to operate within the city's system of governance.

"This wave of arrests has introduced a new ballgame, beheading and delegitimizing the pan-democrats and compelling their parties to face a dilemma," said Jean-Pierre Cabestan, a professor of political science at Hong Kong Baptist University. "Either accept the new rules of the game in terms of candidatures' registration or boycott the next LegCo election."

### **US human rights lawyer arrested in Hong Kong granted bail (AP)**

AP [1/7/2021 12:28 AM, Zen Soo, 11261K, Negative]

An American human rights lawyer who was detained in Hong Kong with scores of democracy activists and supporters as part of a sweeping crackdown was granted bail, his associate said Thursday.

John Clancey, who works at law firm Ho Tse Wai & Partners, was one of 53 people arrested Wednesday under the national security law over their participation in an unofficial primary election last year that authorities say was part of a plan to paralyze the government and subvert state power.

The mass arrests were the largest move against Hong Kong's democracy movement since Beijing imposed the law last June to quell dissent in the semi-autonomous territory following months of anti-government protests in 2019.

The primaries were held by the pro-democracy camp to determine the best candidates to field as they sought to gain a majority in Hong Kong's legislature.

While most of those arrested were candidates in the primaries, Clancey was a treasurer for political organization Power for Democracy, which was involved in the event.

The legislative election that would have followed the unofficial primaries was postponed by a year by Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam, who cited public health risks during the coronavirus pandemic.

The remaining activists will be granted bail without charge, although most had their passports confiscated as evidence, according to the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post, which cited unnamed sources.

The security law criminalizes acts of subversion, secession, terrorism and collusion with foreign powers to intervene in the city's affairs. Serious offenders could face up a maximum punishment of life imprisonment.

Authorities pointed to a plan called "10 steps to mutual destruction" allegedly indicating that the primaries were part of a broader push to cause damage to both Hong Kong and mainland China.

That plan was published as an opinion piece in Apple Daily newspaper by former law professor and pro-democracy activist Benny Tai, who was also arrested on Wednesday. He said that between 2020 and 2022, there would be 10 steps to "mutual destruction," including the pro-democracy bloc winning a majority in the legislature, intensifying protests, the forced resignation of Lam due to the budget bill being rejected twice, and international sanctions against the ruling Chinese Communist Party.

The arrests drew condemnation from the international community, including the U.S. and the European Union.

The U.N. Human Rights Council in Geneva called Thursday for the immediate release of those detained.

"These latest arrests indicate that, as had been feared, the offence of subversion under the National Security Law is indeed being used to detain individuals for exercising legitimate rights to participate in political and public life," council spokesperson Liz Throssell said in a statement.

Kurt Tong, the former U.S. consul general in Hong Kong, viewed the arrests as part of a methodical and escalating campaign to eradicate viable opposition politics both among the protesters and elected parties.

"The national security law provides the legal foundation to do that," said Tong, now a

partner at The Asia Group consultancy in Washington, D.C.

China wants to preserve Hong Kong's economic vibrancy and free market without what it views as political complications, he said. He doesn't predict a mass exodus by companies, saying the city retains its residual energy and dynamism, but warns there could be a measurable impact over time.

"China's taking a big gamble by picking away at parts of the Hong Kong system that it doesn't like," he said. "It really risks damaging parts that it values."

On Wednesday, Anthony Blinken, the U.S. secretary of state nominee for the upcoming Biden administration, called the arrests an "assault" on those advocating for universal rights. EU spokesman Peter Stano said that the security law was being used to "crush dissent and stifle the exercise of human rights and political freedoms."

## Department of State News

### **The storming of the U.S. Capitol echoes violent breaches elsewhere in the world (Washington Post)**

Washington Post [1/6/2021 7:33 PM, Ruby Mellen, 13480K, Negative]

On Wednesday, rioters overran the U.S. Capitol, halting crucial election certification hearings, in scenes of chaos that stunned observers around the world. Members of the mob were seen breaking windows, looting the chambers and invading lawmakers' offices.

While unheard of for the U.S. Capitol, such scenes are not unfamiliar in the broad sweep of world affairs. Modern history is replete with cases of protesters, ranging from peaceful pro-democracy movements demanding accountability to angry mobs looking to overthrow governments, breaching legislative buildings. Here are some examples of times when rioters or protesters overtook government buildings in other parts of the world.

#### Hong Kong

Pro-democracy protesters stormed Hong Kong's parliament in the summer of 2019. Wearing hard hats, masks and protective goggles, hundreds of demonstrators smashed windows and broke through barriers to flood into the government building, where they spray-painted the walls and defaced portraits of lawmakers. The vandalism was a relatively unusual show of force in what had been a largely peaceful protest and broad-based movement against a proposed law that would allow extraditions to mainland China. The bill signaled China's moves to tighten its grip on the island's semiautonomous rule.

#### Kyrgyzstan

Demonstrators in October occupied government buildings in Kyrgyzstan, protesting the legitimacy of recent parliamentary elections. Protesters descended on the Central Asian country's main political building, throwing documents and furniture into the streets and starting fires. Hours after the breach, Kyrgyzstan's election commission annulled the results.

#### Armenia

After six weeks of brutal fighting in the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia and Azerbaijan reached a cease-fire deal in November that granted Azerbaijan much of the territory it had regained in the clashes. The terms of the agreement prompted anger in Armenia's capital, Yerevan, where protesters stormed the country's parliament and other government buildings overnight. The demonstrators left broken glass and destroyed furniture in their wake and ransacked Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's office.

#### Indonesia

In 1998, protests and riots broke out across Indonesia as part of a student-led movement demanding the resignation of President Suharto, who had been in power since the 1960s. In May of that year, demonstrators, in part responding to the killings of students by security forces, occupied government buildings and continued to call for the Suharto's resignation. The civil unrest and demonstrations eventually led the dictator to step down and saw the rise of democracy in a country that now holds the world's largest democratic same-day elections.

#### Serbia

Serbia's government in July, faced with rising coronavirus cases, sought to impose a nationwide lockdown to stem the spread. Demonstrators crowded outside parliament in Belgrade, unmasked, to protest the new restrictions. They broke through a barrier set up by security officials and stormed the government building. Eventually police pushed them out, Reuters reported.

#### Burkina Faso

In October 2014, demonstrators in Burkina Faso, angered by President Blaise Compaore's push to extend his 27-year rule, set the country's parliament building on fire, also ransacking offices and setting fire to cars. Opposition to the president's bid to run for reelection saw protests across the country, with members of the military, including a former defense minister, joining in the demonstrations, according to the BBC.

#### **World Leaders Are Shocked, Worried by Trump Supporters' Actions at U.S. Capitol (Wall Street Journal)**

Wall Street Journal [1/7/2021 12:31 AM, Valentina Pop and Ryan Dube, Neutral]

Leaders and citizens around the world reacted with alarm to images of a mob supporting President Trump forcing its way into the U.S. Capitol, calling it a shocking development in one of the world's most stable democracies.

From Europe to Latin America and Asia, politicians, citizens and dignitaries watched with dismay—and even disbelief—as pro-Trump protesters pushed their way past guards and into the building, halting debate over the certification of President-elect Joe Biden's Electoral College win.

In Europe, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas was quick to condemn the actions of the mob, urging Mr. Trump and his allies, in a Twitter post, to “stop trampling democracy with their feet” and accept the result of the election.

Mr. Maas appeared to draw a parallel with Hitler's power grab: “Violent actions come from

inflammatory words—on the steps of the Reichstag and now in the Capitol,” he said, in reference to the burning of republican Germany’s parliament building in 1933. “Disregarding democratic institutions has devastating consequences.” British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, a longtime Trump ally, tweeted: “Disgraceful scenes in U.S. Congress. The United States stands for democracy around the world and it is now vital that there should be a peaceful and orderly transfer of power.”

Jens Stoltenberg, secretary-general of the U.S.-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization and a former Norwegian prime minister, described the scenes as shocking. “The outcome of this democratic election must be respected,” he said.

Closer to the U.S., Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on his official Twitter account that Canadians are “deeply disturbed and saddened by the attack on democracy” in Washington.

“Violence will never succeed in overruling the will of the people. Democracy in the US must be upheld—and it will be,” Mr. Trudeau tweeted.

But in Toronto, some people came out to support Mr. Trump. Starting late Wednesday morning and into the afternoon, supporters created a motorcade about two blocks long that snaked through downtown and past the U.S. Consulate, according to local media reports. The supporters flew Trump banners and American flags, according to posts on social media. In Latin America—a region with a history of turbulent politics that is all too familiar with presidents who undercut democratic norms to maintain their grip on power—the images of protesters forcing their way into the Capitol shocked politicians and residents who once looked to the U.S. as a model of stability and rule of law.

Mexico’s former president, Felipe Calderon, said the U.S. was seeing “the fruits of populist discourse” from Mr. Trump, “which begins by withdrawing recognition of the truth, and manipulates people’s political resentments, and goes on to delegitimize the rule of law.”

“I am sure the U.S. will stop this craziness; I only hope it’s not too late,” he said.

Jorge “Tuto” Quiroga, a former president of Bolivia, where large, violent protests rocked that country in 2019 forcing then-President Evo Morales to resign and flee abroad, called Wednesday “a sad end for President Trump and a profound deterioration of the democratic image of the country.”

In Brazil, members of Congress for the leftist Workers’ Party took to Twitter on Wednesday, expressing their horror over the events unfolding in the U.S., while policy analysts raised fears that a copycat attack could happen next year in the Latin American country’s presidential election. Political analysts in Latin America say the ordeal could make it harder for the U.S. to promote democracy in the region. That includes in Venezuela, where Mr. Trump’s efforts to oust autocratic leader Nicolas Maduro have failed.

Indeed, leaders of countries that the U.S has criticized for human-rights violations and failure to respect the rule of law didn’t hesitate to point a finger back at the U.S. on Wednesday.

In Venezuela, where the government has jailed political opponents and used mobs of

armed gangs called colectivos to attack critics, the leaders said they were concerned about political violence in Washington.

Diosdado Cabello, a powerful figure in the Maduro regime, wrote on Twitter, "I'll be brief: the U.S.A., what a disaster."

Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Maria Zakharova refrained from independently commenting about the events in Washington on her Facebook page, but shared a Facebook post from Jill Dougherty, a Russia expert at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington.

"The United States will never again be able to tell the world that we are the paragon of democracy," Ms. Dougherty wrote on Facebook. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, leader of the world's largest democracy, said he was distressed about the rioting.

"Orderly and peaceful transfer of power must continue," he said in a tweet Thursday morning. "The democratic process cannot be allowed to be subverted through unlawful protests."

In Japan, the chief government spokesman, Katsunobu Kato, said, "I hope that American democracy will overcome these difficult circumstances and restore social order and cooperation, and that a peaceful and democratic transition of power will proceed."

### **World Reacts With Alarm at Scenes of U.S. Capitol in Chaos (Bloomberg)**

Bloomberg [1/6/2021 8:24 PM, Jason Scott, 6400K, Neutral]

World leaders voiced alarm over a pro-Trump mob's breach of the U.S. Capitol, with the U.K. and Australia calling for a peaceful transfer of power and allies in Europe calling the protesters' actions an attack on democracy.

"Disgraceful scenes in U.S. Congress," U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson tweeted after President Donald Trump's supporters stormed the building. Although well known for his admiration of the outgoing president, the British leader said "it is now vital that there should be a peaceful and orderly transfer of power." Another leader who has previously voiced support of Trump, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, called the scenes "very distressing" and said he was looking forward to a peaceful transfer of power.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said in a radio interview that his government was "concerned." "We're following the situation minute by minute as it unfolds," he said.

Their comments came after President-elect Joe Biden used a Wednesday speech to urge Americans to "think what the rest of the world is looking at" when they viewed the chaotic scenes from Washington.

While some European lawmakers issued statements backing U.S. institutions and its democracy to overcome the turmoil, others were more condemning of the president and his supporters.

"The enemies of democracy will rejoice at these unbelievable images out of Washington," said German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas. "Inflammatory words reap violent deeds." Scotland First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said "shame on those who have incited this attack



on democracy.”

Carl Bildt, co-chair of the European Council on Foreign Relations, said his “sincere hope is that the evil man who bears the responsibility ultimately will suffer the consequences.”

Meanwhile, the Chinese embassy in Washington reminded its nationals living in the U.S. to step up their safety precautions. China’s government in Beijing didn’t immediately issue a direct response to the mob violence, but initial news reports on state media emphasized the chaos emanating from Washington.

### **World leaders appalled by US rioting, urge peaceful transfer (AP)**

AP [1/6/2021 10:37 PM, Foster Klug and Christopher Torchia, 13480K, Neutral]

Teargas and bullets in the U.S. Capitol building. Outrage, confusion and condemnation from leaders across the world.

“What is happening is wrong,” New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said in a statement. “Democracy — the right of people to exercise a vote, have their voice heard and then have that decision upheld peacefully — should never be undone by a mob.”

The chaotic scenes from the storming of the building at the center of American democracy by angry supporters of President Donald Trump are normally associated with countries where popular uprisings topple a dictator. The Arab Spring, for instant, or the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia.

But this time it was an attempt by American citizens to stop a peaceful transition to power after a democratic election in a country that many around the world have looked at as a model for democratic governance.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres “is saddened by the events at the U.S. Capitol,” U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said. “In such circumstances, it is important that political leaders impress on their followers the need to refrain from violence, as well as to respect democratic processes and the rule of law.”

Several countries, both allies and antagonists of America, issued travel warnings to their citizens.

Australia warned its citizens to avoid protests following what Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison described as “rather disturbing scenes” in the United States.

“The riots and protests that we’ve seen in Washington, D.C., have been terribly distressing. They are very concerning,” Morrison told reporters shortly after the U.S. Congress resumed proceedings late Wednesday Washington time.

“This is a difficult time for the United States, clearly. They’re a great friend of Australia, and they’re one of the world’s greatest democracies. And so ... our thoughts are with them and we hope for the peaceful transition to take place,” he said.

The Chinese Embassy in the United States also warned its citizens about the “grave” situation surrounding the coronavirus pandemic and the “large scale protest march” in Washington that prompted the city government to impose a curfew.

"The Chinese Embassy to the U.S. reminds Chinese citizens in the U.S. to closely follow their local virus and safety situations, raise their vigilance, be aware of their personal security and consider deeply before visiting public spaces," the Embassy said in a notice on its website.

Leaders around the world condemned the storming of the U.S. Capitol.

"Disgraceful scenes in US Congress," tweeted Prime Minister Boris Johnson of Britain, a staunch U.S. ally for generations. "The United States stands for democracy around the world and it is now vital that there should be a peaceful and orderly transfer of power."

Other allies were similarly appalled at what they described as an attack on American democracy, though some said they believed U.S. democratic institutions would withstand the turmoil. Some leaders singled out Trump for harsh criticism.

"Trump and his supporters should finally accept the decision of the American voters and stop trampling on democracy," German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas wrote on Twitter. "From inflammatory words come violent deeds." He added that "contempt for democratic institutions has disastrous effects."

"The beauty of democracy?" with a shrug emoji was the reaction tweeted by Bashir Ahmad, a personal assistant to the president of Nigeria, which has seen several coups since independence — including one led decades ago by President Muhammadu Buhari, who most recently entered the office via a vote.

Chilean President Sebastián Piñera and Colombian President Iván Duque were among those in Latin America who denounced the protesters, but both also said they were confident that American democracy and the rule of law would prevail.

"In this sad episode in the U.S., supporters of fascism showed their real face: anti-democratic and aggressive," tweeted Luis Roberto Barroso, Brazilian Supreme Court justice and the head of the country's electoral court. He said he hoped "American society and institutions react with vigor to this threat to democracy."

Venezuela, which is under U.S. sanctions, said the events in Washington show that the U.S. "is suffering what it has generated in other countries with its politics of aggression."

Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro has survived U.S.-backed opposition efforts to oust him despite accusations of human rights abuses, civil unrest and a humanitarian crisis that has forced millions to flee the oil-rich country.

In Puerto Rico, many people took to social media and joked that the U.S. territory no longer wanted statehood. Independence, they said, looked appealing for the first time in decades.

In fact, that pursuit of independence marked one of the last times the U.S. Congress was stormed violently. Four members of Puerto Rico's Nationalist Party opened fire on the House floor in March 1954, wounding five lawmakers.

Italians watched the events with shock, having always considered the U.S. to be the model



of democracy and the country that rescued Italy after its fascist descent during World War II.

"This is the widely anticipated outcome of Trumpism," tweeted a retired Italian center-left politician, Pierluigi Castagnetti. "And unfortunately it won't end today. When politics is replaced by deception and fanaticism of the people the drift is inevitable."

European Parliament President David Sassoli, who leads one of the largest legislatures in the world, also denounced the scenes at the Capitol. The European Union has spent four cantankerous years dealing with the Trump administration, and its top officials have repeatedly said they are looking forward to a better relationship under President-elect Joe Biden.

"This is insurrection. Nothing less. In Washington," tweeted Carl Bildt, a former prime minister of Sweden.

Turkey, a NATO ally that has sometimes been at odds with Washington, expressed concern over the images of angry Trump supporters trying to thwart the certification of Biden as the new president.

A Turkish Foreign Ministry statement urged all parties in the United States to use "moderation and common sense."

"We believe that the United States will overcome this domestic political crisis with maturity," the ministry said.

The ministry statement also urged Turkish citizens in the United States to stay away from crowds and demonstrations.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said his country was "deeply disturbed" by the events in the U.S., Canada's closest ally and neighbor.

"Violence will never succeed in overruling the will of the people. Democracy in the US must be upheld — and it will be," Trudeau tweeted.

### **World leaders express shock over US Capitol riots (Yahoo News/ANI)**

Yahoo News/ANI [1/7/2021 12:30 AM, Staff, 4021K, Neutral]

World leaders and top diplomats condemned the US Capitol riots with some pressing President Donald Trump to call off the violence.

Earlier, Trump supporters on Wednesday (local time) breached the Capitol while a woman was shot dead when a protest spiraled out of control.

It interrupted Congress's count of electoral votes to certify President-elect Joe Biden's win. Biden is due to assume the presidency later this month on January 20.

The rioting took place after Trump told protestors to repeat his false claim that he won the US election in November.

Leaders around the world reacted with concern online, describing the chaotic scenes as 'shocking' and 'disgraceful', reported CNN.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in a tweet, "Distressed to see news about rioting and violence in Washington DC. Orderly and peaceful transfer of power must continue. The democratic process cannot be allowed to be subverted through unlawful protests."

"Canadians are deeply disturbed and saddened by the attack on democracy in the United States, our closest ally and neighbour," tweeted Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. "Violence will never succeed in overruling the will of the people. Democracy in the US must be upheld -- and it will be."

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison condemned the "very distressing" scenes of violence, and New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern tweeted, "What is happening is wrong. Democracy -- the right of people to exercise a vote, have their voice heard and then have that decision upheld peacefully should never be undone by a mob."

Several leaders held the US President personally responsible for the upset and its resolution. "What we are now seeing from Washington is a completely unacceptable attack on democracy in the United States. President Trump is responsible for stopping this. Scary pictures, and amazing that this is the United States," wrote Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg.

"President Trump and several members of Congress bear substantial responsibility for developments," tweeted Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Lofven. "The democratic election process must be respected."

"The United States stands for democracy around the world," wrote UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Twitter. "The US Congress is a temple of democracy. To witness tonight's scenes in #WashingtonDC is a shock," said President of the European Council Charles Michel.

"Shocking & deeply sad scenes in Washington DC -- we must call this out for what it is: a deliberate assault on Democracy by a sitting President & his supporters, attempting to overturn a free & fair election! The world is watching! We hope for the restoration of calm," said Irish Minister of Foreign Affairs Simon Coveney.

And Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte addressed Trump directly. "Horrible images from Washington DC Dear Donald Trump, recognise Joe Biden as the next president today."

Many, including top diplomats and leaders in Iceland, France, Austria, Poland, Ecuador, Colombia and Scotland among others, reminded the US of its role as a model of democracy in the world and expressed disbelief at the breach of the US Capitol -- the first time that the building had been overrun since a British attack during the War of 1812, according to Samuel Holliday, director of scholarship and operations with the US Capitol Historical Society, reported CNN.

"This is not America," wrote European Union High Representative Josep Borrell, who described the mob's actions as "an unseen assault on US democracy, its institutions and the rule of law."

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg urged Americans to respect the outcome of the

November election -- a call echoed by European Parliament President David Sassoli, who added, "We are certain the US will ensure that the rules of democracy are protected."

Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, also wrote, "I believe in the strength of US institutions and democracy. A peaceful transition of power is at the core. Joe Biden won the election."

"I look forward to working with him as the next President of the USA," she added.

**Trudeau on riot at U.S. Capitol: 'We're following the situation minute by minute' (Politico)**

Politico [1/6/2021 6:51 PM, Laura Gardner, 2751K, Neutral]

The most senior leaders of the Canadian government expressed their distress Wednesday about rioters breaching the U.S. Capitol after President Donald Trump encouraged supporters to march to the building.

"Obviously we're concerned, and we're following the situation minute by minute as it unfolds," Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said during an interview with NEWS 1130 in Vancouver earlier in the day.

By the evening, the Liberal leader tweeted that Canadians were "deeply disturbed and saddened by the attack on democracy in the United States. Violence will never succeed in overruling the will of the people."

Trump supporters stormed the Capitol as lawmakers in the House and Senate began debating the certification of the 2020 presidential election results. A number of Republicans in both chambers were planning to challenge the outcomes in certain states.

"There is an important electoral process unfolding in the United States, and I think we all want it and need it to unfold properly and peacefully," Trudeau said. "We certainly hope things will calm down."

The prime minister said Canada will be watching carefully. "I think the American democratic institutions are strong and hopefully everything will return to normal shortly," he said when asked if he was confident President-elect Joe Biden would peacefully transition into power. "But we're going to continue to do what we need to do to make sure that Canadians are well-served in our relationship with the United States, regardless of how things unfold."

The Capitol complex went into lockdown for hours as pro-Trump rioters surged past Capitol Police and into a building normally protected by layers of security.

Canadian Ambassador to the U.S. Kirsten Hillman said the embassy is closely monitoring the situation, and that all staff members are safe. She tweeted an updated travel advisory to the U.S. that includes an alert about "demonstrations in Washington, D.C."

The scenes, which included security drawing guns in the House chamber, also drew statements of concern and condemnation from the leaders of Great Britain and NATO.

Foreign Affairs Minister François-Philippe Champagne said Canada "is deeply shocked" by the events. "The peaceful transition of power is fundamental to democracy — it must

continue, and it will," he said on Twitter. "We are following developments closely and our thoughts are with the American people."

Conservative leader Erin O'Toole called the siege on the Capitol "an astonishing assault on freedom and democracy."

"I am deeply saddened to see chaos grip our greatest ally today," he said on Twitter.

NDP leader Jagmeet Singh blamed Trump directly for the violence. Bloc Québécois chief Yves-François Blanchet said in French that the welcoming majority of Americans will soon see that they are not served by Trump and his ideology.

**Venezuela expresses concern over violence and instability in US amid Capitol riots (Yahoo! News/Independent)**

Yahoo News/Independent [1/6/2021 10:33 PM, Graig Graziosi, 11261K, Negative]

Officials in Venezuela issued a statement of concern over the stability of US democracy in the face of US Capitol riots carried out by Donald Trump supporters.

The statement mirrored similar statements that US officials have issued about authoritarianism in both countries, and comes a day after the country's socialist president retook official control of the government following an election last month.

In a communique issued from Caracas, the Venezuelan government said it "expresses its concern with the acts of violence that are taking [place] in the city of Washington, United States."

Mirroring the language used by US officials commenting on political movements in foreign countries, Venezuela condemned the violence in the Capitol.

"Venezuela condemns the political polarization and the spiral of violence that only reflects the deep crisis that the political and social system of the United States is currently going through," the message said.

The message went on to condemn the US for inciting the kind of violence and unrest seen at the US Capitol in other countries.

"With this unfortunate episode, the United States is suffering the same thing that it has generated in other countries with its policies of aggression. Venezuela hopes that soon the violence will cease and the American people can finally open a new path towards stability and social justice," the statement said.

Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro accused the US of playing a part in a 2019 coup attempt by opposition government leader Juan Guaido.

The US and the European Union, among other foreign governments, recognised Mr Guaido as the legitimate leader of the country, but his attempt to oust Mr Maduro was unsuccessful.

The European Union stated on Tuesday it would no longer recognise Mr Guaido as the legitimate leader on Tuesday.

The US has a long history of supporting regime-change efforts - usually violent - in Latin American countries.

Throughout the 1970's and 1980's, the US attempted to fight the spread of revolutionary socialist governments in Latin America by supporting, training and supplying violent reactionary insurgents.

Arguably the most well known of these regime change efforts was the Contra War in Nicaragua in the early 1980's, in which the US Central Intelligence Agency trained guerilla fighters and "death squads" made up of reactionary Nicaraguan troops to oppose the Marxist Sandinista government that took power through a military junta.

The Contras assassinated civilian leaders, massacred religious workers, and incited mob violence against citizen cooperatives.

In 2020, an American right-wing mercenary Jordan Goudreau, attempted to lead a clandestine military operation into Venezuela to displace Mr Maduro.

"Operation Gideon," as Mr Goudreau called it, was reportedly advised against by Mr Guaido because it was amateurish and poorly-planned.

Mr Goudreau may have been motivated to carry out the mission in order to claim a multi-million dollar reward the US was offering for information leading to the arrest of Mr Maduro.

The American mercenary's men - approximately 60 poorly armed Venezuelans hiding out in Columbia and at least two former US soldiers - were arrested by Venezuelan security forces before they even reached the shore.

The soldiers have been sentenced to 20 years in prison for invading the country. Venezuela has also called for the extradition of Mr Goudreau - who did not personally accompany the ill-fated assault - so he can face trial.

### **Top White House Officials Weigh Exits After Trump Incites Mayhem (Bloomberg)**

Bloomberg [1/7/2021 1:14 AM, Jennifer Jacobs, Saleha Mohsin, and Jordan Fabian, Neutral]

Donald Trump's deputy national security advisor resigned and other White House officials are weighing departures after the president encouraged protests that led to his supporters storming the U.S. Capitol on Wednesday, according to people familiar with the matter.

The deputy, Matt Pottinger, was dismayed by the attack on the Capitol and Trump's incitement of protesters, the people said. His boss, National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien, also considered leaving but was persuaded to stay on by allies on Wednesday, the people said. Also weighing a resignation is Chris Liddell, assistant to the president and deputy chief of staff for policy coordination. A handful of aides already quit following the mayhem Wednesday at the Capitol, including first lady Melania Trump's chief of staff.

Inside Trump's White House, there is anger and consternation over the unprecedented violence that unfolded as Congress began counting Electoral College votes to confirm President-elect Joe Biden's victory. Before Trump held a rally with thousands of supporters outside the White House in the morning, he spoke with Vice President Mike Pence by phone, urging him to reject some of Biden's votes while presiding over the count in a joint

session of Congress. Trump told Pence that he could either be courageous or not, using a vulgarity, according to two people familiar with the matter.

During the rally, the president exhorted his supporters to march on the Capitol. Crowds swelled before protesters finally broke through police lines and entered the building just after the joint session got underway.

It took aides about 45 minutes to persuade Trump to issue a tweet urging protesters against violence after they entered the building, according to people familiar with the matter.

Those who tried to reason with the president included his chief of staff, Mark Meadows, and White House Counsel Pat Cipollone, the people said, asking not to be identified.

Meadows and the president's daughter and senior adviser, Ivanka Trump, later persuaded Trump to film a short video he posted on Twitter, in which he repeated his unfounded claims of election fraud and held the protesters blameless for the violence while urging them to go home.

Trump walked back and forth between the Oval Office and White House dining room watching the events at the Capitol and was initially pleased by the disturbance, the people said -- a reaction that alarmed many of his aides.

The White House declined to comment.

Earlier Wednesday evening, first lady Melania Trump's chief of staff, Stephanie Grisham, resigned, as well as the White House social secretary, Anna Cristina "Rickie" Niceta Lloyd, according to people familiar with the matter. A deputy White House press secretary, Sarah Matthews, said she had resigned over Wednesday's violence at the Capitol, in which an unidentified woman shot and killed by a Capitol Police officer, according to the Washington, D.C. police department. Three other people died of medical emergencies as the Capitol was breached, the municipal police said.

"As someone who worked in the halls of Congress I was deeply disturbed by what I saw today," Matthews said in a statement. "I'll be stepping down from my role, effective immediately. Our nation needs a peaceful transfer of power." A State Department spokesman, Gabriel Noronha, criticized Trump in a tweet from his personal account late Wednesday, saying he "fomented an insurrectionist mob that attacked the Capitol" and "needs to go."

Noronha confirmed the authenticity of the tweet but declined further comment. Some of Trump's loyalists were angry that O'Brien signaled his displeasure with the president in several tweets on Wednesday, including one that openly praised Vice President Mike Pence after he defied Trump's demands that he unilaterally reject Electoral College votes for Biden.

The post was interpreted within the White House as criticism of Trump, according to people familiar with the matter. CNN reported earlier that O'Brien, Pottinger and Lidell are considering resigning. NBC News earlier reported Matthews's resignation.

Also Wednesday, the president told aides not to allow Vice President Mike Pence's chief of



staff, Marc Short, into the White House, the people said.

Trump acted out of anger toward Short for multiple reasons, according to people familiar with the matter, including a New York Times report that Pence had privately told him Tuesday he would not seek to halt the certification of Biden's Electoral College victory. Trump blamed Short for the story, one person said. Another person said Trump doesn't trust Short, and Short doesn't like Trump. Short was at the building on Wednesday anyway, according to one person familiar with the matter.

### **SolarWinds Hack Breached Justice Department System (Wall Street Journal)**

Wall Street Journal [1/6/2021 5:00 PM, Dustin Volz and Robert McMillan, Neutral]

The U.S. Justice Department has become the latest federal agency to say it was breached by hackers in the Russia-linked cyberattack that has ripped through government agencies and an unknown number of corporate networks.

About 3% of the Justice Department's Microsoft Office email accounts were potentially accessed in the attack, the department said Wednesday.

The Justice Department's chief information officer learned of the previously unknown malicious activity on Dec. 24 and has "eliminated the identified method by which the actor was accessing" Microsoft Office email accounts, Marc Raimondi, a Justice Department spokesman, said in a written statement.

There is no indication classified systems were affected, Mr. Raimondi said, as the department classified the breach as a major incident requiring notification to other agencies and Congress.

Even unclassified email accounts, though, can contain sensitive information about investigations and potentially national security related issues, said Chris Painter, a former senior official at the Justice and State departments who worked on cybersecurity issues. "A lot of DOJ work happens on unclassified systems."

It couldn't be determined which Justice Department employees, or how many, potentially had their internal communications exposed in the operation. Some 115,000 employees work at the Justice Department, according to the department's 2020 fiscal year budget request, a figure that includes Federal Bureau of Investigation personnel and correctional officers at federal prisons. Mr. Raimondi said not all Justice Department employees use Microsoft Office, but didn't comment further on the size of the exposure. Investigators continue to try to understand the full extent of the hack, so far linked to using a malicious update to widely used software provided by a Texas-based network-management company called SolarWinds Corp. to compromise U.S. government agencies and scores of private businesses across the globe. Investigators are reviewing how it managed to go undetected for so long and whether there were avenues of attack.

Intelligence officials and cybersecurity analysts involved in the response are investigating whether a little-known software company called JetBrains s.r.o. might have played a role in the SolarWinds hack, according to people familiar with the matter. JetBrains makes tools for software developers, including a product called TeamCity that is used to help manage and speed up large software development projects.

Investigators believe that the SolarWinds hackers gained access to a TeamCity server used by SolarWinds to build its software products, but it is unclear how this system was accessed, according to people familiar with the matter.

"SolarWinds, like many companies, uses a product by JetBrains called TeamCity to assist with the development of its software. We are reviewing all internal and external tools as part of our investigations, which are still ongoing" a SolarWinds spokesman said. The company hasn't seen any evidence linking the security incident to a compromise of the TeamCity product, he said.

"We're not aware of any breach," Maxim Shafirov, the chief executive of JetBrains, said in a text message. The company was founded in the Czech Republic in 2000. It boasts 79 of the Fortune 100 among its 300,000 clients.

"We have never been contact by any security firms or agencies on the matter," Mr. Shafirov said.

Interest in JetBrains among investigators was earlier reported by the New York Times.

The Justice Department is the latest of more than a half-dozen agencies to identify a compromise of its systems related to the massive hack, which has been under way for more than a year but was only discovered last month. Other federal agencies affected include the departments of State, Treasury, Commerce and Energy, according to officials and others familiar with the investigation.

On Tuesday, the Trump administration for the first time formally stated that Russia is likely behind what is known as the SolarWinds hack, a conclusion that senior officials had already reached and expressed both publicly and privately. Moscow has denied involvement in the cyberattack.

Current and former officials and cybersecurity experts have said the hack amounts to one of the worst intelligence failures on record. Hacks are often destructive in nature by disrupting operations. This one, officials believe, was different—a widely successful cyber espionage operation intended to purloin sensitive information from the U.S. government and quietly maintain persistent access within those networks.

Microsoft last week said the hackers accessed its systems and viewed internal source code used to create software products. The hackers also compromised at least one reseller of Microsoft's cloud-based computing services and tried to use that as a way of gaining access to emails belonging to the cybersecurity vendor CrowdStrike Inc. That attempt was unsuccessful, CrowdStrike has said.

Microsoft Corp. declined to comment on the breach of Justice Department email accounts.

### **U.S. Labels India, Italy, Turkey Digital Taxes Discriminatory (Bloomberg)**

Bloomberg [1/6/2021 6:14 PM, Jenny Leonard, 6400K, Negative]

The U.S. said decisions by India, Italy and Turkey to tax local revenue of Internet giants such as Facebook Inc. discriminates against American companies, but won't be taking action against the countries for now.



The taxes are "inconsistent with prevailing principles of international taxation, and burden or restricts U.S. commerce," the office of the U.S. Trade Representative said in a statement Wednesday. While it won't retaliate now, the USTR will "continue to evaluate all available options," it said.

The countries are among several that have instituted so-called digital services taxes, or levies on local sales of companies including Alphabet Inc.'s Google.

In June, the USTR started investigations into the moves of at least 10 countries, citing Section 301 of the U.S. Trade Act of 1974, which allows it to retaliate for trade practices it deems unfair. It's the same tool used to justify U.S. tariffs on Chinese goods for alleged theft of intellectual property.

Should the U.S. decide to impose duties on imports from these countries, it likely would be up to the incoming Biden administration to implement that decision -- as time is running out for the current USTR to prepare tariff lists and go through a public comment period before the duties take effect.

Plans for an international digital-tax agreement brokered by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development have been delayed until at least summer of this year after it became clear the initial deadline of reaching a deal in 2020 wouldn't be met. The goal had been to replace individual country's digital taxes with a global plan.

Without an OECD agreement, countries are going ahead with their own versions of the taxes, which could result in a world-wide retaliatory tax and tariff war between the U.S. and nations that want a share of the taxes from American tech giants' revenue. Belgium, Norway and Latvia are among countries who could introduce digital services taxes in 2021, while Spain and Czech Republic start collecting the tax this month.

#### French Retaliation

The U.S. was due to start charging a 25% levy on imports of French makeup, handbags and soap on Wednesday worth about \$1.3 billion annually in retaliation for the European country's tax on the revenue of American tech companies. The original annual value of goods to be targeted was \$2.4 billion.

The U.S. Trade Representative didn't respond requests for confirmation that the tariffs went into force. Officials from the French finance ministry and the European Commission hadn't received notices from the U.S. by the close of business Wednesday.

France implemented its tax on digital revenue in 2019 to put pressure on the talks to advance, but the U.S. said the unilateral move unfairly targeted American companies.

In January 2020, President Emmanuel Macron and U.S. counterpart Donald Trump agreed a truce in their dispute to give time for the international negotiations to reach a global deal, but the talks stumbled in October and France resumed collecting the tax in mid-December.

#### **[China] NYSE Reverses Course Again, Will Delist Three Chinese Telecom Stocks (Wall Street Journal)**

Wall Street Journal [1/6/2021 5:05 PM, By Alexander Osipovich, Neutral]

The New York Stock Exchange will move forward with delisting three Chinese

telecommunications companies targeted by an executive order from President Trump, reversing course yet again after the NYSE said earlier this week that it wouldn't delist them.

The NYSE said Wednesday that trading of the U.S.-listed shares of China Mobile Ltd. CHL - 5.45% , China Telecom Corp. CHA 3.74% and China Unicom (Hong Kong) Ltd. would be suspended at 4 a.m. ET on Monday. Mr. Trump's order seeks to ban trading in securities of companies that the administration says have links to the Chinese military.

The NYSE said its latest action came after it received "new specific guidance" from the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control on Tuesday, which listed the three companies' American depositary receipts as being covered by Mr. Trump's order. Wednesday's reversal is likely to raise further questions about the exchange's handling of the three Chinese stocks. Last week, the NYSE said it would delist the three companies to comply with Mr. Trump's order, only to reverse course on Monday and say that it wasn't delisting them. A person familiar with the matter said the NYSE backtracked Monday due to ambiguity in whether the three companies were covered by the order, but the new guidance, which Treasury shared with the exchange late Tuesday, made it clear that the companies must be delisted. The Treasury posted that guidance online Wednesday morning.

The NYSE's backpedaling drew criticism from the Trump administration and supporters of a hard line against Beijing. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin called NYSE President Stacey Cunningham to object to the NYSE's flip-flop.

The Treasury Dept.'s handling of the order has also come under fire. Sen. Marco Rubio (R., Fla.) on Wednesday blamed the department for issuing erroneous guidance that led the NYSE to temporarily walk back its delisting. "It is outrageous that those in the U.S. Treasury Department attempted to undermine the President's Executive Order in a blatant attempt to serve the interests of Wall Street and the Chinese Communist Party at the expense of the United States," Mr. Rubio said in a statement.

The senator added that he was pleased the NYSE was moving ahead with the delisting. A Treasury spokesman declined to comment.

Critics on all sides hammered the NYSE, owned by Intercontinental Exchange Inc., for its flip-flop on the delistings, even as it remained unclear whether the exchange or the Treasury was at fault for the confusing series of reversals.

In China, officials have criticized the delisting of the telecom companies, saying it would harm the standing of the U.S. in global capital markets. "I'm sure all countries, not just China, are watching what the United States plans to do, which will determine whether it can be seen as a reliable or trustworthy partner for cooperation," a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman said at a briefing Wednesday.

Meanwhile, U.S. critics of Beijing have accused the NYSE of trying to curry favor with Chinese authorities before the inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden, who may take a softer line on trade with China than Mr. Trump.

"The NYSE is trying to judge how the political winds are blowing, and it's a pretty confusing situation right now," said Dan David, founder of Wolfpack Research, an investment-

research firm that specializes in shorting, or betting against, companies that it suspects to be engaged in fraud, including Chinese companies.

The NYSE's intent has always been to comply with the executive order, the person familiar with the matter said.

Investors have also been whipsawed as the on-again, off-again delisting announcements have sent the affected Chinese stocks on a wild ride. NYSE-listed shares of China Mobile fell 5.5% on Wednesday, while China Telecom gained 3.7% in the final minutes of trading after being down as much as 7% earlier, and China Unicom closed the day flat.

That came after the three stocks sold off Monday, only to rebound Tuesday when it appeared that the NYSE would be allowing the stocks to remain listed after all.

China Mobile and China Unicom didn't respond to requests for comment sent after business hours in Asia. A U.S.-based spokesman for China Telecom referred questions to the company's Hong Kong office, which didn't respond to requests for comment.

Derrick Early, an aerospace engineer in Maryland, said he sold China Mobile shares on Monday at a loss when it appeared that they would be delisted. That meant he missed out when the stock jumped more than 9% the next day.

"I'm so cross with President Trump on the ban, and I'm cross with NYSE on whipsawing their delisting policy," he said.

Mr. Trump's order doesn't formally require investors who own shares of the affected Chinese companies to sell them until November. Still, brokerages used by many individual investors have been warning customers that they may have trouble liquidating the shares unless they cash out several days before the ban takes effect early next week.

Last week, for instance, the popular investing app Robinhood told its customers that they had until Monday, Jan. 5, to sell the affected Chinese securities, and afterward "liquidation may not be available."

**[China] NYSE to delist three Chinese telecoms in dizzying about-face (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/6/2021 10:34 PM, John McCrank, Anirban Sen, Kanishka Singh, Bhargav Acharya, 5304K, Neutral]

The New York Stock Exchange said on Wednesday it will delist three Chinese telecom companies, confirming its latest U-turn on the matter a day after U.S. Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin told the NYSE chief he disagreed with an earlier decision to reverse the delistings.

The latest move, which is effective Jan. 11, marks the third time in less than a week the Big Board has ruled on the issue.

The flip-flopping highlights the confusion over which firms were included in an executive order issued by President Donald Trump in November barring U.S. persons from investing in publicly traded companies Washington deems to be tied to the Chinese military.

It also comes amid escalating tensions within Washington on China policy in the final days

of the Trump administration.

"There is a unique situation where there is an outgoing administration that is disengaged and (there are) orders sitting out there, so something has to be done, but no one wants to take on responsibility," said Leland Miller, the CEO of the U.S.-based consultancy China Beige Book.

"I think in future that anyone getting these orders will say: 'Tell us exactly what you want us to do,' and force administrations to be more focused."

The NYSE originally on Thursday announced plans to delist China Mobile Ltd, China Telecom Corp Ltd and China Unicom Hong Kong Ltd. On Monday, it did a U-turn after consulting with regulators in connection with the U.S. Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control and decided to keep them listed. Wednesday's decision marks a return to the original plan.

The decision to keep the companies listed had prompted criticism that Treasury was being dovish on China.

Mnuchin has long been seen as seeking to thwart attempts by hardliners in the administration - many led by the State department - to crack down on Chinese companies.

But sources who asked to remain anonymous due to the sensitivity of the matter said Mnuchin had called NYSE President Stacey Cunningham on Tuesday to express his concerns over the decision to relist the companies, as the exchange sought further confirmation on the matter.

"The Treasury secretary was on the phone with the NYSE (president) now and was told that NYSE would reverse their decision," a U.S. official told Reuters on Tuesday.

On Wednesday the exchange operator said in a statement its latest decision, to move forward with the delistings, was based on "new specific guidance received on January 5, 2021, that the Department of Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control provided to the NYSE".

Trading in the securities will be suspended at 4 a.m. ET (0900 GMT) on Jan. 11, the NYSE said.

A spokeswoman for the exchange operator declined to comment further.

The flip-flopping caused investors to sell positions in the securities, the prices of which dropped on the initial announcement, then rose on the next, and tumbled again on Wednesday.

Republican Senator Ben Sasse, a member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, said the decision was the "right call".

"Chinese firms that reject fundamental transparency requirements and have ties to the Chinese military shouldn't benefit from American investment," Sasse said.

Trump's executive order technically takes effect on Jan. 11 but does not ban purchases by U.S. investors until November.

While the directive stops short of forcing a delisting, a separate bill signed into law by Trump in November will kick Chinese companies off U.S. bourses if they do not fully comply with the country's auditing rules in three years.

The U.S. State Department plans to release as soon as Wednesday a fact sheet urging U.S. investors to comply with the executive order, according to three people familiar with the matter and a copy of the document seen by Reuters.

The Treasury said on Wednesday that market intermediaries could help investors divest securities of the blacklisted companies.

S&P Dow Jones Indices, which has also made U-turns in decisions, said late on Wednesday it will remove the three telecom firms' ADRs from its benchmarks before Jan. 11.

Other index makers including FTSE Russell and MSCI Inc have cut a dozen Chinese companies on the list from their benchmarks, but have not removed the three telecom firms, all of which have major passive U.S. funds amongst their top shareholders.

**[China] U.S. to urge firms comply with China investment ban in new guidance, sources say (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/6/2021 3:54 PM, Humeyra Pamuk and Alexandra Alper, Neutral]

The U.S. State Department plans to release as soon as Wednesday a fact sheet urging U.S. investors to comply with an executive order banning investments in alleged Chinese military companies, according to three people familiar with the matter and a copy of the document seen by Reuters.

The executive order, released by the Trump administration in November, bars Americans from buying securities of 35 Chinese companies that the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) has deemed to be owned or controlled by the Chinese military, starting in November 2021.

Confusion over what the order requires prompted the New York Stock Exchange last Thursday to announce plans to delist three Chinese telecom companies that the Pentagon added to the blacklist. On Monday the NYSE scrapped the move and then in a surprise twist the exchange reversed course a second time on Wednesday and vowed to continue with its bid to delist the firms.

The State Department guidance sheds little new light on the order but explicitly exhorts Americans to comply.

"Ample warning has been given to the compliance officers and risk managers to understand and disclose to their constituents the material risk associated with the Executive Order," a draft of the State Department release states.

"CEOs and their boards now have a legal duty to implement and be in full compliance with the Executive Order," it adds.

Three people, who declined to be named since the matter was not yet public, confirmed plans to release the document and two of them confirmed the contents.

A spokesperson for the State Department declined to confirm the fact sheet but said, "We continue to work with Treasury, DoD, and others to implement the President's Executive Order to address the threat from securities investments that finance Communist Chinese military companies."

The November executive order is part of a bid by U.S. President Donald Trump to cement his tough-on-China legacy in the waning days of his administration. It also gives teeth to a 1999 law that required the DoD to compile a list of Chinese firms backed by the Chinese military.

The catalog now includes China's top chipmaker SMIC and oil giant CNOOC. Index providers like MSCI have begun shedding the blacklisted Chinese firms from their indexes in the wake of the November directive.

The confusion comes against a backdrop of tension among U.S. agencies about how stringently to construe the November executive order. Reuters and other news outlets reported that the State Department and DoD had pushed back against draft guidance that the Treasury Department was planning to issue that was seen as watering down the order.

Both U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin later wrote in tweets that there was no disagreement over the executive order.

### **[China] Trump's Ban on Chinese Apps Falls to Biden to Execute—or Not (Wall Street Journal)**

Wall Street Journal [1/6/2021 5:12 PM, John D. McKinnon, Neutral]

President Trump's latest executive order targeting Chinese tech platforms will fall to President-elect Joe Biden to enforce, or not, giving Mr. Biden a difficult political calculation to make in his first weeks in office.

The executive order issued late Tuesday bans U.S. transactions with eight Chinese-connected apps, including the Alipay mobile payment platform owned by Chinese billionaire Jack Ma's Ant Group Co., and the WeChat TCEHY -3.97% Pay app owned by China's Tencent Holdings Ltd.

But the order won't take effect until next month—after Mr. Trump leaves office—meaning Mr. Biden has ample opportunity to modify or suspend it.

Already, the Biden transition team has announced that the incoming president will suspend and review late-stage executive actions by Mr. Trump that wouldn't kick in until after he has left office.

The Biden transition team declined to comment Wednesday about whether the new executive order concerning Chinese apps would be among the Trump initiatives likely to be sidelined. Rolling back the order may not be a given, however, considering bipartisan concerns over China's use of technology for political repression. At the same time, U.S. businesses worry about the potential for retaliation by China if major new restrictions on its tech giants are enacted.



One purpose of the new order appears to have been to “make it as difficult as possible for a Biden administration to change direction,” said Scott Kennedy, an expert on Chinese business at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. He predicted more such actions by Mr. Trump in his final two weeks in office. Already on Wednesday, U.S. business representatives were laying plans to push the incoming administration to delay implementation of the order through a review process, to ensure “sufficient commercial input on the measures before any action is taken,” one person familiar with the matter said.

“I’m sure it will be paused and reviewed,” this person said. “If anything is implemented it will be much further down the road.”

Representatives of Ant and Tencent had no comment on the executive order Wednesday.

Beyond those companies, the executive order’s language could raise new concerns among businesses about the potential for restricting some transactions in China, a hot market for many U.S. multinationals, according to a former U.S. trade official.

The U.S. China Business Council in a statement Wednesday expressed support for the order’s aims. It added, however, that “it is vital that this executive order be scoped and enforced in such a way that protects U.S. citizens’ legitimate interests, but does not unnecessarily harm U.S. company competitiveness in international markets, particularly a market as strategically important to many companies as China.”

In fact, some parts of the order are broadly worded. The prohibition on transactions, for example, applies to “any person or...property, subject to the jurisdiction of the United States.” Another part of the order prohibiting attempts at evasion applies to “any transaction by a United States person or within the United States.”

In the executive order, Mr. Trump directed Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross to work out the implementation details—although like the president, Mr. Ross will be departing after Mr. Biden’s inauguration.

#### **[China] U.S. Weighs Adding Alibaba, Tencent to China Stock Ban (Wall Street Journal)**

Wall Street Journal [1/6/2021 7:38 PM, Dawn Lim, Jing Yang, Gordon Lubold and Alexander Osipovich  
, Neutral]

U.S. officials are considering prohibiting Americans from investing in Alibaba Group Holding Ltd. and Tencent Holdings Ltd., a potential escalation of the outgoing Trump administration’s efforts to unwind U.S. investors’ holdings in major Chinese companies.

State and Defense Department officials in recent weeks have discussed expanding a blacklist of companies prohibited to U.S. investments over alleged ties to China’s military and security services, according to people familiar with the matter. The U.S. government announced its original blacklist in November with 31 companies.

Tencent and Alibaba are China’s two most valuable publicly listed companies, with a combined market capitalization of over \$1.3 trillion and scores of American mutual funds

and other investors holding their shares. Alibaba's New York-listed American depositary receipts fell more than 5% on Wednesday, while Tencent ADRs tumbled by about 4% in the U.S. over-the-counter market. The blacklist is one of several Trump administration efforts related to investing in Chinese firms. Also on Wednesday, the New York Stock Exchange said it would delist three major Chinese telecommunication carriers targeted by a Trump executive order, after earlier scrapping the plan following "new specific guidance" from the Treasury Department. The investment decisions aren't the only steps the Trump administration has taken.

After decades of policy broadly aimed at cultivating closer ties, the U.S. has taken a harder line against China in business, politics, trade and markets that have rippled through the global economy.

U.S. companies have also shifted, with some moving production out of China and others more closely examining the security of their trade secrets there. Wall Street, which has long pursued greater connection between the countries' financial markets, is now navigating growing risks to tying investors' money to China.

The State and Defense Departments have debated with the Treasury whether adding Alibaba and Tencent to the U.S. blacklist would have wide capital-markets ramifications, people familiar with the matter said. The plan remains under discussion and might not proceed, the people added.

Alibaba and Tencent are tracked by major indexes including those created by MSCI Inc. and FTSE Russell. Alibaba, listed in both New York and Hong Kong, and Hong Kong-listed Tencent are heavyweights in widely followed global stock indexes. Like most foreign companies, the stocks aren't included on the Nasdaq Composite, S&P 500 or Dow Jones Industrial Average. In the final weeks of the Trump presidency, U.S. authorities have clashed over the scope of the list of companies barred to American investors. Pentagon and State officials have pursued a broader list including high-profile firms and many subsidiaries of already-named companies in China. The agencies have urged a tougher line to curb China's military and security services' access to data troves, advanced technologies and expertise. The Treasury, worried that forced selling could shake financial markets, wants a narrower list.

The Pentagon, the lead agency managing the list, had no immediate comment. The State Department and Treasury Department had no immediate comment.

A spokeswoman at Alibaba didn't respond to requests for comment. A spokesman at Tencent declined to comment.

China's Ministry of Commerce didn't respond to a request for comment sent outside business hours, and the Chinese embassy in the U.S. referred to a December comment by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that said, "China firmly opposes the wanton suppression of Chinese companies by the United States," and "the Chinese government will continue to safeguard Chinese companies' legitimate and lawful rights and interests."

While Alibaba and Tencent aren't controlled by the Chinese government, the State Department and Pentagon have long voiced concerns that the companies could be coerced to share data on U.S. citizens and businesses, potentially serving as a conduit for the



Beijing to extend its influence.

In a separate action earlier this week, President Trump signed an order prohibiting U.S. individuals and companies from transacting with eight Chinese software apps including Alibaba affiliate Ant Group Co.'s Alipay and Tencent's WeChat Pay. The order takes effect in 45 days, after President-elect Joe Biden is inaugurated on Jan. 20.

Then on Wednesday, the NYSE said the trading of the U.S.-listed shares of China Mobile Ltd. , China Telecom Corp. and China Unicom (Hong Kong) Ltd. would be suspended at 4 a.m. ET on Monday.

The exchange's reversal is likely to raise further questions about its handling of the three Chinese stocks. The NYSE said last week that it would delist the three companies to comply with Mr. Trump's order, only to change course on Monday and say that it wasn't delisting them.

A person familiar with the matter attributed NYSE's backtracking Monday to ambiguity over whether the three companies were covered by the order. But the new guidance, which the Treasury shared with the exchange late Tuesday, made it clear that the companies must be delisted. The Treasury posted that guidance online Wednesday morning.

The Trump administration and supporters of a hard line against Beijing criticized the exchange's reversal. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin called NYSE President Stacey Cunningham to voice objections.

The past year has seen several moves that could cut off a recurring investment pipeline between U.S. investors and Chinese firms.

In recent years, scores of Chinese tech companies have raised tens of billions of dollars from U.S. and international investors, allowing foreign investors to capitalize on China's fast-growing economy. As of Dec. 31, Alibaba and Tencent were among top constituents in the MSCI Emerging Markets Index, accounting for a combined 11% weighting. Similarly, the two together claimed a 12% weighting in the FTSE Emerging Index as of Dec. 31.

After releasing its November blacklist, the Pentagon expanded it in December to include companies such as top Chinese chip maker Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corp. and oil giant China National Offshore Oil Corp.

The State Department in August said the U.S. needs to address threats posed by cloud-based systems run by Alibaba, Tencent and Baidu Inc. U.S. officials have become increasingly concerned in recent weeks as The increased scrutiny Alibaba and Ant have faced in China, putting the further at the mercy of Beijing, have raised U.S. officials' concerns in recent weeks, according to one of the people familiar with the matter.

The Chinese government has tightened control over domestic tech champions recently, unveiling a sweeping antitrust regulation aimed at the country's biggest internet platforms, launching an investigation into Alibaba and scuttling Ant's blockbuster initial public offering. Regulators are trying to get Ant to share the troves of consumer-credit data it has amassed with the Chinese central bank's credit-reporting system, The Wall Street Journal reported.

Tencent operates the hugely popular WeChat app, which has become one of Beijing's most powerful surveillance tools. Tencent also owns stakes in several U.S. videogame companies.

Major U.S. asset managers including T. Rowe Price Group Inc., BlackRock Inc. and Vanguard Group are among the top public shareholders of Alibaba and Tencent through funds, according to FactSet data.

Asset managers are lobbying to prevent companies like Alibaba from becoming blacklisted, said a person familiar with large financial firms' conversations with U.S. regulators.

The Treasury said last week that investors would be barred from investing in both blacklisted companies and subsidiaries owned 50% or more by a company named on the list. Derivatives, bonds and depositary receipts—as well as exchange-traded funds, index funds and mutual funds holding securities issued by these entities in any jurisdiction—will also be restricted to U.S. investors.

## **Editorials and Op-eds**

### **Pentagon must continue military support to CIA's counterterrorism operations (Washington Times)**

Washington Times [1/6/2021 3:59 PM, Abraham Wagner, 459K, Neutral]

A key element of the ongoing war on terror has been the collaborative efforts by CIA and the U.S. military working on what are termed "covert" or "clandestine" operations against terrorists around the world.

Often the CIA's Special Activities Center carries out such covert operations with its own paramilitary force, acting independently, but relying on the Defense Department's military assets for transportation and logistical support. In the field, they also rely on special forces for assistance in various counterterrorism operations.

According to a recent report, the Pentagon informed the CIA that it would be ending the majority of the military support it provides to the agency's counterterrorism missions. Acting Defense Secretary Christopher Miller is reported to have sent a letter to CIA Director Gina Haspel outlining the decision, which is both surprising and unprecedented.

Such a decision would certainly impact the CIA's worldwide counterterrorism missions that frequently rely on the military where military personnel are detailed to support the CIA's operations. Over the last two decades such joint and cooperative operations have been a successful and high point in overall U.S. counterterrorism activities. As terrorist activities around the globe have escalated, U.S. presidents have all supported such operations as an essential element of U.S. policy.

A CIA spokesperson has stated that "there is no stronger relationship nor better partnership than that between CIA and DOD," and "that partnership has led to accomplishments that significantly advanced U.S. national security, and we are confident that DOD and CIA will continue this close collaboration for years to come."

At the Defense Department, their spokesperson indicated that the possible shift away from

supporting the CIA's counterterrorism missions was in line with the National Defense Strategy that pushes the military's focus away from the regional wars in the Middle East toward near-peer competitors like Russia and China. Here the intent behind the move is to see if DOD personnel "detailed" to the CIA should be diverted from counterterrorism missions and toward missions related to competition with Russia and China. Such a concept would "better align its allocation of resources with the 2018 National Defense Strategy's shift to great power competition."

In reality, however, the types of DOD personnel detailed to support CIA counterterrorism operations have little to do with competition with Russia and China. Nothing in fact. A careful reading of the 2018 National Security Strategy shows this approach to be largely nonsense. It is simply a political stunt being undertaken for some largely unknown reason. These highly trained and specialized forces are not needed for other missions and removing them from support to counterterrorism operations only serves to harm U.S. interests.

Taking such actions by DOD would be a serious setback to a very strong and effective relationship between the DOD and CIA, that has resulted in numerous successes over the past two decades in the area of counterterrorism, including the operations against Osama bin Laden and al-Baghdadi, as well as many others that will never be disclosed.

Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, recently disclosed that a CIA paramilitary officer was killed in Somalia and had previously served in the military as a Navy SEAL. Removing DOD support to critical counterterrorism operations could increase the risk to CIA officers and may need to be addressed by the incoming administration. If it is not reversed, the CIA needs increased personnel and funding to make up for the difference to continue their critical missions.

On a related note, the DOD announced that President Trump had ordered the withdrawal of most of the 700 U.S. military personnel in Somalia, though the department stated that it would continue to carry out counterterrorism missions against al-Shabab, the al Qaeda affiliate. Presumably, the removal of most of those troops from Somalia would already have had an impact on the CIA's counterterrorism operations in that country.

One of the great success stories of the DOD over the past several decades has been the area of "special forces" where organization, training and equipment have all contributed to what are now outstanding capabilities. Here these forces have repeatedly served on missions which are within the DOD mission areas as well as joint operations with their CIA counterparts.

The relationship between the DOD and CIA has grown exponentially over the last two decades not only in high-profile missions, but daily operations that most often go unnoticed. Those familiar with these activities note that the relationships on the ground and within the ranks are on solid ground, and that any effort to remove this support would be "akin to cutting off your nose to spite your face." At least one former high-ranking CIA official described the DOD plans as "highly irregular" given that the CIA's counter-terrorism missions can no longer be executed by the CIA without U.S. military support.

Exactly how or why this state of affairs came about so quickly at the end of the Trump administration remains a mystery. It should be a high priority for the incoming Biden administration to review what has taken place and ensure that policy going forward supports

the decades of highly successful joint operations between the DOD and CIA in the counterterrorism area. This has never been a partisan issue, and administrations from both parties have all worked to create a capability that serves the nation in a most critical area. Maintaining this capability rather than wrecking it is essential for the country.

### **Who's On the Hook If Vaccines Go Wrong? (Bloomberg)**

Bloomberg [1/6/2021 5:30 PM, Anjani Trivedi and Andy Mukherjee, 6400K, Neutral]

The Covid-19 vaccines are here and distribution has begun. But what if something goes wrong?

Whether it's a loss of income, hefty medical bills or other serious adverse effects from getting a shot, someone has to pick up the tab, be it vaccine manufacturers or governments. In the past, so-called liability shields have given companies cover to produce effective treatments quickly without legal exposure. But it's a risky endeavor for countries to absorb full responsibility for highly novel products, developed and licensed at lightning speed. Especially when every man, woman and, eventually, child will need to be injected.

Adar Poonawalla, the chief executive of Serum Institute of India Ltd., the world's largest vaccine maker by volume, wants indemnity. Competitors tripping up one another by instigating frivolous civil suits isn't a trivial risk for the likes of Poonawalla, who's manufacturing the jab developed by AstraZeneca Plc and Oxford University. It could get messier still because some healthcare systems may experiment with dosage quantities and intervals to deal with mutations. Who will be responsible if there are serious adverse side events then? No insurer will underwrite the risk; the burden of compensation will fall on states or, in the case of poor countries, on Covax, a global initiative to ensure equitable distribution.

On current estimates, Covax can meet only a fifth of global demand by the end of the year. So countries that are striking direct agreements with producers will still have to worry about potential tort claims, which seek civil remedies — and not just for the next year or two. The virus may stick around even after universal immunization, with mutant strains creating an enduring market for jabs long after Covid has ceased to be a public health emergency.

Manufacturers, distributors and other entities in the United States “are very likely to find their Covid-19 products and services moving across borders,” according to RAND Corporation researchers. Their legal exposure in foreign courts is thus uncertain, especially given the rapid pace of vaccine development and limited data about side effects and long-term consequences.

Going by past pandemics, this data won't start showing up for a while. When it does, it will likely vary by country, which affects how liability is handled. In 2013, four years after swine flu hit the globe, the U.K. government reversed its stand on the safety of the Pandemrix jab made by GlaxoSmithKline Plc, after a major study showed that it was associated with narcolepsy. Affected individuals could apply for compensation. At the time, the health department noted that “the decision to recommend that children got this vaccine during the flu pandemic was based on evidence available at the time, along with the advice from the European Medicines Agency which approved its use.” It then said that the department keeps “all emerging evidence under review,” which is why usage stopped in 2011 for those under 20. The data evolves, muddying potential liability issues.

It gets more complicated. Rich countries are buying up large doses of viable vaccines from Pfizer Inc.-BioNTech SE and Moderna Inc. Many are now weighing turning over a portion they have secured to low- and middle-income nations facing delays as Covax hasn't worked out as planned. The European Union, for instance, is considering donating 5% of its inoculations, Reuters reported. With altruistic gifts, it's even harder to assign responsibility.

During the H1N1 pandemic of 2009, the World Health Organization came up with a multi-country liability shield, as RAND researchers describe it, or a global legal framework. Recipient countries had to sign a letter of agreement that basically allowed donors to wash their hands of liability, or indemnify donors, as long as they followed WHO standards. The issues were knotty and some countries didn't have the resources to interpret them. Eventually, of the 94 countries that were interested in donations, 87 signed the agreement and only 78 completed the preconditions in the agreement for vaccine supply.

The complexity of the current situation and the sheer scale of production mean a new agreement will be required. National governments will need to negotiate, consider and approve various requirements – all long processes. If disparities between countries crop up, manufacturers will face barriers to production and distribution. The alternative is national compensation funds, which honor claims for those who have suffered adverse effects from the vaccines. Many countries simply can't afford these, further reinforcing the resource and investment imbalance.

Previous widespread illnesses like small pox and other influenzas show that liability issues can hinder progress of new vaccines, even domestically. In 1976, as the Ford administration took on an ambitious program to vaccinate millions against an anticipated outbreak of swine flu, insurers and manufacturers balked. Their concerns around legal exposure prompted Congress to pass a law waiving liability. Through legislation, the U.S. was substituted as the defendant in lawsuits against any vaccine manufacturer, distributor or American entity providing free inoculation. Although that flu scare didn't evolve into a full-blown pandemic, firms in the U.S. are now effectively protected. Such a legal setup isn't standard in most other places.

An additional challenge this time around is the space race-type international competition in vaccine development. China and Russia are promoting inoculations with little or no data validating their effectiveness in large studies. India has licensed an indigenous product developed by local firm Bharat Biotech International Ltd. "in clinical trial mode" — those receiving the shots will be tracked and that will supposedly prove its efficacy. That's because phase three experimental data, which do exactly that, aren't yet available.

All this is too breathtaking a pace for scientists. Policy makers in developing nations may not have a choice but to take what they can get — easily, cheaply and quickly. But in so doing, they might just be storing up legal troubles for later.

### **[Hong Kong] Jimmy Lai's Message of Hope (Wall Street Journal)**

Wall Street Journal [1/6/2021 6:33 PM, Brad Lips, Neutral]

Jimmy Lai began 2021 in jail. The detention last month of the prominent Hong Kong businessman and democracy activist suggested that the Chinese Communist Party was looking to crack down on dissent. The hammer dropped Tuesday morning, with the mass arrest of 53 other democracy proponents in Hong Kong.



The jailings may lead to an early test for the Biden administration. While Joe Biden and Kamala Harris were celebrated as Time magazine's "Persons of the Year" for winning an election, it is not clear if they will stand with those fighting for the right to have elections at all.

From a global perspective, the big story of 2020 was China's government: its duplicity around Covid, the continuing expansion of its surveillance state, and its mass forced incarceration and indoctrination of Uighurs in 380 detention centers across the Xianjing region. China is flexing its muscles in Hong Kong unchecked. It is time the rest of the world stood up for the norms of free societies, including free speech and the rule of law.

Mr. Lai's case should draw world-wide attention to what is being lost in Hong Kong. At 12, he smuggled himself out of mainland China by boat, reaching Hong Kong penniless but ambitious. Sixty years later, his success embodies the entrepreneurial spirit of a free Hong Kong; from nothing he built a clothing store empire, then a newspaper and media conglomerate. His newspaper, Apple Daily, is the second-most read paper in Hong Kong. Those accomplishments are impressive, but what he is most passionate about, and what keeps him up at night, is Hong Kong's democracy movement. When I interviewed him in early November, he said "I really appreciate the freedom in Hong Kong. This freedom has given us all that we have. Hope. Inspiration. This is so precious. With my gratitude to this place, it is my duty to do whatever I can to fight for freedom and the rule of law here."

He remained steadfast when I asked about his coming trial: "My life is about something more than myself. . . . Once I started to fight for freedom my life changed. I feel there is a purpose and meaning in my life. Even if I have to go to jail, which is very likely, I don't regret it. I consider it a redemption of the life that I have had. I am prepared for anything."

Many in the West—whether in academia, business or the media—prefer to cover their eyes and pretend that totalitarianism isn't spreading. Will the new Biden administration also accommodate China and its human-rights violations? One doesn't have to believe Donald Trump was 100% correct on China to recognize that his administration was right to challenge Beijing's alarming hostility toward Hong Kong's freedoms.

My New Year's wish is that in 2021 the Biden administration will win honors for providing the world an example of freedom, tolerance and the rule of law. The president-elect could begin by calling out the illiberalism of the Chinese government. Then he could follow the lead of the U.K. by offering asylum to Hong Kong's people, including those arrested under the national-security law—especially democracy's hero, Jimmy Lai.

## **Coronavirus News**

### **Nations Stretch Scarce Covid-19 Vaccines by Delaying a Second Shot (Wall Street Journal)**

Wall Street Journal [1/6/2021 2:21 PM, Jenny Strasburg and Joanna Sugden, Neutral]  
Governments engaged in a desperate race to roll out vaccines to beat back a winter surge of the coronavirus have turned to a new tactic: freeing up scarce vaccine supplies so they can inoculate more vulnerable people faster with a single shot by delaying the second dose.

The first to act was the U.K., which is dealing with new Covid-19 infections propelled by a

fast-spreading variant of the virus. Its plan to expand vaccine supplies by delaying the second dose has been followed elsewhere in Europe and part of Canada. The U.K.'s state-run National Health Service will wait up to three months to deliver the second shot instead of the three to four weeks recommended based on drug-company trials.

The moves come as many countries are struggling to ramp up vaccination programs. France has inoculated only a few thousand people, while Belgium began its mass-vaccination program on Tuesday and the Netherlands on Wednesday. Even in places like the U.K., Germany and the U.S. where more people have been vaccinated, vaccination efforts are falling behind a winter wave of infections that threatens to overwhelm some hospitals.

The approach has prompted pushback by some medical authorities, including the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, which this week called delaying the second dose potentially detrimental to public health. However, other U.S. health officials have said they are looking into options such as tinkering with dosage sizes and other ways to stretch the reach of available vaccines. Elsewhere in Europe, some authorities are leaning toward the British approach.

Denmark on Monday approved a delay of up to six weeks between doses while Germany is also considering stretching out the interval. Belgium has also shifted gears, using all available vaccine for first doses, hoping to administer second doses in three to six weeks. In Canada, Quebec said in late December that it would delay second doses of the vaccine developed by Pfizer Inc. and Germany's BioNTech SE to immunize more people with one dose. But Canada's national public-health agency has resisted requests to consider turning an existing two-dose vaccine by Moderna Inc. into a single-dose shot. Canadian officials said data are too limited.

British medical authorities calculated that giving more at-risk people some immunity with one vaccine dose would save more lives than conferring more complete immunity to half the number with a double dose.

With a new variant spreading rapidly, the government estimates one in 50 people have the virus in England, and one in 30 in London. This has forced trade-offs scientists say are crucial to prevent deaths.

"Clearly, if we had infinite vaccine, we might have taken different approaches, but we don't," Chris Whitty, England's chief medical officer, told reporters Tuesday.

In the first month of the vaccine rollout, roughly 1.3 million people in the U.K. had received a first shot of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, or one by AstraZeneca PLC and the University of Oxford. Millions more vaccinations are planned this month.

The U.K. has ordered 100 million doses of AstraZeneca's shot, but faces bottlenecks waiting for bulk vaccine to be packaged into vials and tested for consistency. It has ordered 40 million doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech version.

The World Health Organization on Tuesday said a second dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine could be delayed until six weeks—rather than just three weeks—after the first dose in "exceptional circumstances."

The FDA on Monday said that altering dose schedules is a bad idea that lacks scientific backing. The FDA said doing so "may ultimately be counterproductive to public health," such as potentially making people feel more protected than they are, leading to riskier behavior. But the U.S. National Institutes of Health said this week the agency is studying whether halving Moderna vaccine doses could effectively protect more people faster.

One concern scientists have is that delaying doses could help a mutating virus build resistance, or foster more mutations in people already vulnerable to disease. Viruses routinely mutate, but new variants of the coronavirus rooted in the U.K. and South Africa have become a leading concern as they spread globally.

Scientists say the new coronavirus variant spreading across the U.K.—and already reported in dozens of other countries including the U.S—is up to 70% more transmissible than earlier versions.

"We are in possibly the worst situation in the world," said Stephen Evans, professor of pharmacoepidemiology at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. "We live on a knife edge with our hospital capacity in the U.K."

The U.K.'s medicines regulator said its advice to prolong the dosing interval for both of the U.K.'s authorized vaccines followed a thorough review of data that also drew on broader science beyond the vaccine trials. It concluded that vaccine efficacy would be maintained.

A spokeswoman for the U.K. agency said the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine showed to be 90.5% effective 12 days after the first dose, with no evidence that protection declines after 21 days.

June Raine, chief executive of the medicines regulator, said that approval of the Oxford-AstraZeneca shot and a more flexible dosing schedule would mean more people could be protected. The agency and advisers said last week they found robust reasoning for the delay of second doses.

Critics have said clinical trials of existing vaccines were largely designed to test two shots spaced three to four weeks apart, and didn't provide enough evidence of strength or duration of immunity after one shot.

An AstraZeneca spokesman said the U.K. regulator's dosing advice was "supported by strong evidence," including elimination of Covid-19 hospitalizations by one dose. The vaccine was about 70% effective at three weeks after the first dose and stretching to the time of the second dose, the regulator said. Pfizer said its vaccine hadn't been evaluated for delayed-dosing schedules. Trials showed partial protection from the vaccine appears to begin as early as 12 days after the first dose, but that the 95% maximum protection only kicks in after two doses.

"There are no data to demonstrate that protection after the first dose is sustained after 21 days," the company said. BioNTech has said data are lacking to back up delaying the vaccine's second dose.

Moderna said its trials and emergency authorization for use in the U.S. were linked to two shots of its vaccine one month apart. A company spokeswoman said it couldn't comment on



regulatory discussions involving other dosing options.

Anthony Fauci, the U.S. government's top infectious-diseases official, said last week it was possible to make the case for a longer interval between doses, but he wouldn't be in favor of doing so. However, Moncef Slaoui, chief adviser to the Operation Warp Speed vaccine program, said Sunday that federal officials were considering halving doses of Moderna's vaccine to speed up the vaccination of the public. He said the FDA would need to decide.

The European Union's medicines regulator on Wednesday cleared Moderna's shot for use across the bloc, stipulating it should be administered in two doses 28 days apart.

It said earlier that delaying second doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine without more clinical data would be "off-label use," which the agency would need more data to recommend. A spokeswoman for the regulator said trials on which the regulator based its decision involved doses 19 to 42 days apart. "Individuals may not be fully protected until seven days after their second dose of vaccine," she said.

### **Why the search for the real origin of the coronavirus is a global concern (Washington Post)**

Washington Post [1/7/2021 12:00 AM, Adam Taylor, 13480K, Neutral]

Amid untold suffering, the coronavirus pandemic, which has killed at least 1.8 million people over the past year, has been an era of remarkable scientific breakthroughs, including record-breaking vaccine development programs.

But the answer to one of the fundamental questions about the virus remains shrouded in mystery: How did a pathogen found in bats make the jump to humans, presumably in or near the Chinese city of Wuhan, where it was first detected in late 2019?

An upcoming World Health Organization mission to China intends to investigate the matter.

That is, if it ever actually sets foot in China. WHO officials have been negotiating with Beijing to allow a team of international experts to investigate the virus's origin for almost a year, but Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said this week that China was still holding up the process.

In the void of information about the virus's origin, speculation has grown. Chinese officials have suggested that the virus might not have originated in their country, while U.S. officials have said repeatedly that the virus could have leaked from a lab in Wuhan.

In such a politicized and conspiratorial atmosphere, some virologists and public health experts now have doubts that a clear picture of the virus's origins can ever be discovered. But there are still reasons to hope that the WHO mission can proceed and succeed.

In interviews, the WHO team has emphasized that it does not intend to go into the mission with preconceived notions.

"Everything is on the table," Peter Ben Embarek, a Danish food safety expert and head of the mission, told my colleague Emily Rauhala during an interview last week. The team would begin with a "basic study that will give us clues, and those clues will then help us test different hypotheses."

Ben Embarek did say that one scenario would be the “least surprising” — that the virus now known as SARS-CoV-2, or the novel coronavirus, had spread from bats to an unidentified second animal before infecting humans through zoonotic spillover.

Among scientists, this is the apparent consensus. “The virus is just like a virus we would expect to see in wild bat populations, similar viruses have jumped from non-human animals to animals in the past, so I see no reason to speculate about this any further,” Andrew Rambaut, a microbiologist at the University of Edinburgh, told Today’s WorldView last year.

If it could be proved, this jump from a bat to another animal before humans could explain how the virus made it from the Chinese province of Yunnan, where scientists found its closest relative some time ago (a virus known as SARS-CoV RaTG13), to Wuhan, in Hubei province, more than 1,000 miles away.

But a key question remains: What, and where, was the intermediary animal? Without knowing the answer, scientists have fewer tools to prevent the same thing from happening again.

Around the world, experts have already seen that the virus can spread to and from animals including minks, prompting costly mass cullings.

The WHO team is expected to focus much of its investigation on the Huanan Seafood Market in central Wuhan, to which many early coronavirus cases were linked.

The delay in finding the animal in question is not without precedent. Ben Embarek noted that it took roughly a year to link Middle East respiratory syndrome, or MERS, to dromedary camels.

While most virologists favor the theory of zoonotic spillover, other, more controversial theories abound.

In recent weeks, for example, Chinese officials have pushed the idea that the virus came from outside the country.

High-level experts such as Wu Guizhen, biosafety expert at the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, have said that focusing on wildlife may be the wrong approach. “When we were investigating the origins of the virus, we kept looking for the intermediary host,” Wu said in June. “Now, we may need to reexamine whether the virus really did come from wild animals.”

Meanwhile, a rival theory suggests that the virus could have escaped from the Wuhan branch of the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, which did conduct research on bat coronaviruses.

That idea became popular among hawkish Republican lawmakers such as Sen. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.) last year, but it never really went away: As recently as last week, deputy national security adviser Matthew Pottinger was reported to have told British lawmakers that there was “a growing body of evidence” that this was a “a credible possibility.”

The idea also gained mainstream prevalence with a recent New York Magazine story, which detailed the hypothesis that the virus had unintentionally leaked from the laboratory during controversial "gain of function" experiments, wherein viruses are manipulated to see how they can become more virulent and transmissible.

Virologists tend to be skeptical of both of these theories, noting that they come with political notions attached and that direct evidence for either is lacking.

The WHO team has pledged to consider them, but Ben Embarek said he had his doubts about both. The idea that the virus could have been imported to China a year ago was "not impossible but difficult," he said, while the leak theory was undermined by the fact that the virus was not among those in the lab's records.

In an ideal world, global powers would come together to uncover the origins of the virus.

The other theories need to be considered, cautiously, too. Even if the virus was not spread as a result of a "gain of function" experiment, its rapid spread raises questions about the risks involved in such experiments.

That's an issue that wouldn't just affect China: The United States previously blocked funding to similar experiments amid safety concerns, but resumed it in 2017.

But global efforts to understand the virus have not managed to transcend geopolitics. China has obfuscated international understanding of the virus's origins. The Associated Press reported last week that although hundreds of thousands of dollars in grants had been given out to those studying the origin of the virus, the publication of any of the findings was being tightly controlled by Chinese President Xi Jinping.

But the Trump administration has not made a cooperative effort on the issue either. Rather than support the effort for an international response to the pandemic, it pulled out of the WHO and escalated tensions with China.

By placing political rivalry above scientific discovery, both China and the United States have undermined research. Some experts think it is now unlikely that the WHO team will have the support to complete a credible investigation.

That would be a massive missed opportunity. As the WHO's own emergencies chief Mike Ryan said last week, the coronavirus is not the only pandemic humanity will face. "This is not necessarily the big one," he said.

### **China Health Expert Defends Delay in Confirming Covid's Threat (Bloomberg)**

Bloomberg [1/6/2021 4:00 PM, Staff, Neutral]

One of China's top scientists defended the country's delays in raising a global alarm in the early days of the coronavirus outbreak, saying officials were initially unsure whether the pathogen was infectious among humans because close contacts of the first patients didn't appear to fall sick.

In the first days of 2020, after the mysterious pneumonia cluster emerged in the central Chinese city of Wuhan, Chinese experts quarantined 700 close contacts of the first patients – including 400 medical workers that tended to them – but none showed signs of illness.

This led experts to hold off on concluding the coronavirus was transmissible among humans, said Liang Wannian, a senior official at the National Health Commission who oversaw China's virus response until September.

"At the beginning of January, none of the two dozen cases – and later increased to four dozens – fit those criteria," said Liang in an exclusive interview Tuesday with Bloomberg News in Beijing. "Our call at the time was that there was no clear evidence for human-to-human transmission."

It wasn't until Jan. 20 that China confirmed the virus can be passed on among humans, after some of the medical staff became infected. By then, the situation had spiraled out of control: days later, Wuhan and the broader Hubei Province were forced into a draconian lockdown as infections surged and hospitals became overwhelmed.

China has faced heavy criticism for those lost days. The initial downplaying of the severity of the pathogen's threat allowed Covid-19 to rapidly leap across borders to become a pandemic that has infected more than 86 million people and killed over 1.8 million.

It's now understood that many Covid-19 patients are asymptomatic, which may have accounted for why quarantined close contacts of those first patients did not seem to fall ill.

Liang's comments are the most detailed public statements yet from top Chinese officials at the time describing circumstances at the start of the crisis.

Some governments, however, acted much faster than China. Taiwan dodged a major outbreak by imposing border controls and other strict curbs in January.

Taiwanese health officials visited Wuhan early on and noticed that some among the first patients had no relation to the wet market suspected as the place where people were getting infected. This led them to conclude human-to-human transmission was occurring.

Faced with global acrimony, China has sought to shift the narrative over the virus's origins, with state media and government officials pushing the possibility that the pathogen didn't emerge solely in the Asian country.

Liang, a public health veteran who also oversaw Beijing's response to the SARS outbreak in 2003, echoed the theory.

He said that while much speculation focused on wild animals at the market serving as an intermediary host to the virus that was then passed to humans, most of the earliest patients were merchants selling seafood there.

"Our hypothesis was that they were mostly selling animals or meats, but that wasn't the case," Liang said. "We need to study where the virus at the Huanan Seafood Market came from: Is it from animals or from other goods transported through cold chain or carried in by people? The market is probably not at the beginning of the chain."

The lack of any definitive solutions to the mystery has fed into the political divisions created by the pandemic, particularly between China and the U.S. The Trump administration has

claimed that the virus was leaked from the Wuhan Institute of Virology, where many coronaviruses have been studied – a scenario Liang said has “zero percent” chance of being true.

China's actions haven't helped dispel the mistrust. Representatives and scientists from the World Health Organization visited Wuhan in January and February, but were barred from entering the Wuhan market to conduct investigations.

The difficulties have continued, with WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus saying Tuesday that China has delayed the travel of experts sent to the Asian country to investigate the virus's origins. Chinese officials haven't yet finalized permission to allow the WHO team to enter the country, despite months of negotiation and planning.

Liang said during the interview that the WHO's investigation would “begin very soon” in China. Among the work that will be done will be analyzing the data and samples taken from the market in Wuhan in early 2020, before it was thoroughly disinfected.

Liang, who left his job at China's National Health Commission in September and joined the newly founded Vanke School of Public Health at Tsinghua University in Beijing, rejected assertions that the country has not been forthcoming enough.

Yet he acknowledged that a lack of international exposure among many of China's public health and clinical physicians can get in the way of effective communication.

“We should step up efforts to cultivate talents and capabilities to familiarize them with international rules and enable them to communicate” and be better understood, Liang said.

## **Near East & North Africa**

### **[Morocco] Morocco approves AstraZeneca/Oxford COVID-19 vaccine – Minister (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/6/2021 4:54 PM, Staff, Neutral]

Morocco's health ministry on Wednesday approved the COVID-19 vaccine developed by AstraZeneca and Oxford University for emergency use, Health Minister Khalid Ait Taleb said.

Morocco had announced it plans to launch a free vaccination campaign targeting 25 million people, or 80% of its population.

The country has ordered 66 million doses from AstraZeneca and China's Sinopharm but has not yet received any, Ait Taleb told state 2M TV channel.

The deal with Sinopharm includes technology transfer and the setting up of a production plant in Morocco, he said.

The vaccination campaign would last three months at least in order to achieve population immunity, Ait Taleb said.

On Dec. 23, Morocco imposed a nationwide three-week curfew from 9:00 pm to 6:00 am

and ordered restaurants to shutdown in the hard-hit cities of Agadir, Casablanca, Marrakech and Tangier in an effort to control the latest outbreak.

On Wednesday, the country said it has recorded a total of 447,081 coronavirus infections including 7,000 deaths and 20,719 active cases.

The Moroccan economy is expected to have contracted by 7.2% in 2020 according to the International Monetary Fund, while the government said its 2020 fiscal deficit would surge to 7.5% due to the virus.

**[Saudi Arabia] Saudi Arabia's Extra Oil Cut to Last Two Months, Minister Says (Bloomberg)**

Bloomberg [1/6/2021 12:49 PM, Annmarie Hordern and Grant Smith, 6400K, Neutral] Saudi Arabia's additional million-barrel-a-day oil production cut will last two months, and then the supplies will be returned to the market, the kingdom said.

The extra cutback in February and March -- which comes on top of curbs Riyadh is already making with OPEC+ -- will end in the same fashion as the supplementary reduction made last summer, Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman said in a Bloomberg television interview on Wednesday.

"We gave the oil industry a wonderful present and a wonderful surprise," he said. "We're extending support and help to the industry."

OPEC+, a 23-nation alliance that spans the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries plus non-members including Russia, is already idling just over 7 million barrels a day of supply to prop up a global market ravaged by the pandemic.

Saudi Arabia was completely alone in making the decision to deepen its cut, and didn't consult with any of its fellow OPEC+ members, according to Prince Abdulaziz.

It would have been "excruciating" for many of them -- who have often struggled to implement their agreed reductions -- to make a further sacrifice, he said.

The reduction will apply to the producer's international exports, as well as its domestic sales.

The extra Saudi cut announced on Tuesday came a day after the kingdom and three other Arab states restored ties with Qatar, ending a three-year rift.

RBC Capital Markets LLC suggested the new oil policy could have been "intended as an olive branch to Washington" before the arrival of a new president who has threatened a tougher line with Riyadh.

"I fail to see any correlation between the two events," Prince Abdulaziz said. "We have always been cordial and congenial with any U.S. administration -- past, present and the future."



**[Syria] Syrian Air Defense responded to an Israeli attack over south Damascus: state TV (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/6/2021 4:48 PM, Staff, Neutral]

The Syrian Air Defense responded to an Israeli attack over the southern of the capital Damascus on Wednesday, state TV reported.

There was no immediate information of any damages or casualties.

**Europe and Eurasia****[Germany] Germanys confirmed coronavirus cases rise by 26,391 - RKI (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/6/2021 11:20 PM, Staff, 5304K, Negative]

The number of confirmed coronavirus cases in Germany increased by 26,391 to 1,835,038, data from the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) for infectious diseases showed on Thursday.

The reported death toll rose by 1,070 to 37,607, the tally showed.

**[Germany] CureVac strikes COVID-19 vaccine alliance deal with Bayer -Bild (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/6/2021 6:09 PM, Ludwig Burger, 5304K, Neutral]

German biotech firm CureVac has agreed to an alliance with drugmaker Bayer to get global support in seeking approval for its experimental COVID-19 vaccine and for distribution, the daily Bild reported.

Under the deal, Germany's Bayer will provide access to international pharmaceutical markets, as well as its global supply chain and distribution network, the tabloid newspaper reported in an excerpt made available to Reuters ahead of publication.

The report did not specify its sources and did not disclose financial terms.

Bayer and CureVac were not immediately available for comment outside regular business hours.

CureVac, which has said it was looking for a larger partner, last month started a late-stage clinical trial of its COVID-19 vaccine candidate, banking on the same technology that has allowed rivals BioNTech and Moderna to lead the development race.

The Nasdaq-listed biotech firm, which is backed by investors Dietmar Hopp, the Gates Foundation, GlaxoSmithKline and the German government, has said it aimed to produce up to 300 million doses of the vaccine in 2021 and up to 600 million in 2022.

In March last year, CureVac was at the centre of a row over alleged attempts by U.S. President Donald Trump to gain access to the vaccine but the company denied at the time having received any U.S. offers for the company or its assets.

Ahead of any regulatory approval, the European Union has secure up to 405 million doses of the immunisation, among a slew of supply deals agreed between the bloc and other vaccine developers.

Bayer's pharma unit, which is trying to build a new cell and gene therapy business, has

expertise in cancer, haemophilia, multiple sclerosis, cardiovascular diseases and women's health but not in vaccines.

The group's stock has been battered by billions of euros in writedowns at its agriculture division, litigation woes and a bleaker profit outlook, in large part related to the \$63 billion takeover of seed maker Monsanto.

**[Romania] Air Force establishes Reaper drone base in Romania (Washington Times)**  
Washington Times [1/6/2021 5:45 PM, Mike Glenn, 459K, Neutral]

The U.S. Air Force has set up a base in Romania to locate a squadron of MQ-9 Reaper unmanned aerial vehicles to conduct intelligence and reconnaissance missions in support of NATO operations.

The Reapers and about 90 Air Force personnel will be located at Campia Turzii, a Romanian air base located about 400 miles northwest of Bucharest, the country's capital. Until the squadron is fully operational, the Reapers will fall under the command of the Air Force's 31st Expeditionary Operations Group, officials said.

"The forward and ready positioning of our MQ-9s at this key strategic location reassures our allies and partners, while also sending a message to our adversaries that we can quickly respond to any emergent threat," said Gen. Jeff Harrigan, commander of U.S. Air Forces in Europe and Africa.

In January 2000, the Air Force deployed a detachment of Reapers to Romania from Poland, where they had been operating since May 2018.

"It is designed to promote stability and security within the region and to strengthen relationships with NATO allies and other countries," Air Force officials said in a statement.

With the Reaper unit being located there, Campia Turzii could become a hub for U.S. Air Force operations in southeastern Europe. The National Defense Authorization Act for 2021 included more than \$130 million to renovate the base, a former Soviet-era military installation.

"The United States and Romania enjoy a close military-to-military relationship as NATO allies and cooperate on numerous regional security officials," Air Force officials said.

In addition to their intelligence and reconnaissance missions in the region, the Reaper units also will fly "freedom of maneuver" operations and work with joint forces in the region, Air Force officials said.

**[United Kingdom] After rumors flared that Trump may be heading to Scotland on Jan. 19, the country's leader says he will not be allowed in. (New York Times)**

New York Times [1/6/2021 7:05 AM, Mark Landler and Maggie Haberman, 28290K, Neutral]  
President Trump has not said where he plans to go after leaving the White House on Jan. 20. But the leader of Scotland made clear on Tuesday that Mr. Trump is not welcome in her country.

Nicola Sturgeon, Scotland's first minister, said that under newly imposed virus restrictions,



which prohibit all but essential travel, a visit by the president to one of his Scottish golf resorts, Trump Turnberry, would not be acceptable.

Rumors that Mr. Trump would head for Scotland flared after a Scottish paper reported that an American military version of a Boeing 757 — sometimes used by Mr. Trump — was scheduled to land at a nearby airport on Jan. 19, the day before Joseph R. Biden Jr. is to be sworn in as president.

"We are not allowing people to come into Scotland," Ms. Sturgeon told reporters in Edinburgh, "and that would apply to him just as it applies to anybody else — and coming in to play golf is not what I would consider to be an essential purpose."

A plain-spoken politician, Ms. Sturgeon said she did not know what Mr. Trump's travel plans were, but that she hoped his immediate plan was to exit the White House. On Monday, she imposed a lockdown on Scotland, which, like England, is battling a surge in coronavirus cases because of a rapidly spreading new variant.

Under the new rules, people are required to stay at home and to work from there, where possible. Places of worship have been closed, and schools will operate by remote learning. Scotland has frequently moved faster and further than England to impose restrictions during the pandemic.

The White House initially declined to comment on the report, first published in Scotland's Sunday Post paper, but later denied it.

"This is not accurate," the press secretary, Kayleigh McEnany, said on Tuesday. "President Trump has no plans to travel to Scotland."

Two White House officials said that while there's been almost no concrete discussion of what Mr. Trump will do on Jan. 20 because he is so focused on trying to overturn the election results, they do not believe he is considering Scotland.

Mr. Trump has owned the Trump Turnberry resort since 2014 and has long thought of it as an escape. In November 2016, according to Anthony Scaramucci, the former White House communications director, he had planned on flying to the resort if, as he then expected, he lost the presidential race to Hillary Clinton.

## **East Asia and Pacific**

### **[Australia] Australian exports feel China chill, while housing runs hot (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/6/2021 9:02 PM, Wayne Cole, 5304K, Neutral]

Australia's trade surplus narrowed in November as China curbs on coal and farm goods took some steam out of exports, while a rebound in the domestic economy sucked in record goods imports.

Other data out on Thursday showed Australia's property market roaring back to life with approvals to build new houses hitting the highest in two decades.

Figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics showed the country's trade surplus

contracted to A\$5 billion (\$3.90 billion) in November, from A\$6.6 billion the month before.

Overall exports rose 3% in the month, mainly due to a sharp jump in gold shipments, but goods exports just to China dropped almost 10% to a four-month low.

Diplomatic tensions with Beijing have seen the Asian giant clamp down on imports of Australian coal, barley and wine. China takes fully a third of Australia's exports, with a particular hunger for the iron ore that feeds its steel and construction industries.

While earnings from the ore dipped slightly in November, they were still the second highest on record with a 12-month running total of A\$140 billion.

Strength in demand domestically saw total imports into Australia jump 10% in November, led by telecoms, cars and aircraft. Imports of goods hit a record, having more than recovered from a lockdown-driven dive in mid-2020.

Housing has been a key driver of activity as low mortgage rates helped lift prices out of a pandemic slump.

Approvals to build new dwellings rose 2.6% in November, to the highest since mid-2018, while approvals for houses alone were up by a third on a year earlier.

Analysts see the latter as a near-term positive for the economy as houses take far less time to start and construct than apartment blocks. The sector employs a multitude of small builders and tradespeople, which has a big multiplier effect on activity.

**[Australia] Australia urges China to give access to WHO coronavirus experts 'without delay' (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/7/2021 12:06 AM, Colin Packham, 5304K, Neutral]

China should give access to World Health Organization (WHO) officials investigating the origins of COVID-19 "without delay", Australia's Foreign Minister Marise Payne said on Thursday.

Earlier this week, the head of the WHO said he was "very disappointed" that China had still not authorised the entry of a team of international coronavirus experts.

"We hope that the necessary permissions for the WHO team's travel to China can be issued without delay," Payne said.

She reiterated the importance of the WHO-convened scientific study and said: "We look forward to the findings from the international field mission to China".

The novel coronavirus is believed to have first emerged in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in late 2019. It has since spread globally, infecting more than 86 million people and killing over 1.8 million, Reuters calculations show.

Australia has been a leading voice in calling for an independent inquiry into the origins of COVID-19 and, partly because of this, has seen its relations with China sour.

China, Australia's top trade partner, has since limited beef imports, imposed tariffs on Australian wine and told its millers to stop buying Australian cotton.

**[China] China reports most COVID cases in five months as Hebei infections rise (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/6/2021 10:21 PM, Jing Wang and Josh Horwitz, 5304K, Neutral]

Authorities in the capital of China's Hebei province strengthened travel restriction on Thursday to curb the spread of the coronavirus as the country reported the biggest rise in daily COVID-19 cases in more than five months.

Hebei, which entered a "wartime mode" on Tuesday, accounted for 51 of the 52 local cases reported by the National Health Commission on Thursday. This compared with 20 cases reported in the province, which surrounds Beijing, a day earlier.

Authorities in Shijiazhuang, Hebei's capital, have launched mass testing drives and banned gatherings to reduce the spread of the coronavirus.

Chinese state television reported that the city has now banned passengers from entering its main railway station. The city previously required travellers to present a negative nucleic acid COVID-19 test result taken within 72 hours before boarding a train or an airplane in the province.

Total new COVID-19 cases for all of mainland China stood at 63, compared with 32 reported a day earlier, marking the biggest rise in daily cases since 127 cases were reported on July 30.

The number of asymptomatic patients, who have been infected with the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes the disease but have yet to develop any symptoms, also rose to 79 from 64 a day earlier.

The total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in mainland China since the outbreak first started in the city of Wuhan in late 2019 now stands at 87,278 cases, while the death toll remained unchanged at 4,634.

In the city of Dalian in Liaoning province, which has reported local infections in recent days, residents in medium or high-risk areas have been barred from leaving the city. Residents in other areas were told to refrain from unnecessary trips out of Dalian.

Authorities in Guangdong province late on Wednesday reported a patient infected with a more transmissible variant of the coronavirus discovered in South Africa.

Some scientists worry that COVID-19 vaccines currently being rolled out may not be able to protect against this variant because of certain mutations that have been observed.

**[China] Coronavirus Hasn't Killed Belt and Road (Foreign Policy Magazine)**

Foreign Policy Magazine [1/6/2021 4:43 PM, Alice Han and Eyck Freymann, Neutral]

The past two years have not been kind to the Belt and Road Initiative, the signature infrastructure project of Chinese President Xi Jinping. First, the United States labeled the initiative a "debt trap"—a loan-shark scheme for luring poor countries into economic

vassalage—and began to pressure its allies and partners to stay away. Then came COVID-19. Last summer, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs admitted that as much as 60 percent of Belt and Road projects have been impacted to some degree by the pandemic. That figure is surely higher now. New Chinese overseas lending has fallen precipitously. This year, as low-income countries face a debt crunch, Chinese lenders could take enormous losses.

But the Belt and Road Initiative hasn't died of COVID-19. On the contrary, Xi and other senior Chinese officials continue to trumpet the initiative. Their messaging is highly consistent: In 2021, China will start to wind down its new investment into traditional capital-intensive infrastructure, both at home and abroad. In that way, the pandemic provides an excuse to cut losses on unviable projects. Instead, the initiative will refocus on public health (especially vaccines), green technology, and digital services. This fresh-faced Belt and Road—higher-tech and more geared toward trade than investment—will fit neatly into China's new "dual circulation" economic concept, which emphasizes Chinese domestic consumption. It will also be more attractive to partner countries than its previous incarnation.

China's plans were made clear in remarks this past November by Meng Wei, a spokesperson for the National Development and Reform Commission, which oversees Belt and Road projects. Even as she insisted that the program "has shown full resilience ... in the face of the pandemic," she mostly focused her talk on "new breakthroughs on the Health Silk Road." More and more countries, she said, "have seen the cooperation opportunities of the Health Silk Road, the Digital Silk Road, and the Green Silk Road." Ning Jizhe, the commission's vice chairman, elaborated on her comments in a follow-up speech in Hong Kong.

The "Health Silk Road"—the COVID-19 vaccine race—is Beijing's top priority. China wants to be seen as a responsible high-tech superpower that will help the world conquer the pandemic, not as a shady authoritarian regime that unleashed it. And China has a first-mover advantage in distributing its vaccines in non-Western countries. Vaccine makers Sinopharm and Sinovac are already delivering millions of doses everywhere from Indonesia to the United Arab Emirates. Throughout the pandemic, Xi positioned the Chinese vaccine as a "global public good." This implies that China will heavily subsidize foreign buyers and favor China's long-standing Belt and Road partners.

The "Green Silk Road" is another way China can burnish its international image while peddling its high-tech products abroad. China's recent pledge to become carbon neutral by 2060 doubles as an industrial policy: It plans deepen its dominance in the fast-growing overseas market for wind turbines, photovoltaics, electric vehicles, lithium-ion batteries, and smart grid technologies. In 2019, over 70 percent of solar photovoltaics manufactured worldwide were made in China. China also controls up three-quarters of global manufacturing capacity for lithium-ion battery cells. These are some of the world's fast-growing manufacturing industries: 72 percent of net new electricity generating capacity installed worldwide in 2019 was renewable.

Finally, a renewed push for the "Digital Silk Road," launched in 2016, will support the international expansion of private Chinese tech companies under close supervision by the Communist Party. China now accounts for 23 percent of global cross-border data flows—mostly thanks to use of Chinese apps and services in Japan and Southeast Asia. This is almost double the U.S. share. China is also rolling out a world-leading digital renminbi with

the goal of collecting more data and weakening the dominance of the U.S. dollar. Some Chinese tech companies are exporting "smart city technologies." Others are offering integrated city or "country-as-a-platform" solutions, which could be a euphemism for exporting China's techno-authoritarian toolkit.

By refocusing on these three priorities, the new Belt and Road Initiative will fit cleanly into China's domestic post-pandemic macroeconomic strategy, known as "dual circulation." Under the leadership of economic czar Liu He, China is finally reconsidering the debt-fueled growth model that has driven its development for over a decade. As Liu argued in the People's Daily, in 2021 China should instead focus on stimulating household consumption, including of low-value imported goods, while boosting exports of higher-tech products. Such reforms, Liu has long argued, will "de-risk" China's financial system; as Beijing's overseas debtors clamor for loan forgiveness, it makes less and less sense for China to lend indiscriminately to high-risk countries like Pakistan and Venezuela.

Most of China's trading partners find this new Belt and Road compelling—it's a formula for rapid post-pandemic economic normalization. And they are already benefiting. Chinese imports reached a historic high in 2020, thanks to a stronger renminbi. From a Chinese perspective, meanwhile, this higher-tech Belt and Road, more focused on trade than on investment, is more sustainable than the chaotic, high-risk, debt-dependent model that preceded it.

#### **[Indonesia] Indonesia to Release Bali Bombing Convict Amid Security Fears (Bloomberg)**

Bloomberg [1/6/2021 11:11 PM, Rieka Rahadiana, 6400K, Negative]

Indonesia is set to release the alleged mastermind of the deadly Bali bombings after his 15-year prison term ends Friday, raising concerns over possible security threats.

Abu Bakar Bashir was found guilty of funding an Islamic militant training camp and of links to the 2002 bombings that killed more than 200 people in Bali as well as the attack against the JW Marriott Hotel in Jakarta in 2003.

The government must monitor the 82-year-old cleric who is notorious for his jihadist ideology, according to Stanislaus Riyanta, a Jakarta-based intelligence and terrorism analyst. However, "the security threat posed by Bashir won't be as big as predicted because of his old age," he added.

President Joko Widodo has pledged to intensify the fight against all acts that threaten the country's sovereignty and security as he seeks to improve the investment climate. In 2018, the parliament approved a revision to the anti-terrorism law to let the police take preemptive action and detain people suspected of planning an attack.

At least three people linked to Bali bombings have been executed despite calls to stop the death penalty on concern the men would be painted as martyrs. Bashir, who was also convicted of treason for seeking to overthrow the government and set up an Islamic state, rejected a clemency offer from Jokowi in 2019 as it would require him to pledge loyalty to the state.

The police will undertake efforts to prevent security breaches linked to Bashir's release, spokesman Rusdi Hartono said in a briefing this week, without giving detail on the plan.

**[Indonesia] Indonesia Islamic council aims for halal ruling before mass vaccination (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/6/2021 11:06 PM, Agustinus Beo Da Costa, Stanley Widiyanto, 5304K, Neutral] Indonesia's highest Muslim clerical council aims to issue a ruling on whether a COVID-19 vaccine is halal, or permissible under Islam, before the country is due to start a mass inoculation programme using a Chinese vaccine next week.

The world's largest Muslim-majority country plans to launch vaccinations on Jan. 13 after obtaining 3 million doses from China's Sinovac Biotech.

Controversy over whether vaccines adhere to Islamic principles has stymied public health responses before, including in 2018, when the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) issued a fatwa declaring that a measles vaccine was forbidden under Islam.

"Our target is before first injections start, the fatwa has to come out then," said Muti Arintawati, an official at MUI in charge of analysing food and drugs to assess whether they are halal.

Indonesia is struggling with the worst COVID-19 outbreak in Southeast Asia and authorities are relying on a vaccine to help alleviate dual health and economic crises ravaging the country.

Asked about the risk of public resistance, a health ministry official said the government would wait for MUI's decision.

In a bid to boost acceptance, President Joko Widodo has said he will be the first to receive a vaccine shot next week.

Dicky Budiman, a researcher at Australia's Griffith University, said authorities needed to be transparent on the halal certification to reassure the public.

The New York Times reported that Sinovac told Indonesia's state-owned drugmaker Bio Farma that the vaccines were "manufactured free of porcine materials."

Bambang Heriyanto, Bio Farma's corporate secretary, confirmed receiving the statement, but said the halal status was decided by MUI. Sinovac did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Ahmad Ishomuddin, an official at Nahdlatul Ulama, Indonesia's biggest mainstream Muslim organisation, said emergency vaccines that were not halal could be used if there were no other options.

This opinion was supported by some Muslim residents in Depok, south of Jakarta.

"If indeed the vaccine contains non-halal ingredients and during the emergency period there are no other ingredients for the medicine, yes, it is permissible according to my religion," said 19-year-old student Muhammad Farrel.

Indonesia's food and drug agency (BPOM) needs to issue emergency use approval for vaccinations to start.



In neighbouring Malaysia, religious authorities have declared COVID-19 vaccines were permissible for Muslims, and mandatory for those the government has identified to receive them.

Malaysia does not require vaccines to be certified halal, though authorities are planning to introduce a certification framework this year to allay concerns among some Muslims.

**[Japan] Tokyo Faces Emergency; Allergic Reactions Rare: Virus Update (Bloomberg)**  
Bloomberg [1/6/2021 7:50 PM, Staff, 6400K, Neutral]

Japan's Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga is set to declare a state of emergency for Tokyo and surrounding prefectures from Friday, domestic media reported.

A top Chinese scientist defended delays in raising the alarm in the early days of the outbreak, saying officials were initially unsure whether the coronavirus was transmissible among humans. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said he was concerned by China's lack of cooperation with the World Health Organization, while the U.K. urged Beijing to let WHO officials into the country.

Just 1 in 100,000 people have had a severe allergic reaction to the first Covid-19 vaccine, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said. Moderna Inc.'s vaccine won European Union approval.

**China Reports More Cases in Hebei (8:48 a.m. HK)**

China reported 52 new confirmed local Covid-19 cases, 51 of which were in the province of Hebei near Beijing. The other was in the northeastern province of Liaoning.

**Suga Set to Declare Emergency (8:35 a.m. HK)**

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga is due to declare a state of emergency for Tokyo and adjacent areas, seeking to stem infections that are at record highs.

The declaration will cover the capital and the surrounding prefectures of Kanagawa, Saitama and Chiba, and is likely to be imposed from Friday until Feb. 7, public broadcaster NHK and other domestic media reported.

Suga is set to hold a news conference on the matter at 6 p.m. local time.

**National Express UK to Suspend Services (7:50 a.m. HK)**

National Express UK Coach said it will fully suspend its network of scheduled coach services from Jan. 11 amid tighter restrictions and falling passenger numbers. The company set a provisional restart date of March 1.

**Japan to Fine Violators of Shutdown Law (7:27 a.m. HK)**

Japan will revise legislation to allow imposing fines on business operators that don't obey government shutdown orders, the Mainichi reported, citing a draft of the law. Violators will face fines of up to 500,000 yen (\$4,855), the newspaper said.



### Vaccine for Police Sparks New York Dispute (6 a.m. HK)

In the latest disagreement with New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, Governor Andrew Cuomo said police officers and firefighters are not yet eligible to get the Covid-19 vaccine.

De Blasio said Wednesday that police and firefighters can begin getting vaccinated this week. In response, Cuomo said that only police and firefighters who are also emergency-care providers are eligible. The rest will be able to get vaccinated when the state starts with its next tier.

### California Has Second-Highest Death Tally (3:38 a.m. HK)

California reported 459 daily virus deaths, the second-highest tally since the pandemic began, as the most-populous U.S. state continues to battle a surge of cases that has strained health-care facilities.

Virus hospitalizations climbed 1.5% from the prior day to a record 22,820 patients, according to state health-department data Wednesday. Intensive-care units in Southern California and the San Joaquin Valley are at a surge capacity, while the San Francisco Bay area has less than 8% of its ICU beds available.

### States Urged to Widen Vaccination Pool (3:15 a.m. HK)

U.S. health officials encouraged states to start vaccinating people more widely, acknowledging that the immunization rollout has been slower than anticipated and opening the spigot for a broader range of Americans to begin getting shots.

About 5.2 million doses of Covid-19 vaccines from Pfizer Inc.-BioNTech SE and Moderna Inc. have been administered in the U.S. since mid-December, according to data compiled by Bloomberg News. That represents a fraction of the number of doses distributed so far.

### Colorado Vaccinating People Over 70 (3 a.m. HK)

Colorado has begun administering vaccines to residents ages 70 and older following last week's decision to expedite shots to seniors, who account for 78% of the state's Covid-19 deaths, Colorado Governor Jared Polis said during an online briefing.

Health officials also reported that the total number of confirmed cases of the mutation first detected in England stands at two. Colorado was the first state to report the faster-spreading mutation last week. Colorado has recorded 3,986 Covid-19 deaths since the pandemic swept into the U.S., Polis said.

### CDC Calls Severe Allergic Reactions Rare (2:10 a.m. HK)

Roughly 1 in 100,000 people have had a severe allergic reaction to the first Covid-19 vaccine, a rate that's higher than the flu vaccine but still quite rare, U.S. health officials said.

A study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released Wednesday outlined 21 cases of anaphylaxis among the first 1.9 million recipients of Pfizer Inc.'s vaccine, a rate

of 11.1 per million doses administered. No anaphylaxis deaths have been reported, the CDC said.

#### Warp Speed's Slaoui to Be Biden Consultant (2:05 a.m. HK)

Moncef Slaoui, chief scientific adviser to the U.S. Operation Warp Speed effort to develop Covid-19 vaccines, said he will stay on as a consultant to the incoming Biden administration.

Slaoui, a longtime pharmaceutical executive, had previously said he would consider returning to the private sector after two vaccines and two therapies were available. Operation Warp Speed has achieved that goal with vaccines from Pfizer Inc. and Moderna Inc. authorized for emergency use, along with antibody therapies available to treat Covid-19 cases.

#### N.Y. Triples Medical-Worker Vaccination Rate (1:15 a.m. HK)

New York's vaccination rate of medical workers has tripled so far this week, but supply is still an issue, Governor Andrew Cuomo said. The state has administered more than 31,000 doses a day for the past two days, compared with a daily rate of 10,809 over the past three weeks, Cuomo said.

New York is getting about 300,000 doses a week from the federal government. To date it has received 950,000 doses for 2.1 million health-care and nursing home staff and residents, Cuomo said.

#### Ireland Adds Extra Restrictions (12:45 a.m. HK)

Ireland tightened restrictions in a bid to contain its worst virus outbreak yet, adding extra curbs to what's already one of Western Europe's strictest lockdowns.

The government will keep most students out of schools until at least the end of the month, Prime Minister Micheal Martin said. Most construction will also halt, and click-and-collect services from non-essential stores will end. From Jan. 9, all passengers arriving at Irish airports and ports whose trip started in Great Britain or South Africa will need evidence of a recent negative virus test result.

#### U.K. Tallies Most Deaths Since April (12:30 a.m. HK)

The U.K. reported 1,041 new coronavirus deaths within 28 days of a positive test on Wednesday, the highest daily increase since late April.

A further 62,322 positive coronavirus cases were also reported on the government's dashboard, higher than a seven-day average of 55,945.

#### Moderna Shot Gains EU Approval (11:45 p.m. HK)

Moderna Inc.'s Covid-19 vaccine won European Union approval, opening the way for a second weapon in the bloc's battle against a resurgent virus.

EU leaders are facing growing pressure to speed up clearance and deployment of vaccines to tame a surge of cases across the continent. The 27-nation bloc began immunizations last week with the vaccine developed by Pfizer Inc. and BioNTech SE, but the pace of the rollout has been uneven, prompting unfavorable comparisons with the U.K. and U.S.

#### U.K. Cancels School Exams (9:45 p.m. HK)

The U.K. government confirmed that GCSE and A-level exams will be canceled this year due to the pandemic, with pupils instead being graded using teacher assessments.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson told members of Parliament it is right to “put our trust in teachers rather than algorithms” for generating grades. Earlier, Prime Minister Boris Johnson promised that England’s schools will be the first things to reopen after the national lockdown but warned that restrictions could last months.

#### Germany Urges Patience on Vaccine Rollout (8:25 p.m. HK)

Chancellor Angela Merkel’s government pleaded for patience as it pushed back against criticism that Germany bungled the rollout of a vaccine. A shortage of doses at the start of the campaign was expected and stems from production bottlenecks, Health Minister Jens Spahn said Wednesday in Berlin.

Germany’s daily Covid-19 deaths exceeded 1,000 for only the second time since the start of the pandemic, with 1,009 fatalities in the 24 hours through Wednesday morning, bringing the total to 36,757.

#### **[Japan] Japan to Declare State of Emergency Over Virus Infections (Bloomberg)**

Bloomberg [1/6/2021 9:37 PM, Staff, 6400K, Negative]

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga will be speaking in Japan later and is expected to declare a state of emergency for Tokyo and adjacent areas as coronavirus infections continue to hit record highs. Critics are calling the strategy too narrow and see restrictions lasting for months. [Editorial note: consult source link for video]

#### **[Japan] Tokyo’s Second State of Emergency (Bloomberg)**

Bloomberg [1/7/2021 12:20 AM, Staff, 6400K, Negative]

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga is considering a state of emergency in Tokyo and surrounding areas, with coronavirus cases at record highs and Japan’s vaccine rollout still more than a month away. Bloomberg’s Kurumi Mori reports from Tokyo. [Editorial note: consult source link for video]

#### **[Japan] Plan for Tokyo state of emergency moves forward as COVID-19 cases ssurge (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/6/2021 8:19 PM, Chang-Ran Kim, 5304K, Neutral]

An advisory panel approved on Thursday the Japanese government’s plan for a one-month state of emergency, beginning Friday, for Tokyo and three neighbouring prefectures in a bid to contain a surge in new coronavirus cases, now running at record levels.

The proposal for an emergency declaration running from Jan. 8 to Feb. 7 was approved at a morning meeting, Economy Minister Yasutoshi Nishimura said. Its restrictions centre on

measures to combat transmission at bars and restaurants, cited by the government as key risk areas.

Though still less seriously affected by the pandemic than many countries around the world, Japan saw new daily infections top 6,000 for the first time on Wednesday, according to public broadcaster NHK, led by 1,591 positive tests in the capital, Tokyo.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga will hold a news conference at 6 p.m. (0900 GMT) to formally announce the decision and curbs to be imposed in Tokyo and the neighbouring Saitama, Kanagawa and Chiba prefectures. But medical experts have said they fear the government's plans might be inadequate, with new cases hitting highs around the country.

Government officials have been in talks with experts this week to assess steps to try to bring the surge under control with as little damage as possible to the economy.

With an eye on the looming Tokyo Olympics and the fragile state of the world's third-biggest economy, Suga has favoured limited restrictions.

Economy Minister Nishimura said on Thursday that measures to be included in the state of emergency from Friday mean asking restaurants and bars to close by 8 p.m., requesting that residents refrain from non-urgent outings, and limiting attendance at sporting and other big events to 5,000 people. The four prefectures are home to about 150,000 restaurants and bars.

Prime Minister Suga has said shorter operating hours for such businesses had helped bring cases down in regions such as Osaka and Hokkaido.

But in a worrying sign, Osaka on Wednesday reported new cases easily topped their previous record, with 560 infections, while Hokkaido saw cases surpass 100 for the first time in a week.

"Depending on the way infections spread from here on, we may need to think about a state of emergency nationwide," Toshio Nakagawa, president of the Japan Medical Association, told a news conference on Wednesday.

#### MORE PAIN FOR RESTAURANTS, BARS

According to simulations by Kyoto University scientist Hiroshi Nishiura, daily infections in Tokyo could reach 3,500 per day by February and hit 7,000 by March without new measures. An emergency declaration would need to last at least two months to bring infections to manageable levels, he said.

Already, eating and drinking establishments are suffering.

Tokyo-based Teikoku Databank said this week bankruptcies in the sector hit an all-time high of 780 in 2020, up from the previous year's record of 732. Local media said the government would raise the maximum compensation for the restaurant business to 60,000 yen (\$582) a day from 40,000 yen.

Analysts now say the new state of emergency would probably trigger an economic

contraction in the first quarter - a reversal from a 2.1% annualised expansion forecast in a Reuters poll last month.

**[North Korea] North Korea's economy struggles as sanctions, COVID-19 weigh (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/7/2021 2:00 AM, Hyonhee Shin, Neutral]

Already suffering under stringent U.S. and U.N. sanctions, North Korea's economy faced a double whammy of severe floods and the coronavirus pandemic this year, which prompted Pyongyang to shut its border with China and ditch outside aid.

Kicking off a rare congress on Tuesday, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said his ambitious five-year economic plan unveiled in 2016 had "tremendously fell short of goals on almost every sector".

How bad is North Korea's economy? Here is what we know. After shrinking 4.1% in 2018 - its sharpest contraction in 21 years - North Korea's economy grew 0.4% in 2019, thanks to improved weather and crop yields, according to South Korea's central bank.

But the isolated economy may have contracted by 8.5% last year, Fitch Solutions said, while South Korea's Hana Institute of Finance estimated a decline of up to 10%. The biggest blow came from a drop in trade with China, its top ally which is responsible for some 90% of North Korea trade. Two-way trade plunged nearly 80% to \$534.1 million last year as of November from the same period of 2019, Chinese customs data showed.

Still, U.S. and United Nations officials have accused North Korea of clandestinely exporting coal, seafood and other commodities - mostly to China - in violation of international sanctions.

The pandemic likely had a greater impact than international sanctions, severing nearly all sources of foreign currency, including tourism, labour exports and overseas restaurants, experts say. Reduced trade also led to a lack of fertiliser and farming tools, and North Korea's chronic food shortages were exacerbated by severe floods.

There was more rain last summer than 2007 when North Korea suffered devastating floods, according to Seoul's Unification Ministry. North Korean state media reported tens of thousands of homes and vast swaths of farming areas were damaged, mostly in the breadbasket province of Hwanghae. The U.N.'s World Food Programme said in July, just before the monsoon season, that more than 10 million people, or 40% of the population, were already facing food shortages.

"A crisis could come in the spring due to a fall in outside aid and fertiliser imports as well as flood damage, which came together to inevitably cut crop harvest," said Jang Hye-won, an analyst at the Hana Institute of Finance, in a Dec. 18 North Korean economy outlook. Economic concerns triggered volatility in fuel and food prices and exchange rates in unofficial markets, where most ordinary North Koreans buy their food.

In the capital Pyongyang, the value of the North Korean won rose about 17.5% and 15.2% against the dollar and Chinese yuan between September and November, according to data compiled by Daily NK, a Seoul-based website that gathers news and information from sources inside North Korea.

Rice and gasoline prices, which are sold in local currency, plummeted more than 10% during that period in line with the appreciation of the won.

"The exchange rates likely increased because there were less foreign currencies available after trade and smuggling with China was cut and North Korea sealed off some areas where any suspected COVID-19 cases came out," said Kang Mi-jin, a defector and economist who analyses market data at Daily NK.

**[North Korea] Kim vows to bolster North Korea's military at party meeting (AP)**

AP [1/6/2021 9:17 PM, Hyung-Jin Kim, 2164K, Neutral]

North Korea leader Kim Jong Un vowed to strengthen the country's military defenses in a speech at a major ruling party meeting that provides insights into his priorities amid growing economic challenges and a U.S. presidential transition.

Kim made clear his "will to reliably protect the security of the country and people and the peaceful environment of the socialist construction by placing the state defense capabilities on a much higher level, and put forth goals for realizing it," the Korean Central News Agency said.

The state media report Thursday on Kim's speech to the Workers' Party congress the previous day didn't elaborate. North Korea has previously underscored its need for nuclear weapons and missiles as a deterrent and a pre-emptive strike capability to cope with what it describes as American hostility.

Cheong Seong-Chang, a fellow at the Wilson Center's Asia Program, said Kim's speech likely contained "sensitive contents" that can provoke the United States and South Korea.

Kim halted his country's nuclear and long-range missile tests before engaging in high-stakes summitry with President Donald Trump in 2018. But with his advancing arsenal on the negotiating table, their diplomacy fell apart due to wrangling over the weapons and U.S.-led sanctions on North Korea.

Kim since then has openly pledged to expand his nuclear capability that he says already put the American mainland within its striking range. However, he has not resumed high-profile weapons tests, which some analysts say could completely derail diplomacy with the United States and further diminish prospects for winning sanctions relief.

South Korea's spy agency told lawmakers in late November that Kim was worried about President-elect Joe Biden's expected new approach on North Korea. Biden has called Kim a "thug" and criticized his summit diplomacy with Trump.

This year's congress — the first in five years — comes as Kim faces what appears to be the toughest moment since taking power in late 2011, due to what he calls "multiple crises" caused by an economy battered by pandemic-related border closings, a series of natural disasters and the sanctions.

On the first day of the congress Tuesday, Kim admitted his previous economic development plans failed, saying that "almost all sectors fell a long way short of the set objectives." He said the congress would work out a new five-year development plan.



Kim on Wednesday presented goals for developing the North's transport, construction, commerce and other industries and proposed ways to expand production in agriculture, light industry and fishing to improve public livelihoods, KCNA said.

State media didn't provide much details on Kim's economic review. Cheong said North Korea likely didn't want foreign experts to learn its poor economic performance too easily.

### **[Philippines] Nearly Half in Philippines Don't Want Covid Vaccine, Survey Says (Bloomberg)**

Bloomberg [1/7/2021 12:21 AM, Andreo Calenzo, 6400K, Neutral]

Almost half of Philippine citizens are not inclined to get a Covid-19 vaccine mainly due to safety concerns, according to a survey by pollster Pulse Asia.

Only nearly a third of 2,400 Filipino adults polled said they are willing to be vaccinated, while 21% couldn't say yet if they want to be inoculated. Of those who don't want to get the vaccine, 84% said they are "not sure of its safety."

The level of confidence on the Covid-19 shots poses a challenge to the Southeast Asian nation's vaccine rollout, which underpins government's economic recovery outlook. The Philippines, which has the region's second-worst outbreak, is targeting to inoculate more than half of its population this year, using 148 million doses from at least seven vaccine makers.

## **South and Central Asia**

### **In Kashmir, empty grave for teenager killed by Indian forces (AP)**

AP [1/7/2021 12:29 AM, Shah Abbas, Sheikh Saaliq, Aljaz Hussain, 29K, Negative]

On a recent chilly winter day in Indian-controlled Kashmir, Mushtaq Ahmed shoveled the earth, laboriously digging a grave for his teenage son. There was, however, no body to be lowered inside.

Stunned, a group of onlookers watched in silence. But Ahmed kept digging, now knee-deep inside the half-dug grave.

Then he rose, straightening his back, and faced the crowd, enraged.

"I want my son's body," he howled. "I ask India to return my son's dead body to me."

Police said government forces fatally shot Ahmed's 16-year-old son, Athar Mushtaq, and two other young men when the men refused to surrender on the outskirts of Srinagar city on Dec. 30. They described the men as "hardcore associates of terrorists" opposed to Indian rule.

The men's families insist they were not militants and were killed in cold blood. There was no way to independently confirm either claim.

"It was a fake encounter," a grieving Ahmed cried, as the crowd that gathered around him in the graveyard in southern Bellow village shouted slogans demanding justice.



Authorities buried them at a remote graveyard 115 kilometers (70 miles) from their ancestral villages.

Under a policy started in 2020, Indian authorities have buried scores of Kashmiri rebels in unmarked graves, denying their families proper funerals. The policy has added to widespread anti-India anger in the disputed region.

India has long relied on military force to retain control over the portion of Kashmir it administers. It has fought two wars over the region with Pakistan, which also claims the mountainous territory. An armed uprising since 1989 against Indian control and subsequent Indian crackdown have killed tens of thousands of civilians, rebels and government forces.

In August 2019, India revoked Kashmir's semiautonomous status, clamped curfews and communication blackouts and arrested thousands, sparking an outrage and economic ruin. Since then, authorities have brought in a slew of laws and implemented policies that locals and critics view as part of India's settler colonialism project in the volatile region.

Kashmiris for years have accused Indian troops of targeting civilians and abuse of power with sweeping impunity. Troops have been accused of staging gunfights and then saying the victims were militants to claim rewards and promotions.

Athar's killing came months after a rare admission of wrongdoing by the Indian military, which conceded that soldiers exceeded their legal powers in the deaths of three local men it initially described as Pakistani terrorists. Police concluded that an Indian army officer and two civilian "army sources" killed the three laborers "after stripping them of their identities and tagging them as hardcore terrorists." The officer has been charged with murder.

Kashmiris' fears and rage over such incidents have been exacerbated by the new policy of not identifying those killed or their associates and refusing to return their bodies to their families.

Authorities say the policy is aimed at stopping the spread of the coronavirus, but rights activists and residents say it is an attempt by the government to avoid large funerals that fuel more resentment against India.

The inspector-general of police, Vijay Kumar, said in a recent interview with The Hindu newspaper that the policy "not only stopped the spread of COVID infections but also stopped the glamorizing of terrorists and avoided potential law and order problems."

Authorities, however, have not stopped state-sponsored funerals for government forces killed in combat with the rebels.

"Not returning the bodies of the slain is a humiliation to humanity," said Zareef Ahmed Zareef, a civil rights campaigner and prominent Kashmiri poet.

Distraught families of militants and civilians killed by government forces have repeatedly demanded that Hindu authorities allow final rituals and proper burials at ancestral villages under the Muslim faith. The pleas have been repeatedly denied. Families have sometimes discreetly visited the remote graveyards and marked the graves of their kin with stones and

scribbled their names with paintbrushes.

Until last April, Indian forces had handed the bodies of rebels to their relatives for burial. Since then, according to police, 158 militants have been buried at isolated locations.

Athar's body was the last one denied to relatives last year. On Dec. 30, when Ahmed received news of his son's killing, he rushed to a police facility in Srinagar where Athar's body was being kept. When police later transported the body, along with those of the two other men, to a remote mountain for burial, Ahmed followed.

Along the way, he was stopped multiple times but begged Indian forces to let him see his son's face one last time, he said. When he finally reached the burial site, he was shattered.

Ahmed said the graves had been dug by an earthmover, contrary to traditional practice in which they are dug by shovels and generally marked with marble gravestones.

"They were not graves but hurriedly dug pits," he said. "I myself lowered my son into that pit."

Experts and rights activists say the refusal to return bodies to families is a crime.

"It is an outright violation of international law and against the Geneva Conventions," said Parvez Imroz, a prominent human rights lawyer. "This is even against local laws."

Athar's killing and remote burial drew public mourning, with thousands demanding "return the bodies" on social media.

At his family's simple house in Bellow, mourners surrounded Athar's grieving mother. His sister cried, "Mother, have patience. He will return. He has promised me he will."

At the graveyard, the grave Ahmed dug for his son remained empty.

**[India] Farmers block expressway near Delhi to protest Modi's new laws (Reuters)**  
Reuters [1/7/2021 2:30 AM, Devjyot Ghoshal, Neutral]

Tens of thousands of farmers on tractors occupied a stretch of an expressway on the periphery of the Indian capital New Delhi on Thursday in one of the biggest shows of strength since they began a sit-in against deregulation of farm markets more than a month ago.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has held several rounds of talks with the farmers to placate them, offering concessions on the three laws it passed last year to bring private investment into the country's antiquated agriculture markets.

But the farmers have resisted the overtures and been camped at an interstate border near the village of Kundli outside Delhi for more than 40 days demanding the government withdraw the laws.

On Thursday, the protesters mostly from the Sikh-dominated northern state of Punjab, which is one of the country's leading producers of wheat and rice, took to the highway.

Turbaned young men and elderly farmers with flowing beards rode a convoy of tractors numbering in the thousands, some with loud music blaring.

There was no sign of any police presence.

"We want Modi to repeal the three laws," said Rajvinder Singh, 35, a farmer from Punjab's Gurdaspur district.

He said the rally was a way to build pressure on the government in the lead-up to India's Republic Day on Jan. 26 when the farm unions have threatened to march on to the centre of the capital if the laws are not revoked by then. Farmers fear that the deregulation under which food processors and big retailers can directly buy produce from them will eventually replace government-regulated wholesale markets where they are guaranteed a minimum price for their produce.

The government says the state-regulated market yards will continue alongside the new ones and has offered to give written assurances to the farmers they will continue to get a minimum price.

On Friday, the two sides will sit down for another round of talks.

## Western Hemisphere Affairs

### **[Brazil] Brazil ready to begin COVID-19 vaccinations in Jan, health minister says (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/6/2021 7:27 PM, Gabriel Stargardter, 5304K, Neutral]

Brazil is ready to the country's begin vaccinating its population against COVID-19 this month, Health Minister Eduardo Pazuello said on Wednesday, adding the country has assured a total of 354 million vaccine doses for 2021.

Pazuello, who is under pressure for a slow rollout, added that President Jair Bolsonaro had on Wednesday signed a series of executive orders to streamline vaccine operations. He also said the government was in talks with Pfizer to overcome issues over purchasing its vaccine.

### **[Canada] Canada to vaccinate federal inmates against COVID-19 starting Friday (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/6/2021 7:08 PM, Anna Mehler Paperny, David Ljunggren, 11261K, Neutral]

Canada will start inoculating its federal prison inmates against COVID-19 starting Friday, protecting a vulnerable population that many jurisdictions have struggled to keep safe during the pandemic, a government statement said on Wednesday.

Correctional Service Canada said in the statement it would start with 600 elderly and medically vulnerable inmates, followed by more when additional vaccine becomes available.

Three inmates have died due to COVID-19 as of Jan. 5 and there are 144 active cases, out of about 12,500 federal inmates in the country, according to government data.

Inmates are vulnerable not only because they live in high-risk settings in what are often

older and poorly ventilated buildings but also because they often have comorbidities that worsen prognosis should they fall ill, public health experts say.

Public Safety Minister Bill Blair said the government was following the advice of an advisory committee which said people congregated together in places such as prisons were at higher risk.

But the move came under fire from the federal opposition Conservative Party leader Erin O'Toole, who posted on Twitter that, "Not one criminal should be vaccinated ahead of any vulnerable Canadian or front line health worker."

The president of the union representing Canadian correctional officers said he supported prioritizing inmates but wanted vaccines now for his members, as well. The Corrections Canada statement said prison staff would get inoculated through their province or territory and that the agency is working closely with these governments to ensure health workers in prisons are vaccinated in the first phase.

Many jurisdictions have struggled to keep people behind bars safe during the pandemic. According to an October report from the National Academies Press, COVID-19 infection rates among the incarcerated population were nearly five times higher than that of the general U.S. population.

Vaccination is "a really important initiative to address the higher risk of transmission in prisons and the fact that there are multiple active outbreaks in prisons," Dr. Farah Mawani, a social and psychiatric epidemiologist with Unity Health Toronto.

### **[Canada] Quebec Imposes Curfew as ICU Cases for Covid-19 Near Peak Levels (Bloomberg)**

Bloomberg [1/6/2021 6:13 PM, Sandrine Rastello, 6400K, Neutral]

Quebec is implementing a curfew, Canada's first of the Covid-19 pandemic, and adding new restrictions on business as it battles a rise in virus-related hospitalizations.

The nightly curfew across starts Jan. 9 and will last nearly a month, Premier Francois Legault said at a news conference Wednesday. His government also asked manufacturers and builders to curb activity by delaying the production of non-essential goods. Restaurants, retailers and many other industries are already closed or operating under tight limits.

The announcement brings Canada's second-largest province closer to the measures it took in March, which shut down about 40% of the economy for eight weeks, according to government estimates.

"The situation in our hospitals is critical, especially in Montreal. There are still too many visits in homes," Legault said. Only sparsely-populated areas of the province's north are exempt from the curfew.

Quebec has been the worst-hit Canadian province in the pandemic. With 8.5 million people, it accounts for 23% of the country's population but more than half of its virus deaths. The province had 202 virus patients in intensive care units as of Tuesday, more than double the number on Dec. 1 and close to peak levels of the spring.

After loosening restrictions in May, the government imposed new ones in October to quell a second wave of infections. Last month Legault tightened them further, extending school closures and limits on retailers. It hasn't worked the way the government hoped.

The steady rise in hospital cases has been upsetting to Legault, who was forced to abandon plans to allow limited Christmas gatherings. The decision to impose a daily curfew from 8 p.m. to 5 a.m. marks a shift to a more coercive approach after months of exhorting people to stay home.

"The next month will be critical. We are in a race against the clock," Legault said. "We lost that race a bit in the past weeks but we are capable of winning it. That's why we're announcing a shock therapy."

It's not just Quebec. Except for the more isolated Atlantic provinces, Canada has struggled to get a grip on the virus in recent months. The country has suffered 44 deaths per 100,000 people, on par with Germany, according to data from Johns Hopkins University. The ratio is 2 for South Korea, one of the most successful countries at handling the pandemic, and 109 for the U.S.

#### **[Mexico] Mexico's top diplomat discusses migration with US official (AP)**

AP [1/6/2021 10:04 PM, Staff, 29K, Positive]

Mexico's top diplomat said Wednesday he discussed immigration policy with U.S. President-elect Joe Biden's pick for national security adviser, Jake Sullivan.

Foreign Relations Secretary Marcelo Ebrard said the two spoke via internet.

Ebrard's office said that the talk focused on "a shared vision on the issue of migration" and that the two discussed ways to make migration "safe, orderly and regular."

"Attending to the structural causes of migration is a priority shared" by the two administrations, Ebrard said.

He said he and Sullivan agreed to work on "a regional answer centered on economic development" in areas that migrants come from.

#### **[Mexico] Mexico shares Biden focus on migration's root causes, ministry says (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/6/2021 11:07 PM, Trevor Hunnicutt, Dave Graham and Frank Jack Daniel, 5304K, Neutral]

Mexico's foreign ministry said on Wednesday that U.S. President-elect Joe Biden's team shares its vision of international aid and economic development for Central America to achieve orderly and safe migration.

Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard and Jake Sullivan, Biden's pick for national security adviser, agreed during a video meeting that both governments will prioritize the structural causes of migration, the Mexican statement said.

Sullivan discussed border issues with Ebrard, a Biden aide said. Democrat Biden, who takes office on Jan. 20, has promised voters a more humane and multilateral approach to

immigration policy than Republican President Donald Trump, who took a harder line than previous administrations.

"Attention to the structural causes of migration is a priority shared by the government of Mexico and by the next administration ..." the ministry said in the statement.

"The vision focuses on the protection of the human rights of migrants and refugees, as well as on a regional response focused on economic development."

On Dec. 19, Biden's team said that he and Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador vowed in a phone call to hone a "new approach" to migration issues that "offers alternatives to undertaking the dangerous journey to the United States."

Border arrests reached the highest level in nearly two years in December, driven by coronavirus lockdowns and devastating hurricanes in Central America.

Mexican officials have signaled they will not relax tough enforcement measures aimed at stopping caravans of migrants making their way to the U.S. border. One such caravan is planned to leave Honduras next week.

The latest call was designed to start efforts to build a joint migration policy soon after inauguration day, according to two Biden aides.

The U.S.-Mexico relationship frayed during the last four years over Trump's demands that the Mexican government do more to reduce the flow of U.S.-bound migrants.

### **[Mexico] Mexican with allergic reaction after Pfizers COVID-19 vaccine still hospitalized (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/6/2021 8:30 PM, Adriana Barrera, 5304K, Neutral]

A Mexican doctor who had a serious allergic reaction after receiving Pfizer Inc and BioNTech's vaccine against COVID-19 remains hospitalized and has not fully recovered muscle strength, health authorities said on Wednesday.

The 32-year-old internist, who got the vaccine on Dec. 30, had several seizures in the following days and is being treated in a specialized hospital that is part of Mexico's social security institute IMSS.

The health ministry's initial diagnosis after the reaction was encephalomyelitis. Encephalomyelitis is an inflammation of the brain and spinal cord. The ministry has said the doctor has a history of allergic reactions.

Victor Hugo Borja, an IMSS director, said the doctor has so far responded favorably to treatment, has had no new seizures, and recovered some of the muscle strength lost.

"Today, she's been able to sit up and it's possible she'll be discharged in the following days," said Borja at a news conference.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said on Wednesday it was carefully monitoring allergic reactions to the coronavirus vaccines from Pfizer Inc and Moderna Inc and urged individuals who had a serious reaction not to get the second dose.

A study published on Wednesday in the CDC's weekly report on death and disease looking at cases between Dec. 14 and Dec. 23 identified 21 cases of anaphylaxis after the administration of 1,893,360 doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine.

Doctors are still studying whether the doctor's seizures and decreased muscle strength are related to the vaccine against COVID-19 or previous conditions. The ministry has said there is no evidence from clinical trials that anyone has developed an inflammation of the brain after the vaccine's application.

Pfizer said it is aware that the health ministry is studying the case and vowed to continue to collaborate "with any information that is requested from us."

Mexico started its COVID-19 vaccination plan before Christmas, giving frontline workers priority.

## **Sub-Saharan Africa**

### **[Central African Republic] Central African Republic: A disputed election and a strange rebel alliance (Yahoo News/BBC)**

Yahoo News/BBC [1/6/2021 9:34 PM, Jack Losh, 11261K, Negative]

After an election marred by violence, the president of the Central African Republic (CAR) has won five more years in power. But his victory is contested and the fate of the country balances on a knife edge.

A disparate jumble of armed groups formed an alliance last month and launched an offensive in a bid to disrupt this crucial vote.

Since the election, fighting has continued in towns nationwide, with the rebels threatening to march on the capital, Bangui. So far, they have been kept away by United Nations peacekeepers, CAR's armed forces and hundreds of reinforcements from Russia and Rwanda.

The political opposition has said Faustin-Archange Touadéra's victory lacks legitimacy and are demanding a re-run.

While voters turned out in force in Bangui and some other towns, militants launched a violent and disruptive campaign of intimidation elsewhere - burning ballot boxes, ransacking polling stations and preventing the vote in over 40% of electoral districts in this chronically unstable country.

The rebel alliance calls itself the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC). This formation is new but the armed groups within it have been around for many years.

With origins stretching back to the insurgencies of the 2000s, many of them were involved in the civil war that erupted in 2013 albeit in a different guise. That year, mainly Muslim rebel groups from the lawless north banded together into the so-called Seleka coalition and ousted then-President Francois Bozizé.



The Seleka's brutal rule prompted the creation of another group of militants known as the Anti-Balaka, drawn mainly from Christian and animist communities. These militias fought back against the rebels and carried out reprisals against CAR's minority Muslim population, pushing the country deeper into bloodshed.

The Seleka coalition eventually splintered into various rebel factions, often drawn along ethnic lines and known by a bewildering array of acronyms - the FPRC, the MPC, the UPC, 3R and so on. Along with Anti-Balaka militias, these armed groups have terrorised civilians for years, clashing over the control of mineral resources, such as diamonds and gold, and cattle migration routes, and occupying some two-thirds of the country.

Despite sporadic violence, a peace deal signed between CAR's government and 14 rebel groups in 2019 raised hopes of stability. But last month, these armed groups - despite supposedly being sworn enemies - said they were uniting "into a single entity" and launched a new uprising.

It is not clear exactly why these rival armed groups have banded together, except that rebellions in CAR have a history of being used as a tool to extract concessions from the government and to secure lucrative official positions.

A key figure amid this mayhem is Francois Bozizé - a former general who seized power in a 2003 coup before being toppled by Seleka rebels a decade later. He fled the country, allegedly supporting the Anti-Balaka's rampage from afar, which resulted in UN sanctions against him, although he has denied controlling the group.

Despite an international warrant for his arrest, the 74-year-old Mr Bozizé slipped back into CAR in late 2019 after years in exile and announced his presidential candidacy last July. The country's top court barred him in December from running, saying he did not satisfy the "good morality" requirement for candidates.

Soon afterwards, shortly before the election, the new insurrection erupted. CAR's government and the UN accuse Mr Bozizé - whose location is unknown - of colluding with armed groups to seize power. He denies the accusation. But if true, his alleged alliance with the same rebels that deposed him years earlier would mark an extraordinary twist in this long-running, unpredictable drama.

A former maths lecturer and vice-chancellor at the University of Bangui, Mr Touadéra, 63, served as prime minister under Mr Bozizé between 2008 and 2013. He came to power as president in 2016, running on a ticket to unite CAR and disarm the rebels, but has struggled to wrest control of vast swathes of the country from them, despite enjoying the backing of a UN peacekeeping mission and Russian weapons and personnel.

The signing of the 2019 peace deal was regarded as a positive step by his administration, although the agreement was criticised for its ambiguity over securing post-conflict justice.

A subsequent presidential decree sparked controversy by naming three of the country's most powerful rebel commanders as "special military advisers" within the government. These were essentially token positions, but still carried significance. Human rights groups condemned the decision to bestow official positions on these warlords, whose groups have committed widespread atrocities, and warned against handing them any amnesties.

Russia says it is responding to a legitimate request for security assistance from the CAR government.

Besides gaining access to CAR's mineral riches, Russia's aim of forging new partnerships and rekindling Cold War-era alliances across Africa is seen as a bid to project a great power image and implant itself into areas of Western interest. Its involvement in CAR is a threat to France's influence in CAR, its former colony.

With Russia's economy in long-term decline, Moscow is seeking political influence and new markets in several African countries through arms, construction and energy deals, analysts say.

Violence is likely to continue but observers don't expect a repeat of 2013's total collapse into anarchy.

Security has been strengthened by a 14,000-strong UN peacekeeping mission and an army bolstered by Russian arms and training, as well as private military contractors sent by Moscow - none of which were present seven years ago.

Nor does the new alliance appear to have the popular support or uniting agenda to help this mishmash of former rivals overthrow the government.

But it is hard to see these armed groups laying down their arms yet. Incentives to continue the unrest include seizing new areas to extort funds and controlling the main route into neighbouring Cameroon, thus securing leverage in future peace negotiations.

Mr Touadéra faces serious challenges but is unlikely to be ousted. "Touadéra's vote was the expression of people fed up with armed groups who want to impose a setback for democracy," said Fridolin Ngoulou, a Central African journalist. "Touadéra will retain power as the entire international community supports these elections."

Yet the incumbent's authority is certainly dented, not only by reduced voter turnout but also by the embarrassment of staking his first term on making peace with rebel warlords - sometimes through controversial deals - only for them to turn on him.

Mr Bozizé's shadowy influence is another threat, although his next move is hard to predict. "It is a very risky game of balance that the president needs to play," said Tity Agbahey, of Amnesty International's West and Central Africa office.

The latest flare-up is also a disappointment for the UN peacekeeping mission which has invested huge sums towards re-establishing state control over the country.

"The slow process by which the UN has been helping the central government extend some sort of authority has been set back quite badly," said Paul Melly, a consulting fellow at the Chatham House think-tank. "In a negative scenario, instability would splutter on and not get any better."

CAR is a diverse country, populated by a multitude of different communities, from Bayaka "pygmies" in the Congo Basin to ethnic Peul (Fulani) nomads in northern arid areas. Before

the war, the Christian majority and Muslim minority had coexisted in relative peace in this large but sparsely populated country of 4.7 million people.

Daily life, though, is tough for many. Ranked among the world's least developed countries, CAR is not just enmeshed in a security crisis; it faces a grave humanitarian emergency.

Protracted conflict has left more than 1.2 million people - a quarter of the population - displaced and impedes the work of aid organisations. Malnutrition rates have continued to rise, with 1.9 million people enduring crisis levels of food insecurity. Many face poor access to education, healthcare, hygiene and other basic services.

CAR's civilian population has faced decades of war crimes and human rights abuses. Thousands died in the recent civil war which pushed the country to brink of genocide, while the accompanying humanitarian crisis has stretched resilience to breaking point in the hardest-hit areas. The country cannot afford the devastation of another full-blown conflict.

While CAR occupies a marginal position on the world stage, that is precisely why it is so crucial to help the country through this latest crisis, analysts say. Such support would be powerful proof of the international community's commitment to nudging even the most geo-strategically peripheral countries towards stability.

Allowing the resurgent armed groups to block the election process would undermine the African Union principle that "you can't take power permanently by the gun," said Melly. "The consequences for the whole policy approach would be catastrophic."

Ending impunity for abuses is regarded as key to CAR's sustainable peace. As part of efforts to bring war criminals to justice, a new tribunal in Bangui - known as the Special Criminal Court - promises to break new ground as the first UN-backed court founded in a country where fighting continues. Trials are yet to commence but, if successful, this institution could offer a new model of justice to other hotspots.

"The country is really at some kind of crossroads," said Agbahey. "Everything is there for the change to happen. There is a judicial momentum. For once, there is a feeling that people could have accountability. But it is still so fragile."

#### **[Niger] Niger's leader: Fragility of nations must be top priority (AP)**

AP [1/6/2021 9:33 PM, Edith M. Lederer, 11261K, Neutral]

Days after attacks on two villages killed more than 100 civilians in his African nation, Niger's president said Wednesday that tackling the growing fragility of nations must be a top priority of the 21st century.

President Mahamadou Issoufou urged international help so countries in Africa's Sahel and Lake Chad Basin can build stronger democratic institutions and strengthen their security and defense capabilities.

He said the massacre near Niger's border with Mali is a stark reminder that "what is happening in the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin ... strikes the entire international community."

Speaking at a virtual high-level meeting of the U.N. Security Council, Issoufou said that

"fragile conflicts are increasingly the battleground for political rivalries." He said terrorism, pandemics, forced displacements, disasters and famine "often take root in fragility."

Niger and neighboring Burkina Faso and Mali are battling the spread of deadly extremist violence, including from the Islamic State group and al-Qaida, which has killed thousands of people and displaced hundreds of thousands despite the presence of thousands of regional and international troops. Niger must also deal with instability spilling over from Nigeria, exacerbated by local tensions.

The deadly attacks on the western villages of Tchombangou and Zaroumdareye took place Saturday, the same day that Niger announced its presidential election will go to a second round on Feb. 21. Issoufou is stepping down after two terms and the West African nation, which has seen four coups, could see its first democratic transition of power since independence from France in 1960.

The next president will have to deal with major problems including extremism, poverty, displacement and corruption. Issoufou told the council: "We need as broad involvement as possible of the international community to the international coalition to counter terrorism in the Sahel."

Moussa Faki Mahamat, chair of the African Union Commission, said that "it is in Africa that the issue of state fragility and peacekeeping issues are most acute," pointing especially to the spate of attacks in the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin, including the weekend attacks in Niger.

Tunisian President Kais Saied, whose country holds the Security Council presidency this month and organized the meeting, said that "peacebuilding efforts need to focus on stability and progressively addressing fragility so development and prosperity can be achieved."

He stressed the importance of promoting human rights, democracy, good governance and inclusive participation in fragile nations.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said, "Conflict continues to breed poverty and foster institutional fragility, which in turn decreases the resilience of these societies and the prospects for peace."

"By 2030, the World Bank estimates that two thirds of the world's extreme poor will live in fragile or conflict-affected countries," he said.

The U.N. chief quoted the World Bank's Fragility and Conflict Report, which said one in five people in the Middle East and North Africa "lives in close proximity to a major conflict." This has led humanitarian needs to multiply, "reaching the highest levels since the Second World War," Guterres said.

The number of people at risk of starvation has doubled, international methods to manage conflicts "have been stretched to the breaking point" resulting in a number of countries being caught in a vicious cycle, he said.

Guterres said the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these trends, with extreme poverty rising for the first time in 22 years in 2020, and the contraction of economic activity in fragile

and conflict-affected settings "expected to push an additional 18 million to 27 million people into extreme poverty."

Former Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011, told the council, "You have the power in your hands to help to end the vicious cycle of conflict, displacement and despair so many have faced for so many years."

She urged the U.N.'s most powerful body to look beyond its narrow interests -- which have blocked action on Syria and other conflicts -- "and recognize that peaceful, just and inclusive societies have benefits far beyond their own borders."

She warned that "unattended issues in society fester and deepen fragility." She strongly backed early interventions to prevent conflicts and U.N. peacekeeping operations that are flexible enough to change with challenging circumstances to help restore stability in conflict countries.

Many peacekeeping operations cost hundreds of millions of dollars annually, and some more than a billion dollars, and Sirleaf asked the 15 council members to consider a new idea for spending some of that money.

"What would result if some 25% of financing for peacekeeping were allocated to a technical training contingent of peacekeepers dedicated to training young, unemployed potential militants?" Sirleaf asked.

#### **[South Africa] South African Insurers to Pay for 14 Million Covid-19 Vaccines (Bloomberg)**

Bloomberg [1/6/2021 2:11 PM, Antony Sguazzin, Roxanne Henderson, 6400K, Positive] South African medical insurers will pay for a Covid-19 vaccine for as many people who don't have coverage as they have members and expect the program to cost as much as 7 billion rand (\$464 million).

The subsidy will mean that including medical aid members the companies will finance vaccines for 14 million adults in the country of 60 million people, Ryan Noach, the chief executive officer of Discovery Health Ltd., said in an interview on Wednesday. Discovery has already set aside the money, he said.

"The ultimate effect is the one-to-one cross subsidy," he said.

The plan is being led by Adrian Gore, the CEO and co-founder of Discovery Ltd., the parent of Discovery Health and Africa's biggest health insurer, after he was approached by South African Health Minister Zweli Mkhize.

South Africa's government is facing increasing criticism from labor unions, health officials and opposition parties for its failure to procure vaccines even as at least 37 nations begin inoculating their populations.

The country has yet to conclude any direct supply agreements with pharmaceutical companies. It expects to begin receiving shots in the second quarter to cover a 10th of its citizens through the Covax initiative, which is trying to ensure equitable access to vaccines.

With more than 1.1 million confirmed infections and over 30,000 deaths, South Africa is Africa's worst-hit nation. The economy is estimated by the government to have contracted by the most in nine decades last year as a result of a lockdown related to the outbreak. Some of those measures are still in place.

"There is no more important health care requirement than the vaccination of all South Africans," Noach said. "It has economic benefits to the country in restoring some normality to business and trade. It's far cheaper than a lockdown to pay for the vaccines."

Pharmaceutical companies will only negotiate directly with governments. Still, the procurement may ultimately be handled on behalf of the government by the Solidarity Fund, a charity that collected money from some of the country's richest people and biggest companies, he said.

"We will take whatever reliable vaccine we can get and whatever comes along first," Noach said.

## **Network TV News Coverage**

### **Justice Department Says 3% of Emails Compromised in Breach of Government Systems (FOX News)**

(B) FOX News [1/6/2021 10:04 PM, Staff]

The Justice Department says about 3% of its emails could be compromised as part of a massive breach of federal government agencies that US officials have linked to Russia. No classified systems are believed to have been affected.

### **World Leaders React to Violence in DC (NBC Nightly News With Lester Holt)**

(B) NBC Nightly News With Lester Holt [1/6/2021 6:50 PM, Staff]

World leaders are calling on President Trump to condemn the violence in DC. There were dozens of reactions from world leaders, expressing shock and horror. They are all saying that this was an attack on Democracy. Prime Minister Boris Johnson said, "It is now vital that there should be a peaceful and orderly transfer of power." Germany's Foreign Ministry said, "The enemies of Democracy will be pleased at these unbearable images." The Secretary General of NATO said, "Shocking scenes in Washington, DC. The outcome of this democratic election must be respected." Leaders were placing blame directly on President Trump. The Prime Minister of Sweden tweeted that President Trump and many members of Congress have a great responsibility for what is happening now. A spokesman for the President of South Africa said simply, "Pray for America."

### **[Russia] Russia Sees US Chaos as Win to Years Long Effort to Sow Distrust, Misinformation (ABC World News Tonight With David Muir)**

(B) ABC World News Tonight With David Muir [1/6/2021 8:43 PM, Staff]

Intelligence agencies report that the goal of Vladimir Putin starting more than five years ago, even more than helping elect Donald Trump president, was sowing chaos and division across America. Today has been a great victory for him. Putin saw a vulnerability to misinformation, which as a former KGB agent he was an expert at, and he has pursued this for years. Putin has said that he hates what the United States stands for.



## Headlines

### The Washington Post

(1/7/2021 6:00 AM)

Congress closes in on affirming Biden win following riot at U.S. Capitol

Kid glove treatment of pro-Trump mob contrasts with strong-arm police tactics against Black Lives Matter, activists say

Capitol breach prompts urgent questions about security failures

CDC foresees spread in U.S. of highly contagious coronavirus variant

Justice Department also hacked by Russians in the ongoing cyberespionage campaign, officials say

### The New York Times

(1/7/2021 6:00 AM)

A Mob and the Breach of Democracy: The Violent End of the Trump Era

House Debates Pennsylvania Electors, Further Delaying Certification

U.S. Is Blind to Contagious New Virus Variant, Scientists Warn

As the D.C. police clears the Capitol grounds, the mayor extends a public emergency.

### The Wall Street Journal

(1/7/2021 6:00 AM)

Congress Resumes Debate After Rioters Storm Capitol

'The Protesters Are in the Building.' Inside the Capitol Stormed by a Pro-Trump Mob

A Single Day Shakes Two Presidencies, Two Parties and One Nation to the Core

SolarWinds Hack Breached Justice Department System

### ABC News

(1/7/2021 6:00 AM)

Members of Trump Cabinet discussing invoking 25th Amendment: Sources

Some GOP senators reverse objections to Electoral College certification after protesters storm Capitol

US holds first oil lease sale for Alaska's Arctic refuge

### CBS News

(1/7/2021 6:00 AM)

Trump Cabinet members discuss possibility of invoking 25th Amendment

Key Republican senators withdraw objections to Electoral College count after Capitol siege

4 dead after Trump supporters storm U.S. Capitol

### CNN

(1/7/2021 6:00 AM)

Congress reconvenes to certify Biden's win after rioters breach Capitol

US Capitol secured, 4 dead after rioters stormed the halls of Congress to block Biden's win

Rioters breached US Capitol security on Wednesday. This was the police response when it was Black protesters on DC streets last year

### Fox News



(1/7/2021 6:00 AM)

Congress reconvenes following chaos at US Capitol

White House sees resignations over Capitol building riots

Democratic Rep. Cori Bush calls for expulsion of GOP lawmakers who 'incited this domestic terror attack'

### **NBC News**

(1/7/2021 6:00 AM)

Senate rejects first GOP attempt to block Joe Biden's electors after day of chaos

4 dead, Congress evacuated, National Guard activated after pro-Trump rioters storm

Capitol

World leaders express 'shock' after pro-Trump rioters storm Capitol

## **Washington Schedule**

### **President**

The White House

(1/7/2021 6:00 AM)

The President has no public events scheduled today.

### **Vice President**

The White House

(1/7/2021 6:00 AM)

See source link. Schedule not yet available.

### **Senate**

Senate

(1/7/2021 6:00 AM)

There are no public events scheduled today.

### **House of Representatives**

House of Representatives

(1/7/2021 6:00 AM)

There are no public events scheduled today.

**{End of Report}**



# STATE DEPARTMENT NEWS CLIPS

Prepared for the U.S. Department of State

By TechMIS

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**TO: State Department & Staff**

**DATE: Monday, January 11, 2021 5:00 AM ET**

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## Secretary of State

### China-Taiwan Tensions to Rise as Trump Scraps Decades-Old Rules (Bloomberg)

Bloomberg [1/10/2021 8:51 PM, Staff, 6400K, Neutral]

China's state-run media called for retaliation after the Trump administration removed decades-old restrictions on interactions with Taiwan officials just days before President-elect Joe Biden takes office, one of its biggest moves yet to reshape U.S. ties with the Asian democracy.

The Communist Party-backed Global Times warned that Secretary of State Michael Pompeo's moves were pushing the world's biggest countries toward conflict. Hu Xijin, the newspaper's editor-in-chief, said on Weibo China had a "precious window of opportunity for mainland China to teach a heavy lesson to the 'Taiwan independence' forces" and re-establish "strategic leverage" in the Taiwan Strait.

"While Pompeo tries to cross Beijing's red line on national sovereignty and territorial integrity, he should not expect that China will sit back and do nothing," said a commentary published in the official Xinhua News Agency on Sunday. "Those political clowns will be punished for what they have done to harm China's core interests."

China's Foreign Ministry, which opposes official U.S.-Taiwan interactions, has yet to comment on Pompeo's moves. It has condemned the trip this week by Kelly Craft, who will become the first U.S. ambassador to the United Nations to visit Taiwan since it was

excluded from the global body in 1971, calling her visit "a breach of the One-China principle" and accusing Pompeo of "staging a final show of madness" to "sabotage China-U.S. relations."

The U.S. guidelines on meetings with Taiwanese officials, which are updated periodically, were put in place after its recognition of China in 1979 to distinguish interactions with Taiwan from those with official diplomatic partners. They required written permission from the State Department for diplomats and military personnel above a certain rank to visit Taiwan, and restricted the venues where meetings with Taiwan representatives could take place.

"For several decades the State Department has created complex internal restrictions to regulate our diplomats, service members, and other officials' interactions with their Taiwanese counterparts," Pompeo said in a statement Saturday in Washington. "The United States government took these actions unilaterally, in an attempt to appease the Communist regime in Beijing. No more."

The announcement was the latest in a series of moves by the Trump administration to increase ties with Taiwan. Before taking office in January 2017, President Donald Trump accepted a telephone call from Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen and said his support for the "One China" policy was contingent on getting better trade deals. Although he later endorsed the policy that has governed U.S.-China ties for decades, Trump increased arms sales and sent the most senior officials in decades to visit Taipei.

"While the implications of the announcement are not yet clear, it seems the intent is to nudge unofficial U.S.-Taiwan relations toward something more akin to official ties," said Maggie Lewis, a law professor at Seton Hall Law School who has written extensively on Taiwan and China.

Taiwan's Minister of Foreign Affairs Joseph Wu said in a tweet that he was grateful to Pompeo for "lifting restrictions unnecessarily limiting our engagements."

"The closer partnership between Taiwan and the U.S. is firmly based on our shared values, common interests and unshakable belief in freedom and democracy," the minister said.

Beijing's "One China" principle states that Taiwan and China are part of the same China. While the U.S. recognizes that the government of the People's Republic of China is the only legitimate government of China, it only acknowledges that the PRC claims Taiwan is a part of China. Taiwan's government views the island as a de-facto independent, sovereign nation.

"Best case, the Biden Administration sees this as a blank slate and starts an internal process to develop what the ideal U.S.-Taiwan engagement structure and process looks like, consistent with the unofficial relationship, shared democratic values, and the benefits the bilateral relationship brings," said Drew Thompson, a former U.S. Department of Defense official responsible for Taiwan policy.

The announcement by Pompeo is one of a number the administration has launched or strengthened in the final days of its term, including an initiative to punish companies with close ties to the Chinese military. He also issued a joint statement on Saturday with the

foreign ministers of the U.K., Canada and Australia expressing "serious concern" about the arrest of 55 activists and politicians in Hong Kong last week.

Hong Kong's government later rejected that criticism. China has repeatedly said no other nations have the right to interfere in its internal affairs, including in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong's National Security Law is a breach of the Sino-British Joint Declaration and undermines the "one country, two systems" framework, according to the statement. The legislation "has curtailed the rights and freedoms of the people of Hong Kong. It is clear that the National Security Law is being used to eliminate dissent and opposing political views," the governments said.

**'Big thing': Taiwan praises U.S. move to lift restrictions on ties (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/10/2021 9:37 PM, Yimou Lee, 5304K, Neutral]

The U.S. lifting of restrictions on interactions with Taiwanese officials is a "big thing", Taiwan Foreign Minister Joseph Wu said on Monday, describing it as a major boost for relations with the island's most important global backer.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced the move on Saturday, in the waning days of the Trump administration ahead of Joe Biden assuming the U.S. presidency on Jan. 20.

China, which claims democratic Taiwan as its own territory, has yet to formally respond, but the move is likely to increase Sino-U.S. tensions as Biden prepares to take over.

"This is a big thing for the elevation of Taiwan-U.S. relations," Wu told reporters, expressing his "sincere gratitude" to the U.S. government. "Taiwan-U.S. relations have been elevated to a global partnership. The foreign ministry will not let our guard down and hope to continue to boost the development of Taiwan-U.S. ties."

Although the United States, like most countries, has no official ties with Taiwan, it is bound by law to provide it with the means to defend itself, and under President Donald Trump has ramped up arms sales and sent senior officials to Taipei.

On Wednesday, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Kelly Craft, will arrive in Taipei for a three-day visit, which China has denounced.

Wu said both he and President Tsai Ing-wen would meet Craft on Thursday.

The topic for the visit is to discuss how to promote Taiwan's international participation, he added.

Craft's visit is highly symbolic, as Taiwan is not a member of the United Nations nor most global bodies because of China's objections. Beijing says only it has the right to speak for Taiwan on the international stage.

Taiwan says only its democratically elected government has this right.



**US ends decades-old restrictions on official contacts with Taiwan, says Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (Yahoo News/Firstpost)**

Yahoo News/Firstpost [1/10/2021 9:42 AM, AP, 4021K, Neutral]

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced Saturday that the State Department is voiding longstanding restrictions on how US diplomats and others have contact with their counterparts in Taiwan, another move that is expected to upset China as the Trump administration winds to an end.

The Trump administration has sought to strengthen bilateral relations with Taiwan. It announced Thursday that UN Ambassador Kelly Craft would go to Taiwan, a move that sparked sharp criticism from Beijing and a warning that the US would pay a heavy price. In August, Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar became the first Cabinet member to visit Taiwan since 2014.

Pompeo said that the State Department has created complex restrictions when it comes to contacts between the two parties. He said those actions were taken to appease the Communist regime in Beijing.

"No more," Pompeo declared in a statement. "Today I am announcing that I am lifting all of these self-imposed restrictions."

The Chinese government maintains that mainland China and Taiwan are parts of "one China." China has been stepping up its threats to bring the self-governing island under its control by military force with frequent war games and aerial patrols. It has been using its diplomatic clout to stop Taiwan from joining any organizations that require statehood for membership.

Pompeo said the U.S. maintains relationships with unofficial partners around the world, and Taiwan is no exception.

"Our two democracies share common values of individual freedom, the rule of law, and a respect for human dignity," Pompeo said. "Today's statement recognizes that the U.S.-Taiwan relationship need not, and should not, be shackled by self-imposed restrictions of our permanent bureaucracy."

Taiwan Foreign Minister Joseph Wu welcomed the move.

"I'm grateful to @SecPompeo & @StateDept for lifting restrictions unnecessarily limiting our engagements these past years," Wu said in a retweet of a Pompeo tweet about the announcement.

"The closer partnership between #Taiwan & the #US is firmly based on our shared values, common interests & unshakeable belief in freedom & democracy," he wrote, drawing a distinction with China's authoritarian one-party state.

**Taiwanese officials laud Pompeo's decision to lift curbs on US contact (Yahoo News/ANI)**

Yahoo News/ANI [1/10/2021 7:30 PM, Staff, 4021K, Neutral]

Taiwan government officials on Sunday welcomed US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's announcement of lifting restrictions governing official US contacts with the country, with

many calling it the latest example of bipartisan commitment to deepening Taiwan-US ties, reported Taipei Times.

In a statement on Saturday, Pompeo said that executive branch agencies should consider all "contact guidelines" regarding relations with Taiwan previously issued by the Department of State under authorities delegated to the Secretary of State to be 'null and void'.

In Washington, the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the US said that the decision reflects the "strength and depth" of the Taiwan-US relationship.

"Decades of discrimination, removed. A huge day in our bilateral relationship. I will cherish every opportunity," Representative to the US Hsiao Bi-khim wrote on Twitter.

In addition, Minister of Foreign Affairs Joseph Wu also took to Twitter to express gratitude toward Pompeo and the US Department of State for their continued efforts to lift restrictions on bilateral engagement, and also thanked the US Congress for its "strong bipartisan support" in passing the Taiwan Assurance Act of 2019, which instructed the executive branch to review its restrictions on high-level exchanges, Taipei Times reported.

Presidential Office spokesman Xavier Chang said that the decision reflects the two nations' robust partnership.

"Building on this solid foundation, we will continue striving for bipartisan US support and to deepen the cooperative partnership between Taiwan and the US," he added.

Meanwhile, Taiwanese opposition parties were cautiously optimistic about the decision, with the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) saying that the next US administration's reaction "will be key."

"Most Taiwanese are pro-US. The KMT is the same... Whether Pompeo's announcement can continue into the [US president-elect Joe] Biden administration will be a key indicator," it said.

In his statement, Pompeo said that the US government took these actions of restricting contact with Taiwan 'in an attempt to appease the Communist regime in Beijing'.

Beijing claims full sovereignty over Taiwan, a democracy of almost 24 million people located off the southeastern coast of mainland China, despite the fact that the two sides have been governed separately for more than seven decades, reported CNN.

Taipei, on the other hand, has countered the Chinese aggression by increasing strategic ties with democracies including the US, which has been repeatedly opposed by Beijing.

### **Yemen, China, Cuba top Pompeo to-do list as time runs down (AP)**

AP [1/10/2021 9:50 PM, Matthew Lee, 2164K, Neutral]

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Sunday announced that he will designate Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels as a "foreign terrorist organization" as time runs down on the Trump administration. The designation will take effect on Jan. 19, one day before president-elect Joe Biden takes office.

The announcement comes as Pompeo and his top aides rush to complete actions they believe will cement their legacy and the president's. In addition to the Houthi designation, Pompeo in coming days is also expected to likely re-designate Cuba as a "state sponsor of terrorism," according to several administration officials.

Both moves will impose or re-impose sanctions on the targets and may complicate the incoming Biden administration's diplomacy. On Saturday Pompeo angered China when he declared restrictions on U.S. diplomatic contacts with Taiwanese officials to be null and void. In addition, Pompeo plans before leaving office on Jan. 20 to draw explicit links between Iran and al-Qaida and hit more Iranian entities with sanctions, the officials said.

The officials were not authorized to discuss the steps publicly because they have not yet been announced and spoke on condition of anonymity.

The administration had been weighing the formal designation of the Houthi rebels as a "foreign terrorist organization" for months. But that effort had been bogged down in internal disagreements over whether sanctions could be effectively enforced without worsening the dire humanitarian crisis in Yemen.

Objections from the Treasury Department were apparently overcome last week after certain exemptions to the sanctions allowing for aid work to continue were arranged.

Late Sunday, Pompeo announced that he was proceeding with the designation of the Houthis, also known as Ansarsallah, along with separate terrorist designations of three senior rebel leaders.

"These designations will provide additional tools to confront terrorist activity and terrorism by Ansarallah, a deadly Iran-backed militia group in the Gulf region," he said. "The designations are intended to hold Ansarallah accountable for its terrorist acts, including cross-border attacks threatening civilian populations, infrastructure, and commercial shipping."

Consideration of the designation had already prompted complaints from relief organizations that have warned the sanctions could prove catastrophic for efforts to help starving Yemeni civilians who have been caught in the conflict between the Houthis and the Yemeni government, which is backed by Saudi Arabia.

"The United States recognizes concerns that these designations will have an impact on the humanitarian situation in Yemen," Pompeo said in his statement. "We are planning to put in place measures to reduce their impact on certain humanitarian activity and imports into Yemen."

Those measures will include the issuance of special licenses by Treasury to allow U.S. assistance to continue to flow to Yemen and for humanitarian organizations to continue to work there, he said.

President Donald Trump has taken a tough line on Cuba and rolled back many of the sanctions that the Obama administration had eased or lifted as part of a broader rapprochement with the communist island. Removing Cuba from the "state sponsors of terrorism" list had been a key component of that effort and re-listing the country has been a

long-term goal of Pompeo's.

Such a designation is a legal one and it was not immediately clear on Sunday if all the technical criteria needed to restore Cuba to the list had been met, according to the officials. In removing Cuba from the list, the Obama administration had determined that the country no longer supported international terrorism, but Pompeo is expected to cite Cuban support for Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro as a major justification for the move, the officials said.

Pompeo is also expected to deliver remarks later this week denouncing Iran for its alleged harboring and support for members of Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida network. In November, U.S. officials said Iran had been harboring al-Qaida's No. 2, Abu Muhammad al-Masri, who had been killed in August by Israeli agents in Iran along with his daughter, the widow of bin Laden's son Hamza bin Laden.

The Trump administration has steadily ratcheted up pressure on Iran since the president withdrew from the 2015 nuclear deal in 2018 and began to re-impose sanctions that had been eased under the agreement, which aimed to curb Iran's atomic program.

On Saturday, Pompeo announced that he was rescinding all restrictions on contacts between U.S. diplomats and Taiwanese officials. Those restrictions had been in place since the U.S. formally adopted its "one China" policy in 1979 and recognized Beijing after dropping formal diplomatic ties with Taipei.

Pompeo has been at the forefront of the administration's push to go after China for its actions in Taiwan, crackdowns on dissent and human rights in Tibet, Hong Kong and the western Xinjiang region, as well as Beijing's disputed maritime claims in the South China Sea.

## **Department of State News**

### **US diplomats condemn Trump in State Department 'dissent channel' (Washington Examiner)**

Washington Examiner [1/10/2021 4:55 PM, Tyler Van Dyke, 394K, Neutral]

U.S. diplomats issued a scathing rebuke of President Trump's incitement and handling of the Wednesday attack on Capitol Hill in two cables sent via the State Department's "dissent channel."

The dissent channel is a messaging system through which career diplomats can send criticisms of U.S. policymaking or foreign affairs decisions that are circulated to top State Department officials. In what the Associated Press called a "highly unusual" use of the messaging system, diplomats said that the events from Wednesday undermined U.S. credibility on the international stage and hobbled the country's ability to defend democratic values.

"Failing to publicly hold the president to account would further damage our democracy and our ability to effectively accomplish our foreign policy goals abroad," one of the cables read.

The cable urged Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to support a lawful effort by Vice



President Mike Pence and the remaining members of the Cabinet to sideline Trump in the waning days of his presidency, including through "the possible implementation of the procedures provided for in Article 4 of the 25th Amendment, if appropriate."

The 25th Amendment allows a majority vote from members of the Cabinet to allow the vice president to assume the powers of the office if the president is considered unfit to serve.

The two cables directed against the riots in Washington "appear to be unprecedented in their scope and characterization of the president as a danger to the country," the Associated Press reported. It is unclear how many diplomats signed the cables.

"It is essential that the Department of State explicitly denounce President Trump's role in this violent attack on the U.S. government," the other cable read. "Just as we routinely denounce foreign leaders who use violence and intimidation to interfere in peaceful democratic processes and override the will of their voters, the department's public statements about this episode should also mention President Trump by name. It is critical that we communicate to the world that in our system, no one — not even the president — is above the law or immune from public criticism."

Pompeo denounced the violence that disrupted Congress's certification of the Electoral College vote that sent President-elect Joe Biden to the White House but didn't criticize Trump's actions.

Trump stoked the chaos throughout Wednesday, repeating claims of widespread voter fraud and telling his supporters "we will never give up" and "we will never concede." Trump called for peace after protesters breached the Capitol but in a series of follow-up tweets sympathized with and appeared to defend his extremist supporters, saying in a deleted tweet, "These are the things and events that happen when a sacred landslide election victory is so unceremoniously & viciously stripped away from great patriots."

"This would be a first step towards repairing the damage to our international credibility," the cable read. "It would allow the beacon of democracy to shine on despite this dark episode."

### **Pope Francis prays for victims of Capitol Hill violence (Washington Examiner)**

Washington Examiner [1/10/2021 4:15 PM, Carly Roman, 394K, Neutral]

Pope Francis prayed for the victims of the Capitol Hill siege and urged the public to remain calm in the wake of an attack on the nation's capital that left five dead.

The comments, delivered during traditional Sunday afternoon remarks from the Vatican, were echoed in a tweet from the pope's official Twitter account.

"I am praying for the United States of America, shaken by the recent attack on Congress. I pray for those who lost their life," he wrote. "Violence is always self-destructive. I urge everyone to promote a culture of encounter and of care to construct the common good."

The pope's remarks echo sentiments from an international community shocked by the outbreak of violence on American soil last Wednesday. British lawmaker Tom Tugendhat, who is chairman of the Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, was dismayed by the chaotic scene unfolding on Capitol Hill.

"The US Republic has inspired millions. Not today," he tweeted. "Today many will watch the screens fearful of the power of demagogues who claim to speak for the powerless but tear apart the laws that constrain the strong and protect the weak. The actions of [Trump] threaten us all."

Tugendhat's outrage was shared by Philippines Sen. Panfilo Lacson, who noted the "irony of all ironies" as Congress was placed under lockdown. "Democracy is put to shame in the world's greatest democracy,"

The global reaction comes as American leaders scramble to heal a nation polarized by the outbreak of politically-charged violence. Among those calling for unity is President Trump, who acknowledged the divided state of the country in recorded video remarks.

"2020 has been a challenging time for our people," he said. "This moment calls for healing."

Trump's departure from the presidency has been a source of further division among America's political class. While many Republicans have argued that forcing Trump from office would only serve to deepen simmering malcontent, most Democrats and some members of the GOP have called for an early exit via either impeachment or the invocation of the 25th Amendment of the Constitution.

### **China calls for return of soldier who India is holding after he disappeared on border (Yahoo News/The Telegraph)**

Yahoo News/The Telegraph [1/10/2021 11:15 AM, Staff, 11261K, Negative]

Indian forces have detained a Chinese soldier on the disputed Himalayan frontier where the world's two most populous countries fought a deadly battle last year, the military said Saturday.

It is the second detention on the high altitude border since the pitched battles in June in which 20 Indian soldiers and an unknown number of Chinese troops were killed.

Both sides have since poured tens of thousands of troops and heavy weaponry into the tension zone in the Ladakh region, currently in the grip of freezing winter temperatures.

An Indian Army official said the Chinese soldier would be released on Monday after completion of all formalities and the investigation to ascertain the circumstance under which he crossed the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

"Formalities are underway to return the Chinese soldier at Chushul border meeting point in Ladakh where two armies have conducted eight rounds of talks since the crisis erupted in May 2019," he said.

The People's Liberation Army Daily, which is run by China's military, said the soldier went missing in "the darkness and complicated terrain" and insisted India was informed.

"India should strictly abide by the relevant agreements between the two countries, and promptly transfer the missing person to China, to help with cooling and de-escalating the China-Indian border situation," the military newspaper added.

India and China have disputed their frontier for seven decades and fought a brief war in

1962. The two sides blame each other for the current standoff.

The neighbours have held several rounds of disengagement talks but failed to ease the military buildup.

India's foreign ministry said Friday that the two sides have agreed to a new round of talks between senior commanders.

"In the meantime, both sides have maintained communication at the ground level to avoid any misunderstandings and misjudgements," it said in a statement.

This is the second incident since October when Indian Army captured a PLA soldier, identified as Corporal Wang Ya Long, near Demchok area of Ladakh. The PLA soldier was carrying civil and military documents when he was captured in Ladakh by the Indian Army. He was later released.

China annexed nearly 60 sq km of Indian territory and killed at least 20 Indian soldiers in a violent clash in June last year in the Galwan Valley in Ladakh.

### **[Yemen] U.S. to Declare Yemen's Houthis a Terrorist Group, Raising Fears of Fueling a Famine (The New York Times)**

New York Times [1/10/2021 7:00 AM, Lara Jakes, 28290K, Neutral]

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo will designate the Houthi rebels in Yemen as a foreign terrorist organization, four U.S. officials familiar with the decision said on Sunday, deploying one of his last means of hard power against Saudi Arabia's nemesis at the risk of exacerbating a famine in one of the world's poorest nations.

It is not clear how the terrorist designation will inhibit the Houthi rebels, who have been at war with the Saudi-backed government in Yemen for nearly six years but, some analysts say, pose no direct threat to the United States.

Mr. Pompeo will announce the designation in his last full week as secretary of state, and more than a month after meeting with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia, who began a military intervention with Arab allies against the Houthis in 2015. That campaign has killed civilians, destroyed infrastructure and aggravated a humanitarian crisis that has led to millions of hungry Yemenis.

Spokespeople for the State Department did not respond to requests for comment Sunday night, and the U.S. officials who confirmed the designation spoke on the condition of anonymity as it had not yet been announced. The imminent announcement was reported earlier Sunday evening by Reuters.

The Houthis' inclusion on the department's list of foreign terrorist organizations means that fighters within the relatively decentralized movement will be cut off from financial support and other material resources that are routed through U.S. banks or other American institutions.

But the Houthis' main patron is Iran, which continues to send support despite being hobbled by severe U.S. economic sanctions, rendering the effect of the designation on the rebels more symbolic than searing.



For the rest of Yemen, however, the designation will all but certainly worsen the devastation.

Experts said it would chill humanitarian efforts to donate food and medicine to Houthi-controlled areas in northern and western Yemen, where a majority of the country's 30 million people live, for fear the aid would be seized by the rebels and used for profit that could be traced back to aid organizations. The rebels also control the capital, Sana, and parts of the strategic port city of Hudaydah, where much of the humanitarian aid from across the world is unloaded.

The United Nations estimates that about 80 percent of Yemenis depend on food assistance, and nearly half of all children suffer stunted growth because of malnutrition. On Nov. 20, the U.N. secretary general, António Guterres, said Yemen was "now in imminent danger of the worst famine the world has seen for decades."

"I urge all those with influence to act urgently on these issues to stave off catastrophe, and I also request that everyone avoids taking any action that could make the already dire situation even worse," Mr. Guterres said then. "Failing that, we risk a tragedy not just in the immediate loss of life but with consequences that will reverberate indefinitely into the future."

Some Houthi leaders had already been singled out for terrorist-related American sanctions. The broader designation against the entire movement has been under consideration by the Trump administration for years.

That Mr. Pompeo is issuing it now, in the administration's final days, is a sign of his determination to maintain his signature pressure campaign against Iran for as long as possible.

The United States accuses the Houthi rebels of being proxy fighters for Iran, seeking to destabilize neighboring Saudi Arabia by lobbing missiles over its border and striking its oil fields. But a large attack on two state-owned Saudi Aramco oil facilities in September 2019, which the Houthis said they carried out, appeared to be far more sophisticated than the rebels' previous strikes.

That suggested that Iran was directly involved, as the Trump administration has asserted, despite Tehran's denials.

"The Trump administration could have leveraged its ties to Saudi Arabia for the past four years to get closer to a resolution on the conflict," Ariane Tabatabai, a Middle East fellow at the German Marshall Fund, a public policy think tank, said in a recent interview in anticipation of the designation. "Instead, the administration chose to cut blank checks to Saudi leaders."

She predicted the terrorist designation was part of a strategy to force the administration of President-elect Joseph R. Biden Jr. to maintain the tough line on Iran — or risk the political consequences of having "to explain to domestic critics and regional partners why it's reversing sanctions."

The Trump administration has steadfastly backed Saudi Arabia and its allies in the war in Yemen, providing intelligence and billions of dollars in weapons over the objections of Congress, despite indiscriminate bombings that have killed civilians and other military atrocities that could amount to war crimes.

In October, the rebels released two American hostages and the remains of a third in a prisoner swap that also allowed about 240 Houthis to return to Yemen from Oman. The freed Houthis included fighters captured by the Saudi-led coalition and officials who had gone to Oman for international peace talks and were not allowed to go home.

Beyond the looming famine, the terrorist designation could also seal the fate of an immense rusting oil tanker moored off Yemen's western coast.

Compared to a floating bomb, partly because of the combustible buildups of gas it may be carrying in its tanks, the decaying vessel, the FSO Safer, is not far from the Hudaydah port. If it either explodes or simply falls apart, it could dump more than 1.1 million barrels of oil into the Red Sea, destroying its ecosystem in a spill four times greater than that of the Exxon Valdez disaster in 1989.

About a half-dozen Houthis are aboard the vessel, along with a small crew of state-backed engineers from the state-owned company that holds the title to it, said Ian M. Ralby, the chief executive of I.R. Consilium, a maritime security consultancy. The terrorist designation could prevent U.N. negotiators from working with the Houthis as quickly as possible to repair the vessel or otherwise defuse the danger it poses.

"If we do not want to cause Yemen to lose an entire generation," Mr. Ralby said, "we need to back off this designation."

**[Yemen] After internal battle, Trump administration to declare Yemen's Houthis a terrorist group, raising humanitarian concerns (Washington Post)**

Washington Post [1/10/2021 10:17 PM, John Hudson, Missy Ryan, 13480K, Neutral]

The Trump administration has decided to designate Yemen's Houthi rebels as a foreign terrorist organization, according to four U.S. officials familiar with the matter, a decision that aid groups and several senior U.S. officials worry could worsen a humanitarian crisis.

In a statement obtained by The Washington Post, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced his intention to blacklist the group and add three of its top officials to a list of Specially Designated Global Terrorists, including leader Abdul Malik al-Houthi.

A senior State Department official said the decision was based on the group's involvement in terrorist activities, including a missile attack on a Saudi airport in 2019 and another on a Saudi oil distribution station in 2020.

"The designations are intended to hold Ansarallah accountable for its terrorist acts, including cross-border attacks threatening civilian populations, infrastructure, and commercial shipping," said Pompeo using the formal name for the Houthi group.

Humanitarian organizations and foreign diplomats worry that the move could complicate U.N.-brokered peace talks between the Houthis and the Saudi-backed government in Yemen — parties that have been at war for almost six years in a conflict the U.N. calls the

world's worst humanitarian crisis.

Trump administration officials denied that they were complicating the peace efforts for President-elect Biden, who has promised to breathe new life into the diplomatic discussions when he takes office on Jan. 20.

When asked if the terrorism designation will prevent U.N. or U.S. diplomats from meeting with the Houthis, who are crucial to any lasting political resolution, a senior State Department official said that "we're going to look at work-arounds where we can," but noted that there currently isn't a well-functioning "political track."

One individual with knowledge of the matter said the Biden team did not support the designation and that the new administration was expected to vacate it because of the concerns about the humanitarian impact.

Nearly a quarter of a million people have already died in Yemen's war, the majority of those due to insufficient food, medical care and other indirect causes.

The Houthis control broad swaths of Yemen, particularly in the north, where aid agencies coordinate with the rebels to deliver badly needed humanitarian assistance.

How the designation will impact Yemenis may hinge in large on the nature of waivers and exceptions the government grants to aid groups and parties so they can avoid potential financial and legal penalties, which would include licenses from the Treasury's Office of Foreign Asset Control (OFAC).

Much of the internal opposition to the decision came from the Treasury officials who warned that it would be difficult for them to issue the waivers in an opaque, wartime environment. The officials argued that the department lacks the on-the-ground intelligence to appropriately consider the waivers and therefore opposed making the designation, said diplomats familiar with the situation.

Such protections, even if widely granted, would only shield U.S. government employees and entities from potential prosecution for "material support" to terrorism under laws associated with the FTO designation, according to current and former officials with knowledge of the matter.

State officials have said the Justice Department is unlikely to pursue those kind of charges. But such assurances are unlikely to quell the concerns of aid organizations and commercial groups that fear running afoul of U.S. law, even if the likelihood of prosecution is low, fueling additional questions about why the administration is pursuing the FTO designation rather than others without such complications.

The fact the administration was preparing to announce the designation before Pompeo had signed off on potential waivers and licenses designed to allow aid and commercial activity to continue threatened to intensify the decision's impact on Yemeni civilians. It also represented the Trump administration's rush to finalize a growing list of measures targeting Iran before handing off to a new team that is expected to take a different approach to Tehran.

The Trump administration says the Houthis bear the blame for the grim humanitarian situation in the country, citing its use of child soldiers and hampering of the work of aid groups in the country. However, the United States has continued to sell billions of dollars of weapons to Saudi Arabia, which has led a bloody bombing campaign in the country resulting in numerous civilian deaths.

Trump administration officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss a sensitive policy issue, acknowledged that scores of humanitarian aid groups and foreign officials opposed the decision but said they had exhausted other options and that Houthi rebels refused to meet with them. The United States sent two senior diplomats to the Middle East in December to meet with Houthi representatives, but the group refused the meeting, U.S. officials said.

"We're looking at ways to draw attention to the fact that the status quo is unsustainable," said a senior State Department official. "This is going to get peoples' attention."

Scott Paul, humanitarian policy lead for Oxfam America, described the move as a "counter-productive and dangerous" decision that would endanger Yemeni lives. In electing to issue an FTO designation, the State Department was embracing "by far the most severe" of the options considered against the Houthi rebels, he said.

"The consequences will be felt acutely across a country also hit hard by extreme hunger, cholera and Covid-19, as banks, businesses and humanitarian donors become unwilling or unable to take on the risk of operating in Yemen," he said in a statement.

The designation represents a turning point in U.S. handling of the war, which began in 2015 when a Saudi-led coalition began what Gulf officials hoped would be a short-lived campaign to sideline Houthi separatists who had taken over the Yemeni capital late the previous year.

While Houthi forces have repeatedly launched attacks against Saudi Arabia, U.S. officials have cited only one attack against the United States, when they unsuccessfully fired missiles at an American warship off Yemen's coast in 2016.

The Trump administration, facing increasing pressure from Congress over U.S. ties with Saudi Arabia and civilian casualties in Yemen, has reduced military support to the Gulf coalition, halting aerial refueling of Saudi jets in 2018.

But the Trump administration has increasingly cast Yemen as another front in its campaign against Iran, which has provided military assistance to the Houthis.

Throughout the war the United States has continued a separate counterterrorism campaign against al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and the local branch of the Islamic State.

Millions of Yemenis remain in need of nutrition assistance, including hundreds of thousands of children suffering from severe acute malnutrition, according to the U.N.

Last year, the Trump administration suspended much of its aid to Yemen over Houthi restrictions, making it harder to verify that assistance was reaching intended beneficiaries.



**[Yemen] U.S. to designate Yemen's Houthi movement as foreign terror group as soon as Monday -sources (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/10/2021 8:44 PM, Aziz El Yaakoubi, Jonathan Landay, Matt Spetalnick, 5304K, Neutral]

The United States plans to designate Yemen's Houthi movement as a foreign terrorist organization, three sources familiar with the matter said, a move that diplomats and aid groups worry could threaten peace talks and complicate efforts to combat the world's largest humanitarian crisis.

The decision to blacklist the Iran-aligned group, which could be announced as soon as Monday according to two of the sources, comes as the administration of President-elect Joe Biden prepares to take over from the Trump administration on Jan. 20.

The Trump administration has been piling on sanctions related to Iran in recent weeks, prompting some Biden allies and outside analysts to conclude that Trump aides are seeking to make it harder for the incoming administration to re-engage with Iran and rejoin an international nuclear agreement.

The State Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

One person familiar with the matter said the Trump administration had worked out certain "allowances" to permit continued delivery of humanitarian supplies to Yemen and insisted that U.S. sanctions rules in most cases leave room for aid organizations to work. The source declined to elaborate.

The designation has been the subject of weeks of fierce debate within the Trump administration and internal disagreements over how to carve out exceptions for aid shipments held up a final decision on the blacklisting, which has been in the works for weeks, multiple sources have said.

A Saudi Arabia-led military coalition intervened in Yemen in 2015, backing government forces fighting the Houthi group. U.N. officials are trying to revive peace talks to end the war as the country's suffering is also worsened by an economic and currency collapse and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The United Nations describes Yemen as the world's largest humanitarian crisis, with 80% of the people in need of help. Top U.N. officials have warned that millions of people are facing famine and more money is needed to deliver aid.

The Houthi group, also known as Ansar Allah, is the de facto authority in northern Yemen and aid agencies have to work with it to deliver assistance. Aid workers and supplies also come in through Houthi-controlled Sanaa airport and Hodeidah port.

"This serves no interest at all," Ryan Crocker, a retired U.S. ambassador who served in the Middle East, said of the designation. "Are there elements among the Houthis who have been involved in terrorist acts? Sure. Just as with other groups in the Middle East."

"The Houthis are an integral part of Yemeni society. They always have been. This is making a strategic enemy out of a local force that has been part of Yemen for generations. They are not Iranian pawns."

In November U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said Yemen was in "imminent danger of the worst famine the world has seen for decades," warning against any unilateral moves as the United States threatened to blacklist the Houthis.

A spokesman for Guterres declined to comment on Sunday. Iran's mission to the United Nations in New York did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The U.S. Treasury Department has the power to carve out exceptions by issuing special licenses to humanitarian groups to ship food and medical supplies to heavily sanctioned countries, as it has done with Iran and Venezuela.

But international relief officials have said such measures have often failed to unblock the flow of aid because banks and insurance companies are worried about running afoul of U.S. sanctions, and that this could also be the case with Yemen.

### **[United Kingdom] With Trump Presidency Winding Down, Push for Assange Pardon Ramps Up (New York Times)**

New York Times [1/10/2021 6:53 PM, Kenneth P. Vogel, 28290K, Positive]

Allies of the WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange have ramped up a push for a last-minute pardon from President Trump, enlisting a lobbyist with connections to the administration, trying to rally supporters across the political spectrum and filing a clemency petition with the White House.

The effort comes at a delicate moment for Mr. Assange and during a period of tension between the United States and Britain over a case that his supporters say has substantial implications for press freedoms.

The Justice Department announced last week that it would appeal a British judge's ruling blocking the extradition of Mr. Assange to the United States to face trial on charges of violating the Espionage Act and conspiring to hack government computers. The charges stemmed from WikiLeaks's publication in 2010 of classified documents related to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Mr. Assange's supporters had been optimistic about the prospects of a pardon from Mr. Trump, who has issued dozens of contentious clemency grants since losing his re-election bid. But they now worry that pressure over his supporters' ransacking of the Capitol last week could derail plans for additional clemencies before he leaves office on Jan. 20.

As unlikely as the prospect of a pardon from Mr. Trump might be, Mr. Assange's supporters are eager to try before President-elect Joseph R. Biden Jr. takes office.

As vice president, Mr. Biden called the WikiLeaks founder a "high-tech terrorist." Some of his top advisers blame Mr. Assange and WikiLeaks for helping Mr. Trump win the presidency in 2016 by publishing emails from Democrats associated with Hillary Clinton's campaign, which U.S. officials say were stolen by Russian intelligence to damage her candidacy. Mr. Trump has long downplayed Russia's role in the 2016 election.

For Mr. Assange's supporters and press freedom advocates, though, the issues at stake transcend him or politics.

"This is so much bigger than Julian," said Mark Davis, a former journalist who worked with Mr. Assange in Australia, where they are from. If Mr. Assange is prosecuted, "it will have a chilling effect on all national security journalism," Mr. Davis said, adding: "If we can get Julian off, then the precedent hasn't been set. If Julian goes down, then it's bad for all of us."

Mr. Davis, who is now a lawyer specializing in national security and whistle-blower cases, is on the board of Blueprint for Free Speech, an Australia-based nonprofit group that advocates for press freedoms and whistle-blower protections. The group, which was started by Suelette Dreyfus, a former journalist who is an old friend and collaborator with Mr. Assange, signed a pro bono contract on Saturday with the lobbyist Robert Stryk to seek a pardon for Mr. Assange.

During Mr. Trump's presidency, Mr. Stryk, who is well connected in Trump administration circles, has developed a lucrative business representing foreign clients in precarious geopolitical situations.

He has worked for a jailed Saudi prince who had fallen out of favor with his country's powerful de facto leader, as well as the administration of President Nicolás Maduro of Venezuela, which the Trump administration considers illegitimate. Mr. Stryk also worked for Isabel dos Santos, the daughter of Angola's former president, who is accused of embezzling millions of dollars from a state oil company she once headed, as well as the government of the former Congolese president Joseph Kabila, which had faced American sanctions for human rights abuses and corruption.

Mr. Stryk said that he was representing Blueprint for Free Speech to seek a pardon for Mr. Assange without pay because of his belief in free speech, and that he would continue pushing for the pardon in the Biden administration if Mr. Trump did not grant it.

"This is not a partisan issue," Mr. Stryk said.

The contract, which he said he had disclosed to the Justice Department under the Foreign Agents Registration Act, calls for his company, Stryk Global Diplomacy, to "facilitate meetings and interactions with the president and the president-elect's administrations" to "obtain a full pardon" for Mr. Assange.

Mr. Davis said Mr. Stryk had been chosen partly because of his entree into Mr. Trump's administration, which the group sees as its best chance to secure a pardon.

Mr. Davis noted that Mr. Assange, 49, was indicted during Mr. Trump's presidency. "We are unabashedly reaching out to the Republican Party on this issue in the final weeks to correct something before it's too late, and before it become part of Trump's legacy," Mr. Davis said.

He said, "If Joe Biden is sympathetic, that's well and good, and we certainly hope he is." But, he added, "it's a far simpler process for an outgoing president than an incoming president."

Mr. Assange's cause has been taken up by a range of media freedom and human rights organizations, public officials and celebrities, including the actress Pamela Anderson.



Blueprint for Free Speech is working to harness some of that support, including from Ms. Anderson, a friend of Mr. Assange, who said in an interview that she had been trying to connect with Mr. Trump to plead the case. "I just hate to see him deteriorate in jail right now," she said of Mr. Assange, describing the pardon push as "a last-ditch effort for all of us who are Julian Assange supporters."

Asked about the effort by Blueprint, Jennifer Robinson, a lawyer representing Mr. Assange, said he "is encouraged by and supports efforts" by a variety of prominent supporters around the world.

Mr. Davis stressed that Blueprint's push was independent of parallel efforts by Mr. Assange's family and his lawyers, though Mr. Stryk has been in contact with Barry J. Pollack, Mr. Assange's Washington-based lawyer, who is representing him against the criminal charges.

Prosecutors have argued that Mr. Assange unlawfully obtained secret documents and put lives at risk by revealing the names of people who had provided information to the United States in war zones.

Mr. Assange's lawyers have framed the prosecution as a politically driven attack on press freedom.

Last month, Mr. Pollack filed a petition for a pardon with the White House Counsel's Office, which has been vetting clemency requests for Mr. Trump, arguing that Mr. Assange was "being prosecuted for his news gathering and publication of truthful information."

Mr. Pollack declined to comment on the petition, which was obtained by The New York Times, except to say that it was pending.

The petition appears to be geared toward appealing to Mr. Trump, who has wielded the unchecked presidential clemency power to aid people with personal connections to him or whose causes resonate with him politically, including a handful of people ensnared in the special counsel's investigation of Russia's interference in the 2016 election and ties to his campaign.

The petition highlighted that the charges against Mr. Assange stemmed from WikiLeaks's publication of material that "exposed misconduct committed in Iraq and Afghanistan during wars initiated by a prior administration." And it notes that the Democratic emails published by WikiLeaks in 2016, which showed some in the party apparatus conspiring to sabotage the campaign of Senator Bernie Sanders, Independent of Vermont and Mrs. Clinton's rival for the Democratic presidential nomination, resulted in the resignations of party officials.

The petition does not address the United States government's findings about Russia's role in the theft of the emails as part of its effort to undermine Mrs. Clinton, which has long been a sore spot for Mr. Trump.

The petition notes that the sentence of Chelsea Manning, the former Army intelligence analyst who provided the military and diplomatic documents to WikiLeaks that led to the charges against Mr. Assange, was commuted by President Barack Obama in the final days

of his term.

Like Mr. Assange's lawyers in Britain, Mr. Pollack's petition raises concerns about Mr. Assange's health, noting that the prison in which he is being held has been under lockdown after a coronavirus outbreak.

**[China] Devin Nunes seeks intelligence on coronavirus origins and Wuhan lab escape theory (Washington Examiner)**

Washington Examiner [1/10/2021 3:53 PM, Jerry Dunleavy, 394K, Neutral]

The top Republican on the House Intelligence Committee called on the Trump administration's spy chief to provide details about the origins of the coronavirus in China, including intelligence community information related to whether COVID-19 may have escaped from a lab in Wuhan.

Rep. Devin Nunes, the ranking member of the House Intelligence Committee, sent a two-page letter to Director of National Intelligence John Ratcliffe on Friday, which was obtained by the Washington Examiner, saying the Republicans on his panel "have conducted a long-standing investigation into the rise of China as our foremost national security threat," and "as part of that probe, we are investigating the outbreak of the coronavirus."

With less than two weeks left in the Trump administration, Nunes asked Ratcliffe to provide the intelligence with a classified notification on Chinese virology research, including "an explanation of significant changes in Intelligence Community analysis, or the evolution of such analysis, related to the origin of SARS-COV-2, research activities in Wuhan labs, efforts by China to block international investigations of a possible lab leak, and actions taken by Chinese authorities that increased COVID-19 worldwide lethality and economic disruptions." The congressman also asked Ratcliffe for an "assessment of Chinese adherence to international agreements that require disclosure and cooperation in the event of a viral outbreak such as COVID-19."

Additionally, Nunes asked the intelligence community to provide an "exact timeline" of research specific to coronaviruses at the Wuhan lab, as well as a "counterintelligence assessment" detailing all United States engagement with the Wuhan lab on coronaviruses, including U.S.-sponsored research and funding, any technology transfers, and information on which outside groups coordinated with the lab.

"Among the various theories of the pandemic's origins, we've seen indicators that COVID-19 may have stemmed from dangerous research at laboratories in Wuhan, China," Republican congressman wrote, pointing to recent reports, including remarks from now-former White House deputy national security adviser Matt Pottinger.

Pottinger served on the National Security Council from 2017 until resigning his post last week in the wake of rioters storming the U.S. Capitol as lawmakers affirmed President-elect Joe Biden's victory. In late December, he said that "there is a growing body of evidence to say that a laboratory leak or accident is very much a credible possibility" and "even establishment figures in Beijing have openly dismissed the wet market story." Pottinger was apparently referring to the Wuhan Institute of Virology, a biosafety level 4 lab in China that researches infectious diseases, including bat coronaviruses. Questions remain about whether the virus escaped from a lab through an accidental infection or if it got its start in nature by jumping from an animal to a human.

"I don't know of anybody in the federal government with access to all of the information that does not believe that this is a plausible scenario — if not the most plausible scenario," an administration official told the Washington Examiner when speaking of the Wuhan lab escape hypothesis last week.

China has done its utmost to thwart investigations into the origins of the virus that has turned into the pandemic killing 1.93 million people around the world, including more than 373,000 in the U.S., according to Johns Hopkins University. The Chinese Communist Party has denied it originated in China and spread baseless conspiracy theories about it being caused by the U.S. military.

"There are enough reports out there, there is enough of what we are hearing, the people we're interviewing, that we believe there is much more to the Wuhan lab," Nunes said during an appearance on Fox News's Sunday Morning Futures with Maria Bartiromo, adding that "we believe that the IC possibly has information that I think the American people need to see," and "hopefully John Ratcliffe can get as much as he possibly can out in the next 10 days."

Republican Sen. Tom Cotton, who caused a stir in February when he suggested the Wuhan lab as a possible origin, told the Washington Examiner on Tuesday that "the Chinese Communist Party has thwarted investigations into the coronavirus's origins," but "circumstantial evidence points to the Wuhan lab, where accidental release remains the most likely scenario — but we cannot rule out other origins, including a natural transmission."

In 2018, U.S. Embassy officials in China raised concerns about biosecurity at the Wuhan lab. One "sensitive but unclassified" State Department cable warned about a "serious shortage of appropriately trained technicians and investigators needed to safely operate this high-containment laboratory."

The letter from Nunes noted that the Wuhan lab "has a history of mismanagement, poor safety practices, laboratory outbreaks, dangerous 'gain of function' research, and other questionable activities." Nunes told Ratcliffe he would like him to make this a "priority" for the spy agencies "given the great variance in explanations for COVID-19 origins and Chinese behavior that we are receiving from government, scientific, and media sources."

GOP Rep. Michael McCaul, ranking member on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, released a report in September on the coronavirus, concluding that "the CCP's lies, cover-up, and oppression of whistleblowers cost thousands of Chinese citizens and hundreds of thousands of others around the world their lives." McCaul's spokeswoman told the Washington Examiner last week that the committee also wanted to see what evidence the Trump administration possesses about the coronavirus origins.

In May of last year, a senior intelligence official told the Washington Examiner that a majority of the intelligence community's spy agencies believed the coronavirus likely originated with an accidental lab escape in Wuhan. The Office of the Director of National Intelligence weighed in last spring, noting that "the Intelligence Community also concurs with the wide scientific consensus that the COVID-19 virus was not man-made or

genetically modified." The statement said the spy community had not yet reached a conclusion on how the coronavirus first originated in China.

## Editorials and Op-eds

### **Why the Pentagon Remains a Battlefield for Women (Foreign Policy Magazine)**

Foreign Policy Magazine [1/10/2021 3:22 PM, Courtney Mabeus, 722K, Neutral]

As an active-duty officer in the Marine Corps, Lindsay Rodman was accustomed to being the lone woman in the room—and, unlike her male peers, having her mere presence challenged.

There was the lieutenant colonel who seemed genuinely bewildered that a woman would be interested in joining, and another colonel who flat out told her women didn't belong. A different colonel in Afghanistan didn't have to say a thing; he refused to shake her hand.

"There's no great response," said Rodman, now the executive director of the Leadership Council for Women in National Security (LCWINS), a nonprofit that advocates for greater gender diversity in national security. "My response typically was always like, 'Well, sir, I'm grateful to be in the Marine Corps. I do think women belong in the Marine Corps.'"

If confirmed, President-elect Joe Biden's pick for defense secretary, retired army general Lloyd J. Austin III, would be the first Black person to head the Department of Defense. But his historic selection dashed hopes for another first: that after 73 years of uninterrupted leadership by men, a woman might run the Pentagon.

For a time, that possibility finally seemed within reach. Michèle Flournoy, who served as undersecretary of defense for policy in the Obama administration and also served in the Clinton administration, was widely considered a top contender for the position. Many viewed her as a slam dunk because of her decades of experience, her knowledge of how the Pentagon operates, and her deep connections within the defense community. The Democratic chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, Adam Smith, endorsed Flournoy, telling reporters last month that she was "hands down the best qualified person for the job."

Austin's nomination also comes with some controversy. Many Democrats have called for a return to civilian leadership of the defense department after President Donald Trump chose retired Marine Corps Gen. James Mattis to be his first defense secretary. Because of a law requiring seven years of separation between military service and civilian leadership, Mattis, who retired in 2013, required a waiver from Congress. As a recent active-duty general, Austin will also require a waiver.

Women have long faced barriers to reaching some of the country's top defense and national security jobs. Not only has the military openly discriminated against women throughout history—combat jobs were only opened to women in 2015—the Pentagon remains an environment in which "most people were either military or former military," said Rosa Brooks, a Georgetown Law professor and co-founder of LCWINS who previously worked for Flournoy at the Defense Department. Women were "overwhelmingly likely to be neither," Brooks said of her time at the Pentagon, which resulted in them being left out of networks often developed by a shared military connection.

The numbers show just how tightly shut the doors have been to women at the Pentagon. Women accounted for just six of a total 23 positions at the rank of assistant secretary or above within the Defense Department as of late 2018, according to a New America report. Indeed, Secretary of Defense and Secretary of Veterans Affairs are the only cabinet agencies that have never been led by a woman (neither has Secretary of the Treasury, but Joe Biden has nominated Janet Yellen for the role).

While it's hard to predict how Flournoy—or any woman—would run the department, her appointment would have signaled to other women interested in working in national security that the United States is ready to draw from all of its talent. Linda Reynolds, who has led the Australian Department of Defence since May 2019, has made the case for better gender equity within that country's forces and pushed back against a toxic locker room culture that has been described by government officials as "what happens outside the wire, stays outside the wire." Last month, after a war crimes investigation revealed the gruesome killings of Afghan civilians by Australian soldiers, she dismissed claims from a former special forces captain that the killings were the "fog of war," instead calling them "cold-blooded murder."

A study of female defense ministers worldwide found that women are less likely to be appointed in countries that are engaged in conflict or that invest heavily in military operations at the expense of peacekeeping. It also found that, as women's representation in government overall increases, so does the likelihood that they will be appointed to top national security posts. In the United States, women's participation in government lags behind that of many developed countries. Dozens of countries, including the U.K., India, Chile, France, Spain, and Germany, have had women at the helm of their defense ministries. America, Rodman said, is "behind the curve."

That lack of representation can influence decision-making in ways that can affect national security. In September, the U.S. Air Force released a report on digital acquisition titled "Take the Red Pill," intended to be a reference to the film *The Matrix*. But the phrase "red pilling" has also been used as a dog whistle by men's rights groups that have been associated with violence. Kathleen McInnis, an author and defense expert who has served in the Pentagon called out—along with other women and at least one man—the double meaning within the defense community, including online, prompting the Air Force to rename the report "There Is No Spoon" (another *Matrix* reference). "If you have ... a bigger pool of diverse perspectives to draw upon, these kinds of things are more likely to be brought to the fore, earlier, in a way that they aren't right now," McInnis said.

Rodman noted the hypocrisy in America's call for greater participation of women abroad while continuing to fall short at home. In 2000, U.N. Security Council Resolution 1325 recognized the need for greater representation of women in the peacebuilding process, and the United States passed its own version in 2017. Her organization received pledges from every Democratic presidential candidate and Republican Bill Weld in the 2020 election to strive for greater gender parity in senior national security and foreign-policy appointments. But Trump did not sign on. "It's quite easy for other countries to point at us and be like, 'Are you guys kidding us?'" Rodman said, adding that there are no excuses for officials who say they would consider a woman for a senior civilian appointment but can't find any who are qualified.



There are currently 57 Senate-confirmed civilian positions at the Defense Department, according to Senate Armed Services Committee spokesperson Marta Hernandez. LCWINS developed a database of female candidates for those and other agency positions, including senior civilian roles at the State Department, totaling about 200 jobs. The organization aimed to offer two candidates for each position, or 400 names. It ended up compiling about 900.

Rodman said there's plenty of room for more women in the national security space. Biden recently named Dr. Kathleen Hicks, who served at the Pentagon as part of the Obama administration, as his pick for deputy secretary of defense. If confirmed, she will be the first woman to hold the number two position (Christine Fox held the job in an acting capacity during the Obama administration). More national security personnel announcements are expected soon.

Beyond representation, McInnis stressed the need for the culture of the field to change. A woman as defense secretary is no "silver bullet," she cautioned. When she was working as the NATO-ISAF operations director at the Pentagon, a man told her that she was "too passionate" about her job and that it was undermining her credibility. "That shut me up for years," she said.

Rodman said she also self-censored when she felt her audience wouldn't be receptive to her ideas, keeping her from pushing back against sexist comments or from offering alternative perspectives.

Now, she's more concerned about what would have happened if she weren't there. "It always dawns on me that if I'm not in the room, then there's no woman in the room, right?" she said. "That seems to me to be even more important than being the lone female voice."

Rodman imagines what she might have said to the men who questioned her presence in the Marine Corps if a woman had been in charge of the Pentagon. "The power of being able to look at someone under those circumstances and say, 'Hey, sir, the secretary of defense is a woman.' Just the power of being able to turn around and say something like that."

### **Previous Disasters Provide Important Lessons for Central America's Recovery from Hurricanes (The National Interest)**

The National Interest [1/10/2021 7:34 PM, Shelly Culbertson, Ismael Arciniegas Rueda, 289K, Neutral]

In November, two devastating storms hit Central America in a space of two weeks. Hurricanes Eta and Iota pummeled Honduras, Nicaragua, and Guatemala where winds, rain, and flooding caused significant destruction. The effects of these hurricanes may well rank as among the worst in the region's history. Hurricanes Eta and Iota led to the loss of more than two hundred human lives and damaged an economy already expected to contract by as much as 9 percent due to the coronavirus pandemic. In Honduras, the economic engine of the country—the Valley of San Pedro de Sula—was one of the most affected areas. Business leaders in the area estimate a loss of 40 percent of gross domestic product due to the hurricanes—this is in addition to the thousands of people being left homeless.

The year 2020 was the busiest hurricane season on record, and the fifth consecutive year since 2016 to log at least one Category 5 storm. Climate scientists attribute some of this

increased activity to particularly warm Caribbean Ocean temperatures, and such warming is only expected to increase in the coming decades. These are likely not the last devastating storms that Central America will face in the coming years.

As the global community works together to assist Central America in recovering from this disastrous season, experiences from other recent disaster recovery efforts offer some helpful lessons, both for the governments of the region as well as outsiders providing resources and support.

First, the United States and the greater global community could take more decisive action to assist recovery—the suffering and losses are great and damages too extensive for the affected countries to recover alone. Fortunately, aid has poured in, with the Central American Bank of Economic Integration announcing \$2 billion in loans, the InterAmerican Development Bank announcing \$1.2 billion in loans, and USAID announcing \$48 million in help. But managing and coordinating this and other expected aid can be tricky. Recovery does not rely on money alone, but on the capacities of the countries to manage complex recovery processes. Recent ongoing disaster recoveries in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, after 2017's Hurricane Irma and Hurricane Maria, revealed how much capacity building can be needed in government management capabilities, supply chain efficiencies, financial management, and workforce skills.

Next, as emergency response activities transition to recovery, the countries affected would benefit from a coherent and thoughtful strategy that goes beyond repairing damaged infrastructure. Other disasters that struck Puerto Rico in 2017, such as Hurricanes Irma and Maria, led to a shift towards “building back better.” Natural disaster impacts are greatest where development is misaligned with natural risks, and the recovery from these disasters provides an opportunity to address the root causes of their vulnerabilities. The aim of disaster recovery should now be to (1) reestablish community-sustaining infrastructure and government services, (2) increase resilience to future disasters through the harnessing of natural solutions; (3) improve equity in access to resources and economic opportunities; (4) improve overall environmental conditions; and (5) modernize and decarbonize the region's economy through, for example, a decentralized electric grid that would provide more resilience. Puerto Rico's Economic and Disaster Recovery Plan, for instance, includes a wide range of investments designed to improve all sectors while taking into account the economic potential of the region.

A successful strategy would not only create infrastructure, but also improve public services, health, and the economy so they are more resilient to future natural disasters. And doing so can take a lot of time. The public may assume that disaster recovery can take place in a few short years. However, the United States and other donors will need to be prepared for sustained support to Central America over a decade or more. After Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita slammed into the Gulf Coast in 2005, Louisiana developed a fifty-year Coastal Master Plan to stabilize its coastal region and increase its resilience to hurricanes. Recovery in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands has barely begun. The rebuilding from Hurricane Sandy, which was viewed as fast, took almost a decade.

Lastly, the countries in the Americas would need to prepare to handle the unfolding migration surge and humanitarian catastrophe effectively and with compassion. For instance, after Hurricanes Irma and Maria in Puerto Rico, an eighth of Puerto Rico's four million residents moved to the continental United States. After Hurricane Mitch, in 1998,



thousands of Central Americans migrated north over the U.S. border. And this case is no different—already thousands of Central Americans have left the region on foot and are looking for safety and opportunity at the U.S. border. The ability of the U.S. immigration system to handle this surge of refugees is strained due to an already overwhelmed system and the coronavirus pandemic.

President-elect Joe Biden has made a commitment to increasing aid to Central America and addressing the root causes of instability in the region—ongoing gang violence, instability, and economic decline. The 2020 hurricane season has only added urgency to this need. This may be an opportunity to fix past problems and prepare for future threats. Disasters can be tipping points for communities—to something better.

### **Russia, China and More: How America Can Address Its Biggest Coming Threats (The National Interest)**

The National Interest [1/10/2021 5:00 PM, Brent D. Sadler, 289K, Negative]

The reaction to Joe Biden's pick to lead the Defense Department, retired Army Gen. Lloyd Austin, has so far ignored perhaps the most significant security issue of our nation: China. Why? The silence on this is bewildering.

Great-power competition with Russia and China is not new, and was a factor in the Obama-Biden administration in its final year. Today, intensifying pressures are driving competition between the United States, China, and Russia. This contest is about to enter a more dangerous phase, making the need for a strong Navy, increased forward military presence, and pragmatic diplomacy national imperatives.

For China, an aging population, unresolved territorial disputes, and a slowing economy are conspiring to challenge the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) legitimacy. This legitimacy has been anchored in the CCP's delivery of prosperity as measured by increasing gross domestic product (GDP) which has been ebbing as China's population ages. As this post-Tiananmen promise falters, there will be sharpening nationalist calls to resolve the Taiwan dispute—a scenario that could plausibly draw the United States into war.

Additionally, the CCP's attempts at enacting an extradition law sparked protests in Hong Kong that continue today. A consequence has been the repudiation of the CCP's decades-old proposed framework for peaceful resolution of the Chinese civil war known as "One-Country, Two-Systems."

The absence of a new framework for peacefully resolving the dispute between the CCP and Taiwan, and these economic pressures will come to a head by 2029. This is when China begins an unavoidable population decline and the associated GDP growth rate likely shrinking from today's 6.9 to 3 percent by 2030. Coincidentally, the CCP is urgently seeking to field a fully modern military by 2027—a budget priority in the CCP's 2021–25 five year plan.

All the while, Russia remains an unremitted strategic agitator seeking to weaken a geopolitical order it views as antithetical to its interests. Since the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, Russia under the leadership of Vladimir Putin has proven adept at leveraging a limited military, economic and diplomatic hand to great effect—notably the annexation of Crimea and interventions in Syria and Libya. As China grows more aggressive in Asia, it potentially distracts the West, opening avenues for Russia to advance its own interests in its periphery

at NATO and U.S. expense.

Moreover, both President Xi Jinping and Putin have pushed through legal changes that allow them to effectively serve for life. This marks a break from Russia's post-Soviet experience, as well as China's post-Cultural Revolution tradition of avoiding the instabilities of a cult of personality. This likely means the United States will know who it is dealing with in its principal competitors for some time. The downside, given that life-tenure carries historical luggage in both countries, is that Xi and Putin will be compelled to validate their prolonged leadership with delivery of military, economic or diplomatic successes.

Like traditional autocracies, both are externally risk adverse since they must also contend with domestic challenges; CCP spends almost 20 percent more on internal defense as it does for external national defense. Because of this, they attempt to change realities on the ground and at-sea without direct confrontation via so-called hybrid or gray-zone operations. Backed by active influence campaigns, economic largess, and military presence, their theory of victory is to alienate the United States from security allies and partners, elbow out market influence and access, and depict the rules-based order as hypocritical and only serving U.S. interests. Their goal—position themselves to dictate or accomplish via fait accompli their strategic economic, political, and military goals.

To effectively contest Chinese and Russian theories of victory, the Department of Defense and Navy must compete below the threshold of conflict to confound Xi's and Putin's strategic calculus. To deny them victories without firing a shot, the Navy will need to build and employ a larger fleet with new competencies to keep Xi and Putin unsure of the correlation of forces, explicitly challenge strategic narratives and influence campaigns, and pre-empt fait-accompl operations through a forward naval presence.

Doing this highlights the need for the United States to adroitly employ Naval Statecraft backed by an appropriately sized, trained, and equipped fleet. To accomplish this, the Navy must field a war-winning fleet while conducting a proactive strategic competition with China and Russia. To shift the Navy into this new paradigm, seven imperatives must be simultaneously addressed:

Articulate a strategic narrative that transcends political agendas allowing the Navy to enable deeper collaboration across government, Congress, and industry.

Accelerate deployment of a new fleet designed for contested operations, by validating through vigorous field testing unmanned systems and promising new capabilities, such as high energy lasers.

Expand shipyard capacity to ensure prompt return to service of ships in maintenance, recapitalization of wartime losses, and accelerated production of new classes of ships.

Prioritize near-term deployment of limited numbers of ships to decisive theaters in the South China Sea and Eastern Mediterranean, where they will have greatest strategic impact.

Rebuild naval core ship handling competencies as well as practice warfighting concepts such as dynamic maritime operations to address the operational stresses on the fleet and challenge evolving Chinese and Russian naval capabilities.

Secure and enhance an integrated naval force, to include Coast Guard, postured to secure our economic exclusive zones in peace, and critical air and sea lanes that can be held at risk in war by Russia and China; most notably in the Central and South Pacific. Implement a comprehensive national shipbuilding program to regain the nation's competitive edge in the strategically important maritime industry—to include commercial and naval shipbuilding.

The United States cannot wish away those who view its prosperity and democratic principles as an impediment to their designs. Reluctantly, the nation has awoken over the last five years to a new era of Great Power Competition, which is about to enter a dangerous new phase. To slacken resolve and vigilance now would make conflict more likely and costly.

**[Qatar] Was the ending of Qatar's blockade a victory, or does it signal the end of the Saudi era? (Yahoo News/ANI)**

Yahoo News/ANI [1/11/2021 12:28 AM, John Solomou, 4021K, Negative]

Last Tuesday, during a Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) summit, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain announced that they were ending the air, land and sea boycott of the state of Qatar. The summit issued a solidarity statement in which all sides vowed not to interfere in each other's affairs while retaining the freedom to follow their own foreign policy.

This was presented to the world as some sort of victory for the GCC, which had been practically paralysed because of the rift, and for Saudi Arabia's crown prince Mohammed Bin Salman (MBS), but in reality, it was a big victory for the tiny state of Qatar and one more failure of the misguided policies of MBS.

It should be mentioned that the declaration of conflict with Qatar in June 2017 was one of the first actions of Mohammed Bin Salman, who became the Saudi Crown Prince in the same month. The three countries together with Egypt accused Qatar of supporting Islamist groups in the region and of having close ties with Iran.

Moreover, they presented a list of 13 demands for the lifting of sanctions, which included limiting relations with Iran, ending support for the Muslim Brotherhood and closing down Al Jazeera, which exposed the corruption prevailing in Arab states. Qatar flatly refused to comply with these demands.

Throughout this period, the tiny but oil-rich Qatar stood its ground and managed to overcome the difficulties it was facing, used the Iranian airspace for the flights of its airline and forged closer relations with Turkey and Iran, with which it shares a giant gas field. It also built factories to manufacture consumer goods and increased its national investment fund with more than USD 320 billion.

It is reported that the only concession Qatar made for the lifting of sanctions was to withdraw claims for USD 5 billion in compensation for damages caused due to the boycott. For its part, Saudi Arabia withdrew its demand to close Al Jazeera.

In the past decades Saudi Arabia, as home to Islam's holiest sites and as a country having the second-largest oil reserves in the world, had a lot of religious and economic power among the Arab and the Islamic countries. In 1978 in the wake of the Islamic Revolution in

Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan the following year, the Saudi regime became a most valuable ally of the United States.

The end of this state of affairs started with the death of King Abdullah and the leadership of King Salman and his son Mohammed, who became Defence Minister and afterwards Crown Prince. Soon MBS embarked on an anti-corruption campaign and arrested dozens of rich Saudis, including princes and government officials, forcing them to pay billions of dollars into government coffers. He tried to turn Qatar into a vassal state and make the Gulf Cooperation Council impose sanctions on Qatar. Only UAE, Bahrain and Egypt- which is not a GCC state- followed him and boycotted Qatar.

Mohammed bin Salmanguided the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen against the Houthi rebels, who in 2015 had seized Sana'a and ousted the Saudi-backed Hadi government. Saudi airstrikes during the intervention have resulted in thousands of civilians killed or injured, prompting accusations of war crimes in the intervention. Despite hundreds of billions of Saudi arms purchases, the five-year war continues with no one emerging victorious, while one of the worst humanitarian disasters in the world has been created there. Meanwhile, Yemeni Youthis are escalating their missile attacks on Saudi Arabia.

In October 2018, a Saudi journalist and a critic of the crown prince named Jamal Khashoggi disappeared after entering the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. Turkish officials say Khashoggi was first tortured and then murdered by a 15-man Saudi team. Prince Mohammed has denied any involvement in the murder and blamed the assassination on rogue operators. However, Western countries are not convinced and believe this couldn't have happened without the knowledge or approval of the prince. US President Donald Trump described the Saudi response to the killing as "one of the worst in the history of cover-ups.

Although MBS appeared prepared to take some liberalisation measures, e.g. significantly restricting the powers of the religious police, allowing Saudi women to open their own business without a male's permission, opening the first public cinema in ultra-conservative Saudi Arabia and lifting the ban on women driving, he has consistently suppressed human rights activists, some of whom were murdered by death squads.

As Marwan Bishara, a senior political analyst at Al Jazeera points out: "The initial optimism and excitement about greater social mobility and empowerment of women soon gave way to pessimism and despair, as Saudi economic reform and multibillion-dollar megaprojects stalled, while youth unemployment remains at a high 29 per cent. The Saudi kingdom is in disarray, its regime utterly disoriented and disrespected throughout the region and beyond."

Omer Ozkizilcik, an analyst for the SETA Foundation, says: "A withdrawing Saudi Arabia, an increasingly influential UAE that focused on Turkey and Qatar, and the continuing Russian-Iranian cooperation made Saudi Arabia the primary loser of the geopolitical chess game in the Middle East. From Syria to Yemen, Saudi Arabia's role was relegated to a footnote."

### **[Taiwan] Taiwan Found a Strange Bedfellow in Trump (Bloomberg)**

Bloomberg [1/10/2021 5:00 PM, Tim Culpan, 6400K, Neutral]

One of the great ironies of the Trump presidency is that Asia's most liberal democracy may be the biggest beneficiary of his very illiberal view of the world.

Taiwan's moment in the Trump spotlight commenced even before he took office in January 2017 — when he held a historic phone call with President Tsai Ing-wen — and culminated on Saturday with the U.S. secretary of state ordering the removal of “complex internal restrictions to regulate our diplomats, service members, and other officials’ interactions with their Taiwanese counterparts.”

It should be lost on no one that the most significant tweak to Washington's policy toward Taipei comes in the dying days of an administration whose president inspired a damaging but ultimately ineffectual uprising for his own benefit in Washington, D.C.

Few dare to call Taiwan a country, despite its fully independent legal system, diplomatic autonomy and democratic institutions. Yet Trump's incessant desire to keep needling Beijing, for domestic political distraction, elevated Taiwan's status.

And Taiwan played along. At one point the foreign ministry tweeted an article from the rabid right-wing U.S. outlet Breitbart in what appeared like a blatant attempt to score points against China. And last year Tsai waived the quarantine protocols that had kept Taiwanese safe from Covid-19 in order to welcome a delegation led by health secretary Alex Azar. It'll repeat that risky maneuver this week with a visit to Taipei by the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Kelly Craft.

If you put their mutual distrust of Beijing aside, the Taiwan and U.S. we saw over the past four years couldn't be more different.

Taiwan has grown in moral and political stature — it became one of the few places in Asia to allow gay marriage, held another round of free and fair elections, showed the world how to handle a pandemic, and dispensed millions in aid to afflicted nations — while the U.S. has become increasingly belligerent and regressive both at home and abroad.

Their anti-Beijing pile-on rose to a crescendo in the final year of Trump's presidency when a confluence of factors sharpened the focus on their common enemy. In one fell swoop the world had a new virus out of China, Beijing's own evasiveness on the outbreak, Taipei's early and effective measures, and Trump's bumbling of the disaster. That was the perfect formula for Taiwan to project its righteousness — as opposed to the regime on the other side of the strait.

While Taipei seems to revel in that stark juxtaposition, it may also be the biggest risk to Taiwan's future.

If being pro-Taiwan is inexorably tied to being anti-China, a paradigm not formulated by Trump but highlighted under his tenure, then the flipside is that a more gentle policy toward Beijing under President Biden could leave Taipei back out in the cold.

While there's no doubt that a Biden administration will tone down the rhetoric, it's also unlikely Washington will return to the dovishness seen under Obama and the generations before him. Even the most naive and starry-eyed optimist must recognize the folly of the tired old theory that welcoming China into global institutions would result in Beijing learning to become a compliant international citizen.

Taiwan — largely shut out of those same institutions and mostly due to Beijing's pressure



— has received arguably more support from “like-minded countries” over the past four years than at any time in the past four decades. But that’s also because Beijing’s aggressiveness has itself made Taipei look so innocuous.

For sure, Taiwan benefits from its positive comparison to China, one brought to global attention under Trump. And its leaders have happily ridden that wave of goodwill.

But if it’s to truly take its place in the world, it needs countries like the U.S. to view Taipei not as a better version of their large rival, and a convenient bulwark against Beijing expansionism. Instead, it needs the world to see Taiwan as a place worthy of its own narrative, one that’s apart from their toughening policies toward China.

## Coronavirus News

### **Global coronavirus cases surpass 90 million in battle on new variant (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/11/2021 1:50 AM, Roshan Abraham and Anurag Maan, Neutral]

Worldwide coronavirus cases surpassed 90 million on Monday, according to Reuters tally, as nations around the globe scramble to procure vaccines and continue to extend or reinstate lockdowns to fight new coronavirus variants. The new COVID-19 variants discovered initially in the United Kingdom and South Africa are rapidly spreading globally.

The novel coronavirus has picked up pace in the past few months with about one-third of total cases registered in the last 48 days, according to a Reuters tally. Europe, which became the first region to report 25 million cases last week, remains the worst-affected area in the world, followed by North and Latin Americas with 22.4 million and 16.3 million cases respectively.

Europe has reported around 31% of about 1.93 million coronavirus-related deaths globally. The United Kingdom, the worst-affected European country, crossed 3 million cases last Friday.

The nation is on course to have immunized its most vulnerable people against COVID-19 by mid-February and plans to offer a shot to every adult by autumn.

To control the spread of new coronavirus variant, countries across the globe have started to extend movement and business restrictions.

In Germany, Chancellor Angela Merkel and state premiers last week agreed to restrict non-essential travel for residents of hard-hit areas all over Germany for the first time, after a lockdown decreed in December failed to significantly reduce infection numbers. French authorities imposed a stricter evening curfew in Marseille after authorities said the new variant of the COVID-19 virus initially found in the UK had been discovered in the Mediterranean city.

The United States, world's worst affected country, reported its highest death toll on Wednesday, with over 4,000 fatalities in a single day.

The nation has recorded more than 22 million cases since the pandemic started, reporting on average 245,000 new infections a day over the last seven days, according to a Reuters

analysis.

In Asia, India crossed 150,000 deaths last Tuesday, becoming the third nation to reach the grim milestone.

The south Asian nation has approved two COVID-19 vaccines and will start its vaccination drive from Jan. 16 with priority given to about 30 million healthcare and frontline workers.

### **Global COVID-19 cases surpass 90 million (Yahoo News/ANI)**

Yahoo News/ANI [1/10/2021 10:01 PM, Staff, 4021K, Neutral]

The global coronavirus cases have surpassed the grim milestone of 90 million cases and 1.93 million deaths as per the latest update by Johns Hopkins University.

As of 6.52 am IST, the COVID-19 Dashboard by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) at Johns Hopkins University (JHU), reported that the cases worldwide stand at 90,216,381 and as many as 1,933,487 people have succumbed to the pathogen worldwide.

As many as 49,953,438 patients who tested positive for the virus have recovered from the virus, the live dashboard reported further.

The United States continues to be the most-affected country in the world by the pandemic reporting 22,377,230 cases of the coronavirus and 374,008 deaths across the country. The US also records the most fatalities in the world.

CNN reported that more than 27,000 new COVID-19 deaths have been reported in the US in the first 10 days of 2021, citing data from Johns Hopkins University.

A total of 27,163 deaths have been reported as of Sunday afternoon. At this pace, January could have more deaths than December, which saw a record of 77,431 total Covid-19 deaths. April saw the second-highest number of deaths with 60,750 fatalities, the data showed.

India and Brazil continue to be the second and third most-affected countries respectively reporting 10.4 million cases and 8.1 million cases respectively.

Russia and the United Kingdom occupy the fourth and the fifth place of most COVID-19 cases in the world with 3.6 million cases and 3.08million cases respectively, the dashboard reported further.

Sputnik reported that the United Kingdom has raised \$1 billion from global donors to fund vaccination campaigns against COVID-19 in developing countries, the UK Foreign Office said Sunday.

The first round of World Health Organization consultations on granting Russian COVID-19 vaccine Sputnik V authorisation for emergency use will take place in the latter third of January, Heath Ministry Advisor Sergey Glagolev said according to Sputnik.

The COVID-19 vaccination drive in the country will start from January 16. The decision was taken at a meeting on Saturday in which Prime Minister Narendra Modi reviewed the status



of COVID-19 in the country and preparedness of states and union territories for vaccination against the disease.

In December, the UK announced that a new coronavirus strain was detected in the country, adding that the new variant can be up to 70 per cent more transmissible than other SARS-CoV-2 variants. After the news, many countries suspended travel to and from the UK. There is no evidence that the new strain is more pathogenic.

**At this rate, January will be the deadliest month of Covid-19 in the US (CNN)**

CNN [1/10/2021 5:40 PM, Madeline Holcombe and Holly Yan, 7975K, Neutral]

It took about 90 days for the United States to reach its first 2 million cases of coronavirus last year.

But it took just 10 days to hit 2.2 million cases in 2021, according to data from Johns Hopkins University.

And new infections, hospitalizations and deaths keep soaring.

"We're in a dire situation," said Dr. Ashish Jha, dean of the Brown University School of Public Health.

"We know how to slow the spread of the virus. We need mask mandates. We need people to really stay at home and avoid any indoor gatherings."

But officials say many Americans did the opposite over the holidays, gathering with friends or extended family. Now the consequences are becoming more evident in packed hospitals across the country.

More than 27,000 new Covid-19 deaths have been reported in just the first 10 days of 2021, according to data from Johns Hopkins.

At this rate, more people could die from Covid-19 in January than any other month of this pandemic. December had a record high of 77,431 deaths due to Covid-19.

Saturday, the United States suffered 3,655 new Covid-19 deaths, along with 269,623 new infections, according to Johns Hopkins.

US vaccinations are lagging behind expectations

In hard-hit Arizona, the crisis will get worse, said Joe K. Gerald, associate professor at the University of Arizona's Zuckerman College of Public Health.

"We should expect to set new records for cases, hospitalizations, and deaths over the coming weeks. Policy action is urgently needed to mitigate the worst possible outcome," Gerald wrote.

He also expressed concern about "the inevitable arrival of the more highly transmissible" strain of coronavirus that was first detected in the United Kingdom and has spread to at least eight US states, including California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, New York, Pennsylvania and Texas.

"If it gathers a foothold, it will accelerate, lengthen, and deepen Arizona's outbreak," Gerald said.

Thursday was the first day the US reported more than 4,000 new Covid-19 deaths in a single day.

The toll could get worse as more hospitals fill up.

There were 129,229 Covid-19 patients in US hospitals on Sunday, according to the COVID Tracking Project -- the sixth highest figure recorded. It was the 40th consecutive day that US Covid-19 hospitalizations remained above 100,000.

The director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said the recent riot at the US Capitol would likely be a "surge event" that "will probably lead to a significant spreading" across the country.

"You had largely unmasked individuals in a non-distanced fashion, who were all through the Capitol," Dr. Robert Redfield told the McClatchy newspaper group.

"Then these individuals all are going in cars and trains and planes going home all across the country right now."

CNN medical analyst and emergency physician Dr. Leana Wen echoed that statement, telling CNN's Ana Cabrera Sunday, "The individuals who did not use masks or social distancing at the Capitol probably are also not following these guidelines when they go back to their home communities."

"And it's very likely they're engaging in other risky behaviors there and potentially seeding coronavirus all around the country, wherever they came from," she said. "I hope that everyone who participated in those events will go back and quarantine and get tested."

In Kentucky, Gov. Andy Beshear said his state was seeing a "real and significant increase in cases and our positivity rate from people's gatherings around the holiday."

"This surge that we're in right now is at least twice the rate, the seriousness, of the previous surges that we have seen," the governor said Friday. "This is our most dangerous time."

Hospitalizations are climbing in Texas, where a record number of Covid-19 patients were reported for the seventh day in a row Saturday. At least 13,935 patients were hospitalized in the state, according to the Texas Department of State Health Services.

There were 7,497 Covid-19 patients in Florida hospitals on Sunday, according to the Florida Agency for Health Care Administration. That's about 3,000 patients more than were hospitalized in the state about a month ago, on December 12, when the AHCA reported 4,343 hospitalizations.

And California set two new records Saturday -- the most deaths reported in one day, 695, and the most Covid-19 patients in intensive care units -- 4,939. On Sunday, the state reported nearly 50,000 new cases and 468 deaths.

"The speed with which we are reaching grim milestones of COVID-19 deaths and cases is a devastating reflection of the immense spread that is occurring across the county," Los Angeles County Director of Public Health Barbara Ferrer said.

"The best way to protect ourselves, slow the spread, and stop overwhelming our hospitals, is to pause participating in any activities that aren't absolutely essential," she said.

"This is just not the time to go to the shopping mall or to a friend's house to watch a basketball or football game."

Meanwhile, the nation's Covid-19 vaccine rollout "is absolutely not working as intended," said Dr. Megan Ranney, a CNN medical analyst and an emergency physician.

"We have three times as many doses that have been distributed to states as have actually gotten in arms," she said. "We have to do something different, and we have to do something different now."

President-elect Joe Biden will aim to release nearly all available doses of Covid-19 vaccines in an effort to quickly ramp up the US vaccine rollout, a spokesman for his transition team said.

But it could also be risky, because the vaccines by Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna require two doses administered weeks apart to be about 95% effective, and vaccine manufacturing has not ramped up as rapidly as many experts had hoped.

The plan is a break from the strategy of the Trump administration, which has held back doses of the vaccines to ensure that second doses are available.

Dr. Celine Gounder, a member of Biden's coronavirus advisory board, told CNN Saturday the new plan aims to "get doses out as quickly as possible" and simplify distribution.

Officials aren't recommending patients delay receiving their second doses, she said. People should still plan to receive the second dose of Pfizer's vaccine 21 days after the first dose, and the Moderna vaccine 28 days after the first dose.

"So long as there are not any manufacturing glitches, we're confident that the supply of vaccine will be there when people return for their second dose," Gounder said.

Ranney said she believed the plan "makes sense," saying the US needed to "rethink how we take the doses we have and get them out into peoples' arms."

"Time is absolutely of the essence," she said. But she also stressed that people need to stick to the two-dose regimen approved by the FDA.

Asked about the plan, Wen said she supported any effort to speed up vaccination, "but we should also look at where the bottleneck is."

"Right now, the issue is not so much supply, but it's actually that last mile of getting (vaccines) from the distribution sites to, actually, people's arms," she said. "If we have more

supply, that's not actually solving for the right problem."

Wen also said each individual who received the first dose would be guaranteed a timely second dose, since that's how clinical trials were conducted.

If there isn't enough vaccine in reserve for people to received second doses, she said, "I think that could really fuel vaccine hesitancy and further erode public trust in these vaccines."

## **Congressional Activity**

### **House to Move to Impeach Trump After Push to Have Pence Remove Him From Office (Wall Street Journal)**

Wall Street Journal [1/10/2021 8:30 PM, Andrew Restuccia, Brent Kendall and Siobhan Hughes, Neutral]

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D., Calif) said the House will move to impeach President Trump as soon as this week if Vice President Mike Pence and the president's cabinet don't act to strip him of his powers over the riot at the U.S. Capitol.

Mrs. Pelosi, in a letter to House colleagues, said Democrats on Monday will first introduce a resolution calling for the vice president to use the 25th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution to remove Mr. Trump from office. The resolution would come to a vote by Tuesday. If it is approved and Mr. Pence doesn't act to remove Mr. Trump from office within 24 hours, the House will proceed to impeachment, Mrs. Pelosi said.

"We will act with urgency, because this president represents an imminent threat," Mrs. Pelosi said.

Mr. Pence isn't expected to move forward with a 25th Amendment process, people familiar with his thinking said.

One article of impeachment that accuses Mr. Trump of inciting an insurrection was close to having enough support to pass the House. Meanwhile, more GOP lawmakers said Sunday Mr. Trump should resign.

Should Democrats succeed, Mr. Trump would be the first president in U.S. history to be impeached twice. Conviction in the Senate faces higher hurdles, however, including a two-thirds majority vote requiring significant Republican support.

The president didn't appear in public or make remarks over the weekend after Twitter Inc. shut off his personal account. He released a video on Thursday condemning the riot without taking responsibility for it and in which he vowed to leave office on Jan. 20. The White House has dismissed the impeachment effort as politically motivated. Authorities on Saturday charged additional people in connection with the attack, which many say was spurred on by Mr. Trump's rhetoric as he for weeks falsely claimed the election had been stolen.

House Democrats said they expected to vote on at least one article of impeachment, and possibly another connected to Mr. Trump's efforts to pressure state officials to overturn

President-elect Joe Biden's victory in Georgia.

Rep. David Cicilline (D., R.I.), one of the main sponsors of a resolution to impeach the president, said Sunday afternoon that he had lined up more than 200 co-sponsors. A total of 222 lawmakers are in the House Democratic caucus, and it would take 217 votes to pass an impeachment measure, with 433 House seats currently filled.

As part of the impeachment process, lawmakers could vote on a measure that would prevent Mr. Trump from running for president again in 2024, which he has told associates he wants to do, though it is unclear whether it would win enough support to pass both chambers. An alternative approach would involve censuring Mr. Trump. Eleanor Holmes Norton, Washington, D.C.'s nonvoting delegate in Congress, on Sunday said "a censure resolution is the only way to send a bipartisan, bicameral message without delay."

Democrats are torn between pressure to hold Mr. Trump accountable for the riot and shifting their focus to Mr. Biden's agenda.

House Majority Whip James Clyburn (D., S.C.) said on Sunday that the House could delay sending the articles of impeachment to the U.S. Senate until Mr. Biden's term is well under way.

"Let's give President-elect Biden the 100 days he needs to get his agenda off and running, and maybe we'll send the articles sometime after that," he said on CNN's "State of the Union." Sen. Chuck Schumer (D., N.Y.), who is in line to be majority leader once Mr. Biden assumes the presidency, also hasn't commented on his preferences. An aide didn't answer a question about whether Mr. Schumer favored proceeding with a Senate trial. Once the House approves articles of impeachment, it automatically triggers a Senate trial.

Any effort to impeach and convict Mr. Trump faces long odds given that two-thirds of the Senate must vote in favor of conviction.

Mr. Trump was acquitted by the Senate last year in impeachment proceedings related to his efforts pressing Ukraine to announce investigations that would have aided him politically.

The Senate isn't scheduled to be in session again until Jan. 19, one day before Mr. Trump leaves office. The Senate will be divided 50-50 with Democrats controlling the Senate after Mr. Biden assumes office on Jan. 20. If all 100 senators were to vote, it would take 67 to convict, and the Senate will have 50 Democrats, suggesting they would need support from 17 Republicans. Senate conviction carries with it removal from office, should Mr. Trump still be president at the time of a vote. The Senate would have to hold a separate vote, by a simple majority, to disqualify Mr. Trump from holding office in the future.

Separately, the Capitol's attending physician said some lawmakers and staff might have been exposed to the coronavirus when they were evacuated during the Jan. 6 siege, adding to the potential fallout from the riot. Dr. Brian Monahan wrote in a memo that one person in a House group that was moved to a large committee room "may have been exposed to another occupant with coronavirus infection." He said that individuals should get tested for the virus "as a precaution."

Sen. Pat Toomey (R., Pa.) on Sunday said Mr. Trump should step down. "I think the best

way for our country is for the president to resign and go away as soon as possible. I acknowledge that may not be likely, but I think that would be best," Mr. Toomey said on NBC's "Meet the Press." Rep. Adam Kinzinger (R., Ill.), who has called for invoking the 25th Amendment to remove Mr. Trump, also said the president should resign on ABC's "This Week."

The 25th Amendment, ratified in 1967, lays out the details of presidential succession in the event that a president dies or becomes ill. One section of the amendment allows for the vice president to take over the president's duties if the vice president and the majority of the cabinet determine that the president "is unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office."

That section of the amendment has never before been invoked, and it could set off a clash between the president and his No. 2. Congress would get the final say over whether the vice president can maintain the president's powers, which would be decided by a two-thirds majority. Republicans have enough seats to block an incapacity vote in each house of Congress.

Sen. Ben Sasse (R., Neb.) said on Friday he would consider impeachment, and Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R., Alaska) called on Mr. Trump to resign. Some Republicans resisted the calls. "My view would be that what the president should do is finish the last 10 days of his presidency," Sen. Roy Blunt (R., Mo.) said Sunday on CBS' "Face the Nation." Mr. Kinzinger also said that impeachment could backfire "because I think it victimizes Donald Trump again."

The White House on Sunday referred reporters to a Friday statement, which said, "A politically motivated impeachment against a president, who has done a great job, with 12 days remaining in his term will only serve to further divide our great country."

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R., Ky.) sent a memo to Republican senators on Friday outlining how an impeachment trial could work, saying it would be impossible to do it before Mr. Biden becomes president.

University of Texas law professor Stephen Vladeck said there was a general legal consensus that impeachment proceedings can continue even after a president or other official leaves office. The issue also remains relevant, he said, because the impeachment process is a mechanism for rendering Mr. Trump disqualified from holding office in the future. "This is their only remedy for that," Mr. Vladeck said. Mr. Trump sought to overturn Mr. Biden's win in Georgia in an hour-long call earlier this month with Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, prompting criticism from Democrats and some Republicans.

In December, Mr. Trump also called a staffer in the Georgia secretary of state's office, demanding that it produce proof of election fraud, an official at that office said. White House officials separately pushed Atlanta's top federal prosecutor to resign before Georgia's U.S. Senate runoffs because the president was upset he wasn't doing enough to investigate the president's unproven claims of election fraud, people familiar with the matter said.

Mr. Raffensperger told the president he was wrong and rejected pressure to further investigate an election. Senior Justice Department officials including recently departed Attorney General William Barr have said the Justice Department hadn't found evidence of



widespread voter fraud that could reverse Mr. Biden's victory, and Mr. Trump and his supporters lost dozens of cases challenging the election results.

The president is scheduled to travel to Alamo, Texas, on Tuesday for an event focused on the Trump administration's efforts to build a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, the White House said.

### **House moves closer to 2nd Trump impeachment (ABC News)**

ABC News [1/10/2021 8:10 PM, Staff, 29K, Neutral]

Democrats will take steps this week in the House to remove President Donald Trump, beginning with a call for Vice President Mike Pence to invoke the 25 Amendment, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said in a letter to Democrats on Sunday.

The resolution would call on Pence "to immediately use his powers under section 4 of the 25th Amendment to convene and mobilize the principal officers of the executive departments in the Cabinet to declare what is obvious to a horrified Nation: That the President is unable to successfully discharge the duties and powers of his office."

If Republicans block the move, Democrats will vote on the bill on Tuesday and impeachment later this week.

"We are calling for the Vice President to respond in 24 hours," Pelosi wrote, regarding Pence and the 25th Amendment.

Democrats will hold a private caucus call at 2 p.m. ET.

Hoyer's action on the floor will take place at 11 a.m. on the House floor.

Calls for the president's removal come after a mob of pro-Trump supporters breached the Capitol on Wednesday while Congress was voting to certify the electoral votes. The siege of the Capitol left at least five dead, including one Capitol police officer.

Pelosi also asked Democrats for their views on a section of the 14th Amendment, regarding the removal of members who "have engaged in insurrection or rebellion."

Some Democrats, including new progressive Rep. Cori Bush, D-Mo., want the House to expel members who may have encouraged violence at the Capitol.

"Tomorrow, I'm introducing my resolution to expel the members of Congress who tried to overturn the election and incited a white supremacist coup attempt that has left people dead. They have violated the 14th Amendment," Bush tweeted Sunday. "We can't have unity without accountability."

## **Near East & North Africa**

### **Bahrain says it will open airspace to Qatar from Monday (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/10/2021 4:47 PM, Nayera Abdallah, Ghaida Ghantous and Lisa Barrington, 5304K, Neutral]

Bahrain will open its airspace to Qatar as of Jan. 11, the civil aviation affairs authority said



on Sunday, following a U.S.-backed deal by Arab states last week to end a dispute with Doha.

The move comes after Riyadh announced a breakthrough at a summit on Tuesday to end the bitter political row in which Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt imposed a diplomatic, trade and travel boycott on Qatar in mid-2017.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE have already announced reopening air, land and sea entry points to Qatar.

Saudi Arabia's foreign minister had said at the summit that the four states agreed to restore all ties with Qatar which were severed over accusations that Doha supports terrorism. Qatar denies this and says the embargo aimed to curb its sovereignty.

However a senior UAE official said last week that while trade and travel links could be resumed within a week, restoring diplomatic ties would take more time as parties rebuild trust.

In a sign of continued tension, Bahrain's foreign ministry earlier on Sunday said Qatar's coast guard arrested Bahraini bodybuilding champion Sami Al Haddad while on a fishing cruise and called on Doha "to stop attacking Bahraini fishermen at sea and unfairly arresting them".

The director of Bahrain's coast guard operations said in a separate statement that Haddad and another Bahraini were arrested on Friday over allegations of entering Qatari territorial waters in the third such incident since November.

There was no immediate comment from Qatari authorities.

In December, Qatar's interior ministry said its coastguard stopped a Bahraini cruiser catching fish in Qatari territorial waters and arrested three people.

The previous month, Bahrain's interior ministry accused Qatari coastguard vessels of violating regional and international agreements after they stopped two Bahraini boats inside Qatari waters.

**[Algeria] Algeria registers Sputnik vaccine for use, Russian wealth fund says (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/10/2021 3:09 PM, Staff, 5304K, Anton Zverev and Anton Kolodyazhnyy]  
Algeria has registered Russia's Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine for use, becoming the first African country to do, Russia's RDIF sovereign wealth fund said on Sunday.

Russia said last month it had signed a contract with Algeria to supply it with the vaccine.

**[Saudi Arabia] Saudi Crown Prince Plans Car-Free City for Future Beyond Oil (Bloomberg)**

Bloomberg [1/10/2021 5:57 PM, Vivian Nereim, 6400K, Neutral]  
Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman unveiled his latest vision for Saudi Arabia's future beyond oil: a city with no cars, roads or carbon emissions.

The 170 kilometer-long (106 mile-long) development called "The Line" will be part of the \$500 billion project called "Neom," the crown prince said in a televised speech on Sunday. Construction is planned to start in the first quarter.

A news release described The Line as a walkable "belt of hyper-connected future communities, without cars and roads and built around nature." It said the city would have 1 million residents and create 380,000 jobs by 2030. The infrastructure will cost \$100 billion to \$200 billion, the crown prince said.

Neom is the crown jewel of Prince Mohammed's plan to diversify the economy of the world's largest crude exporter. Announced in 2017, the project spans more than 10,000 square miles in a remote area of the country's northwest. It's described on its website as "a bold and audacious dream" that will become a hub for new technologies and businesses.

The project has been plagued by skepticism and political controversy since its launch. Analysts question if it's realistic and can attract the investment needed.

"The backbone of investment in The Line will come from the \$500 billion support to Neom by the Saudi government, PIF and local and global investors over 10 years," the prince told reporters in Al-Ula, referring to Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund.

The announcement on Sunday shows the extent to which Prince Mohammed is thinking about life after oil for the kingdom, which earned over half of government revenue from crude in 2020. The project was the first major development to be announced within Neom.

"Why do we accept sacrificing nature for development?" the prince said, citing rising sea levels and carbon emissions in a manner rare for a Saudi official. The city, he said, would be a "revolution for mankind" with "zero cars, zero streets, zero emissions."

No journey within The Line will be longer than 20 minutes, he said. The city would be built around "ultra-high-speed transit and autonomous mobility solutions," according to the statement.

## Europe and Eurasia

### **[France] 'Every minute counts' as France detects COVID-19 variant first found in England (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/10/2021 2:59 PM, Marc Leras, Sudip Kar-Gupta, and Matthieu Protard, 5304K, Neutral]

French authorities said on Sunday they were racing to contain the more infectious variant of COVID-19 first found in Britain, which has now been detected in France's Mediterranean port of Marseille and in the Alps.

Marseille Mayor Benoit Payan said seven to eight people had tested positive for the new variant in the city, while tests were underway on 30 others who may also have been exposed to it.

"Right now, every minute counts in terms of preventing the spread of this English variant,"

Payan told reporters.

The local health authority in the Hautes-Alpes region, home to many ski resorts which attract British visitors, said the variant had also been discovered there.

France has the seventh-biggest COVID-19 death toll in the world. Deaths rose by 151 over the last 24 hours to reach a total of 67,750, while the number of new, confirmed cases rose by 15,944 to stand at around 2.78 million.

The variant, first found in England late last year, has been blamed by the British government for a surge in cases threatening to overrun British hospitals in the last month.

In response to the discovery of the variant in Marseille, the city imposed moved the start time of an evening curfew two hours earlier to 6 p.m.

Marseille joined other major cities such as Strasbourg and Dijon in having longer curfew hours. In Paris, 8 p.m. to 6 a.m. curfew hours remain unchanged for now.

President Emmanuel Macron's government has said it will not rule out stricter measures if the COVID-19 situation worsens in France.

Macron has been working on speeding up the country's vaccine rollout. France had delivered just 7,000 shots more than a week after launching its vaccination campaign on Dec. 27. The government said a vaccine made by Moderna will arrive in France this week.

**[Ireland] Northern Ireland hospitals under pressure 'like never before': health minister (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/10/2021 5:08 PM, Padraic Halpin, 11261K, Negative]

Northern Ireland's health minister on Sunday night said COVID-19 was placing the healthcare system under pressure "like never before," as one hospital appealed on social media for the immediate help of all off-duty healthworkers nearby.

The British-run region has struggled with persistently high coronavirus infection rates despite being in and out of some form of lockdown since October. Cases soared to by far their highest level since the pandemic began after the Christmas holidays.

The Western Health and Social Care Trust, one of the five regional groups that run Northern Ireland's hospitals, made the call to workers near the South West Acute Hospital (SWAH) in the town Enniskillen, close to the border with Ireland.

"Attention all off-duty staff in the vicinity of SWAH. Due to increasing pressures this evening on the NI (Northern Irish) Healthcare System we are appealing to you to contact or go directly to the hospital. Thank You," the Trust said on Twitter.

Patients were being diverted to Enniskillen due to pressure on hospitals elsewhere, it added.

A Sinn Fein lawmaker, Liz Kimmins, whose party jointly leads the devolved regional government, also posted a message she said was sent to nurses at another hospital in the town of Craigavon calling on off duty staff to help on Sunday night.

Health Minister Robin Swann shared a statement from the chief executives of the hospital groups urging people to only go to emergency rooms if they need emergency care, and that patients will need to leave the hospital as soon as they are medically fit to do so.

That might mean families "having to go the extra mile" to provide temporary support for relatives, they said. They warned that those arriving by ambulance may have to wait hours before space is available in already stretched emergency departments.

The statement added that despite hospitals already being at 94% capacity, modelling projections indicate they will be contending with double the number of COVID-19 patients in the third week in January.

"Our health service is under pressure, like never before, please play your part, follow guidance, you know what to do!" Swann said on Twitter.

**[Italy] Italy reports 361 coronavirus deaths on Sunday, 18,627 new cases (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/10/2021 11:28 AM, Giulio Piovaccari, 11261K, Neutral]

Italy reported 361 coronavirus-related deaths on Sunday, down from 483 the day before, the health ministry said, while the daily tally of new infections fell to 18,627 from 19,978.

Some 139,758 swab tests were carried out in the past day, the ministry said, against a previous 172,119.

Italy has registered 78,755 COVID-19 deaths since its outbreak came to light on Feb. 21, the second-highest toll in Europe and the sixth-highest in the world. The country has reported 2.276 million cases to date, the health ministry said.

Patients in hospital with COVID-19 - not including those in intensive care - stood at 23,427 on Sunday, up 167 from a day earlier.

There were 181 admissions to intensive care units, versus with 183 on Saturday.

The current number of intensive care patients rose by 22 to 2,615.

When Italy's second wave of the epidemic accelerated quickly in the first half of November, hospital admissions were rising by about 1,000 per day, while intensive care occupancy was increasing by about 100 per day.

**[United Kingdom] Brexit Drags U.K. Below U.S. in Global Business Location Ranking (Bloomberg)**

Bloomberg [1/10/2021 8:00 PM, Iain Rogers, 6400K, Neutral]

Britain is significantly less attractive as an international business location because of Brexit but remains well positioned compared with other major economies, according to a German study.

The U.K. slipped behind the U.S. to second place in the latest ranking published by Germany's Foundation for Family Businesses, though it remains ahead of the rest of its Group of Seven partners. Canada was fourth, followed by Germany in 17th, France in 18th,

Japan in 20th and Italy in 21st and final spot.

"Brexit has been a major liability for the U.K.," the authors of the study wrote. "Future British governments have a long road ahead if they wish to regain its economic dynamism, as promised by Brexit advocates."

The eighth edition of the ranking, which is prepared by the ZEW research institute and was first published in 2006, assessed the business environment in six categories: taxation; labor costs, productivity and human capital; regulation; financing; infrastructure and institutions and energy.

Britain suffered the biggest overall decline of all the countries included, with "Brexit-related uncertainties" having the greatest impact in the area of "financing" and "infrastructure and institutions."

The U.S. tops the list mainly due to "outstanding performance" in regulation, financing and energy, and it also scores well on labor costs, productivity and human capital. A clear weakness is taxation: "While Trump's tax reform was beneficial, the U.S. still trails most countries in this area," the authors said.

"Our analysis sheds important light on the extent to which countries will be in a position to ward off the long-term effects of the coronavirus pandemic," they added.

## **East Asia and Pacific**

### **[Australia] Australia closes hospital emergency unit over virus case as city lockdown lifts (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/10/2021 8:38 PM, Byron Kaye, 11261K, Neutral]

A hospital emergency department in Sydney was closed after a patient tested positive for COVID-19, Australian authorities said on Monday, as the city of Brisbane made face masks compulsory at public venues.

A man in his 40s tested positive for the virus on Sunday after coming to Sydney's Mount Druitt Hospital, prompting it to close its emergency unit for cleaning, with media reports saying ambulances were diverted to other hospitals.

Although the unit reopened on Monday, health officials said they would investigate the man's movements to determine where he contracted the illness and whether it was linked to a highly-contagious strain that was first detected in Britain.

"We are doing all we can to do rapid genome testing to understand where this virus sits in terms of its lineage and whether that gives us some clues of transmission," said New South Wales state chief health officer Kerry Chant at a televised news conference.

Since the man and another member of his household tested positive after 8 p.m. local time, they would be counted in the following day's official tally of new coronavirus cases. In the 24 hours to 8 p.m. on Sunday, three people in Sydney tested positive, Chant said, the country's only community transmissions of the infection that day.

Thanks to border closures and widespread compliance with social distancing rules, along

with aggressive testing and tracing programmes, Australia has been more successful than most advanced economies in managing the pandemic, with total infections in the country of 25 million people at around 28,600, including 909 deaths.

Last week, Queensland state put Brisbane, the country's third-most populous city, into a three-day lockdown after one person tested positive to the strain originating in Britain. The lockdown was lifted on Monday after the state reported no new infections, although the authorities made it compulsory for 10 days to wear masks at indoor public venues like shopping malls.

Sydney and Melbourne have also made wearing masks compulsory in public.

"It is for 10 days only and then hopefully if we get zero community transmission over those 10 days then we can just go back to the rest of Queensland," said Queensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk.

**[China] Twitter deletes China embassy's Xinjiang 'emancipation' tweet (Yahoo News/BBC)**

Yahoo News/BBC [1/10/2021 8:07 AM, Staff, 11261K, Neutral]

Twitter has deleted a post from China's US embassy which claimed Uighur women had had their minds "emancipated" by their policies in Xinjiang.

The post linked to an article by state-run media which claimed women were no longer "baby making machines" due to action on alleged religious extremism.

Beijing is alleged to have forced many Uighur women to be sterilised or fitted with contraceptive devices, apparently to control population growth.

China has denied the allegations.

The Uighurs are a mostly Muslim minority group which lives mainly in Xinjiang province in northwestern China.

The tweet, published on Thursday, also claimed that Uighur women were "more confident and independent" as a result of "reproductive health" being "promoted" to them.

Over the weekend, the tweet was replaced with a message from the social media site which claimed the tweet "violated" Twitter's rules, without providing further details.

The original tweet had linked to an article by China Daily, a state-run newspaper, which alleged the eradication of extremism in Xinjiang "had given Uighur women more autonomy when deciding whether to have children."

The article referenced a report by the Xinjiang Development Research Centre which said: "The changes were not caused by 'forced sterilisation' of the Uyghur population, as repeatedly claimed by some western scholars and politicians."

Last year, a report by China scholar Adrian Zenz alleged Uighur and other ethnic minority women were being threatened with internment in camps for refusing to abort pregnancies that exceeded birth quotas.



The findings were based on a combination of official regional data, policy documents and interviews with ethnic minority women in Xinjiang.

The report also said that Uighur women with more than the legally permitted number of children — but also many women who had not exceeded birth quotas — were involuntarily fitted with intra-uterine devices (IUDs), while others were coerced into receiving sterilisation surgery.

Under current rules, couples in China are allowed to have up to two children, with couples in some rural areas allowed up to three.

Former detainees in internment camps, which China says are re-education camps to tackle extremism, said they were given injections that stopped their periods, or caused unusual bleeding consistent with the effects of birth control drugs.

According to Mr. Zenz's analysis of the data, natural population growth in Xinjiang has declined dramatically in recent years, with growth rates falling by 84% in the two largest Uighur prefectures between 2015 and 2018 and declining further in 2019.

Following the release of that report, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo called on "all nations to join the United States in demanding an end to these dehumanising practices."

China said at the time that the allegations were "baseless" and showed "ulterior motives."

Foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian accused media outlets of "cooking up false information on Xinjiang-related issues."

**[China] A year on from Wuhan, China tells glorious tale of triumph... and no mistakes (New York Times)**

New York Times [1/10/2021 10:55 PM, Staff, 4021K, Neutral]

At a museum in Wuhan, China, a sprawling exhibition paints a stirring tale of how the city's sacrifices in a brutal 76-day lockdown led to triumph over the coronavirus and, ultimately, rebirth.

No costs appear to have been spared for the show, which features a hologram of medical staff members moving around a hospital room, heart-rending letters from front-line health workers and a replica of a mass quarantine site, complete with beds, miniature Chinese flags and toothbrush cups.

But the exhibition is also striking for what is not included. There is no mention of the whistleblowing role of Ai Fen, one of the first doctors to sound the alarm in Wuhan, where the virus is believed to have originated, or the decision by Zhang Yongzhen, a Shanghai doctor, to share its genome with the world against official orders.

Visitors are invited to lay a virtual chrysanthemum at a wall of martyrs that includes Li Wenliang, the ophthalmologist at a Wuhan hospital whose death from the virus led to nationwide mourning. But missing from his brief biography is a crucial fact: that Li was reprimanded by the government for warning colleagues about the virus from which he later died.



China has spent much of the past year trying to spin the narrative of the pandemic as an undisputed victory led by the ruling Communist Party. The state-run news media has largely ignored the government's missteps and portrayed China's response as proof of the superiority of its authoritarian system, especially compared to that of the United States and other democracies, which are still struggling to contain raging outbreaks.

Those efforts have taken on new urgency as the 23 January anniversary of Wuhan's lockdown draws closer. In recent weeks, the government has deployed an army of censors to scrub the internet of critical coverage of the Wuhan outbreak. Terms like "first anniversary" and "whistleblower" have been deleted at times from Chinese sites.

A recent propaganda directive explicitly banned coverage of the anniversary of the outbreak, according to journalists at state-run news outlets who were briefed on the order. Instead, propaganda agencies have pushed feel-good videos and adulatory articles that depict Wuhan as a city reborn, while playing down residents' lingering grief and anger.

The praise for Wuhan's success is well deserved. Since the lockdown ended in April, life in the city — long known as a bustling commercial hub where tourists flock to eat fiery sesame noodles, listen to punk music and catch a glimpse of the mighty Yangtze River — has largely returned to normal, as it has in most of China. While many people in virus-ravaged countries rang in 2021 alone in their homes, images of crowded New Year's Eve celebrations in Wuhan were splashed across Chinese state media.

But with nationalism and public support for the party apparently on the rise, the assertive rebranding campaign is a sign that China's leaders have little interest in dwelling on the past or revisiting their mistakes. Their goal, experts say, is simple: to ensure that nothing undermines the party's triumphant narrative.

"China's response was portrayed as a huge victory for the Chinese Communist Party," said David Bandurski, co-director of the China Media Project, a research program affiliated with the University of Hong Kong. "For China's leaders, the story is written."

Long wary of sensitive anniversaries, Chinese authorities have released few details about how they will mark the sombre occasion.

So far, the only event on the official calendar is the 22 January release of a State-backed documentary, *Days and Nights in Wuhan*. Billed as a moving tribute to the city's "ordinary heroes," it features a song called *You Are So Kind* by the well-known Chinese actress Zhou Xun, whose gentle lyrics, in the words of one state media outlet, are meant to convey "warm power."

Recent state media coverage of Wuhan has mostly focused instead on the city's booming tourism and economic revival. A video produced by CCTV, the State broadcaster, draws on interviews with workers at one of the city's railway stations to spin a tale of courage and sacrifice during the lockdown. Within three days, it had more than 2.5 million views on Weibo, a popular social media platform.

Another widely circulated video, recently posted by the state-backed *Changjiang Daily* newspaper, features business managers from companies like Lenovo and Gree extolling

the city for its rapid recovery.

"What doesn't kill me will only make me stronger," the narrator says as dramatic orchestral music swells in the background.

Officials, too, are playing up the themes of revival and rebirth. Wang Zhonglin, the city's top party official, spoke loftily of Wuhan's ambitions at a December forum promoting economic development along the Yangtze River.

"Do not slow down efforts to work toward becoming an international metropolis," he said of Wuhan. "Rise up from the ashes and achieve glory once again."

The upswell in propaganda has been carried out alongside tightened controls on the media. A year ago, Chinese news outlets €" which are sometimes censored less heavily than usual in the first days of a crisis €" published some of the hardest-hitting exposés of the government's sluggish response to the virus and failures in the health care system.

But in recent weeks, Chinese journalists say, editors have told them to avoid drawing attention to the lockdown's anniversary on social media sites. Some said they were also instructed to abandon plans to interview people who lost relatives in the earliest stages of the outbreak.

The government underscored its message to the media last month when it sentenced Zhang Zhan, a 37-year-old citizen journalist who documented Wuhan's ordeal, to four years in prison. She is the first person known to have faced trial for chronicling China's outbreak.

The censorship around the anniversary is part of an ongoing campaign to purge voices that question the official narrative. Activists have been detained, and outspoken relatives of people who died from the virus are routinely harassed. A study last year by the Citizen Lab at the University of Toronto found that thousands of keywords related to the pandemic were censored on WeChat, a popular messaging app; many of the deleted posts were critical of Chinese officials.

Authorities are particularly sensitive about efforts to pay homage to Li, the Wuhan ophthalmologist whose death prompted rare calls for freedom of speech in China.

Several recent articles recalling Li's actions have been erased from the internet. At the same time, Global Times, a State-backed nationalist tabloid, has sought to reframe the legacy of the doctor, who has become a hero to many Chinese.

"Observers said that for Chinese mainland people, Li was not a figure representing an opposition or confrontational force with Chinese authorities as some international politicians and media have reported," a recent article read. "Rather, Dr Li was an ordinary hero with the courage to speak out the truth, Chinese observers said."

The government's aim is "to create a State-approved version of the collective memory of the coronavirus pandemic for the public," said Lotus Ruan, a researcher at the Citizen Lab.

Within the official narrative of the pandemic, there are many heroes. But China's top leader, Xi Jinping, is undoubtedly the star.

At the cavernous exhibition hall in Wuhan, visitors are greeted with a large photo of Xi, looking stern as he presides over a meeting. A nearly 50-foot-long timeline chronicles the heroic measures that Xi is said to have taken during the crisis, day by day. Throughout the show, he is portrayed as having been a resolute leader in control of the outbreak almost from the beginning, although there is limited evidence of that.

"The Chinese people have shown resilience, diligence and bravery," the show's concluding text reads. "And the Communist Party of China, like always, has put people and their lives first."

**[China] How China Plans to Protect Firms From Foreign Laws (Bloomberg)**

Bloomberg [1/10/2021 10:32 PM, Staff, 6400K, Negative]

Henry Gao, law professor at Singapore Management University, discusses China issuing new rules to protect its firms from what it calls "unjustified" foreign laws and allowing Chinese courts to punish global companies for complying with foreign restrictions. [Editorial note: consult source link for video]

**[China] China Allows WHO Experts in to Investigate Covid-19 Origins (Wall Street Journal)**

Wall Street Journal [1/11/2021 12:31 AM, Chun Han Wong, Neutral]

China has agreed to allow a team of World Health Organization experts to enter the country to investigate the origins of the coronavirus pandemic, days after the United Nations agency's top official criticized Beijing for holding up the mission.

The WHO experts are scheduled to start their mission on Thursday and will be working with Chinese scientists in studying the contagion's origins, China's National Health Commission said in a brief statement on Monday.

A health commission official earlier said the WHO team would be traveling to the central Chinese city of Wuhan, where the coronavirus was first detected and which became the first Covid-19 hot spot.

A spokeswoman for the WHO representative office in China referred queries to the agency's headquarters in Geneva, which didn't immediately respond. Last week, in a rare rebuke against Beijing, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus voiced disappointment that China still hadn't given permission to the U.N. agency's investigators to enter the country—an unusual sign of tensions between the WHO and one of its most important members.

The WHO has been negotiating with China's government over the past year to get information on how the coronavirus might have first crossed into humans, as well as access to sites in Wuhan.

Answers could help prevent another virus lurking in animals from making a similar leap, epidemiologists say, as well as help clear up questions over how long the virus had been circulating, or which early mutations enabled it to spread and kill more than 1.9 million people world-wide as of Monday. At a news briefing last week, Dr. Tedros said several scientists on the WHO team started traveling from their home countries last week after

Beijing had agreed to allow entry, but the agency was then told Chinese officials hadn't completed the necessary permissions for the team's arrival. Dr. Tedros said Chinese officials have assured him that "China is speeding up the internal procedure" that would allow the mission to begin.

China's Foreign Ministry said last week that Beijing and the WHO were still discussing details such as when the scientists would visit the country.

The WHO rarely criticizes the national governments that fund its budget and elect its leaders, though the agency has at times struggled to get Beijing's cooperation on issues related to the Covid-19 pandemic. In late January of last year, the WHO panel tasked with declaring a public health emergency expressed frustration that epidemiological data sent from China was too imprecise and paltry to act upon.

### **[Indonesia] Indonesia Plane Crash Search Finds Human Remains, Life Vests and Aisle Sign (Wall Street Journal)**

Wall Street Journal [1/10/2021 9:15 PM, Jon Emont and Viriya Singgih, Neutral]

Authorities believe they have identified the location of the two so-called black boxes of the Sriwijaya Air jet that crashed into the Java Sea carrying 62 people.

Soerjanto Tjahjono, head of Indonesia's national transportation safety committee, on Sunday said divers were being dispatched to try to recover the cockpit-voice and flight-data recorders.

Crews using helicopters, fixed-wing aircraft and search-and-rescue ships spent the day looking for and retrieving debris from the Boeing 737-500 that went down minutes after taking off from the capital, Jakarta, on Saturday afternoon. Authorities have also found human body parts and expect to use DNA testing to identify the victims, a Jakarta police spokesman said. The plane, which was on a domestic flight to Pontianak on Indonesia's Borneo island, was delayed before it took off Saturday afternoon because of inclement weather. Shortly after it was airborne, it made an unexpected turn, flying northwest, prompting air-traffic control to ask the plane to report its direction, the transportation ministry said. Seconds later, the aircraft disappeared from the radar, at 2:40 p.m. local time.

Authorities began search operations near a series of islands on the outskirts of Jakarta called Kepulauan Seribu, or Thousand Islands. They homed in on the area near Laki Island where the waters appeared of an unusual color and flow, potentially indicating an oil spill and burned fuselage connected to the crash, an air-force official, Henri Alfiandi, said in a televised interview on Sunday. Diving teams discovered debris with the same colors as the plane as well as life vests about 75 feet below the water's surface, said Hadi Tjahjanto, Indonesia's military chief. The sign for aisle 21 of the plane was also recovered, showing seats D, E and F, according to a photograph shared by Julius Widjojono, the navy's spokesman.

Indonesia's national transportation safety committee, which is investigating the crash, sent a ship with technology that can detect underwater objects. The ship also had technology that could read signals to help locate black box cockpit-voice and flight-data recorders, the committee head said. "Hopefully it's not too long before we can recover them," Mr. Tjahjono said.

Finding black boxes is often challenging after a plane crashes into the sea, and searches can take weeks or years. The recorders are considered crucial to determining the cause of accidents. Sriwijaya Air Chief Executive Jefferson Irwin Jauwena on Saturday said the aircraft was in good condition when it made the flight. It was 26 years old. It isn't the 737 MAX, the newest version of the company's single-aisle jet family, which had been grounded nearly two years ago following two deadly crashes.

A relatively small number of Boeing 737-500s remain in operation around the world. Since 1993, there have been four other fatal crashes among the total of nearly 400 such jets Boeing delivered around the globe, according to the Aviation Safety Network, a database associated with the nonprofit Flight Safety Foundation. Over the past 13 years, according to the same database, four of Sriwijaya's other early model 737 jets, some built before the 737-500 version, suffered accidents that were serious enough to result in damage that ended the aircraft's commercial flying. All of those crashes involved planes running off runways after touchdowns, with investigators identifying pilot errors, mechanical failures or a combination of those problems as the probable cause of each accident, according to the database.

As hopes of finding survivors faded on Sunday, President Joko Widodo said in a speech his government was doing its utmost to rescue victims. "We pray together that the victims can be found," he said. The crash renews scrutiny of Indonesia's air-safety record, which over roughly the past two decades experienced dramatic ups and downs amid steadily climbing traffic. In 2007, after a spate of deadly crashes, Indonesia and leaders of the International Civil Aviation Organization, the air-safety arm of the United Nations, signed what they described as a "groundbreaking declaration." In it the government pledged to boost funding and increase oversight personnel to swiftly enhance safety.

However, the next few years saw a string of serious jetliner and turboprop crashes across Indonesia, including planes careening off runways, flying into mountains and landing on taxiways. At various times, both U.S. and European aviation authorities restricted incoming flights of carriers based in the country.

By 2015, after ICAO leaders found "no objective of conclusive evidence" that Indonesia had properly implemented its original corrective action plan, the U.N. agency prodded the country harder to beef up regulation of fast-growing airlines. Outside safety experts have cited inadequate government expertise, inadequate pilot training and maintenance lapses.

But Indonesia's safety record, and the view of foreign regulators, has improved in recent years. In 2016, the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration upgraded the country's status to the highest ranking under the agency's international safety assessment program. Two years later, the European Union lifted all flight restrictions on Indonesian carriers. In 2019, Indonesia had an accident rate below the global average, according to ICAO statistics.

#### **[Indonesia] Indonesia Closes In on Black Boxes, Says Jet Intact on Impact (Bloomberg)**

Bloomberg [1/10/2021 3:17 PM, Harry Suhartono, Eko Listiyorini, and Alan Levin, 6400K, Negative]

Indonesian investigators were closing in on the flight recorders from a Boeing Co. passenger jet that crashed on Saturday and confirmed the plane was intact when it struck the Java Sea, reducing the likelihood of a terror attack.



As the recovery mission enters its third day, search teams have identified the site where the Sriwijaya Air jet carrying 62 people went down, plunging more than 10,000 feet shortly after takeoff. Some wreckage from the Boeing 737-500 has been pulled up and possibly the so-called black boxes located. The plane was intact when it struck the sea, National Transportation Safety Committee Chairman Soerjanto Tjahjono said in a text message.

Search crews have detected the sound signature of so-called pingers used to help locate the crash-proof flight recorders, according to officials. The plane's black boxes -- one capturing sound in the cockpit and another monitoring the plane's track and other flight data -- are equipped with underwater locator beacons that broadcast a unique sound when they come in contact with water to help investigators pinpoint their location in wreckage.

Indonesia, one of the world's fastest-growing aviation markets prior to the coronavirus pandemic, also has one of the worst safety records. The archipelago of more than 17,000 islands has suffered 104 accidents and 2,353 related fatalities, data from Aviation Safety Network show. Its planes were barred by the European Union in 2007 over safety concerns and the full ban wasn't lifted until 2018.

Weather has been a contributing factor in several of the past crashes in Indonesia and may have played a part in this accident. On Saturday, heavy rain in Jakarta, which is still in Monsoon season, delayed the takeoff for the 90-minute SJ182 flight to Pontianak on the island of Borneo. The airport's official weather report about 10 minutes before the crash said there was light rain with a cloud ceiling starting at 1,800 feet above the ground.

Four minutes after takeoff, controllers noticed the aircraft was not on its assigned track. It radioed the crew, and within seconds, the aircraft disappeared from radar. Flightradar24's tracking data showed the plane leveling off at an altitude of about 10,000 to 11,000, before a rapid descent to the water in just 14 seconds. That meant it was dropping at more than 40,000 feet per minute.

The flight track also suggests the jet was intact as it dove toward the water, said John Cox, president of Safety Operating Systems and a former airline pilot who flew 737s. The plane was transmitting its position down to the water, which means its electrical system appeared to be functioning through the flight, he said.

One of the most common causes for planes to fall from the sky -- so-called aerodynamic stalls in which the wings lose lift -- appears not to have occurred, he said. Accidents involving stalls, such as the plunge of Air France Flight 447 in the Atlantic Ocean in 2009, have gone down more slowly.

"Based on what we know so far, it is very difficult to get the airplane to come down that fast," Cox said, referring to the Sriwijaya Air crash. "If the data is accurate, it is going to be a pretty extreme event."

The plane that crashed on Saturday is a decades-old Boeing 737 model, not the newer 737 Max just emerging from a worldwide grounding. The 737-500 model used in Flight SJ182 is among the safest planes currently flown, according to data from Boeing. The first crash of a 737 Max also occurred in Indonesia when Lion Air Flight 610 went down in 2018, killing 189 people.

"This is not even the model before the Max, it has been in service for 30 years so it's unlikely to be a design fault," said Richard Aboulafia, an aviation analyst at Teal Group Corp. "Thousands of these planes have been built and production ended over 20 years ago, so something would have been discovered by now."

Sriwijaya Air, which was established in 2003 and now flies 53 routes, most of them domestic but some international including to Penang, Malaysia and Dili, Timor Leste, hasn't had any fatal accidents previously. There have been four other incidents involving its jets, the last in May 2017, when a Boeing 737-33A overshot a runway.

Preliminary readings from flight data transmitted by the aircraft via the Automatic Dependent Surveillance–Broadcast system appeared to show "possible disorientation" by the pilots, said aviation analyst Gerry Soejatman.

"We have to wait for the final report of the investigation to know the true cause of the incident, but the preliminary data appears pointing to possible disorientation in the cockpit, to which the bad weather is a factor here," he said.

Still, finding the black boxes may not be easy. In a number of high-velocity crashes, such as what apparently occurred with the Sriwijaya Air flight, the pingers have broken loose from the recorders, complicating the searches.

Without access yet to the plane's black-box flight recorders, it's impossible to say what may have triggered the sudden dive, said Jeffrey Guzzetti, the former head of accident investigations at the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration. Flight-crew confusion, instrumentation problems, catastrophic mechanical failures or even an intentional act were among the possible scenarios, he said.

Boeing is "closely monitoring the situation," spokeswoman Zoe Leong said in a statement. "We are working to gather more information." Sriwijaya Air said it will work with relevant authorities in evacuation and investigation efforts.

Of the 62 people on the flight, 50 were passengers, including seven children and three infants, and there were two pilots, four cabin crew and six off-duty staff, local media reported. There were no foreign nationals on board.

The crash comes as the aviation industry reels from the effects of the coronavirus pandemic, which brought air travel to its knees. Covid-19 left many carriers in distress, along with a constellation of aerospace manufacturers, airports and leasing firms. With many planes still grounded, pilots aren't getting enough opportunities to fly.

On Sept. 15, an Indonesian flight carrying 307 passengers and 11 crew to the northern city of Medan momentarily veered off the runway after landing, sparking an investigation by the transport safety regulator. It found the pilot had flown less than three hours in the previous 90 days. The first officer hadn't flown at all since Feb. 1.

"This concern about lack of flying hours among pilots might have materialized here," Soejatman said. "The Indonesian airlines domestic market is rebounding from the Covid hiatus and this might have put significant strain on the crew. Compound that with all the



personal conditions that these people might have from the reduced pay and everything, this is a challenging time for the industry."

**[Indonesia] Indonesia Says Boeing Jet Broke Apart Upon Impact (Bloomberg)**

Bloomberg [1/10/2021 7:05 PM, Staff, 6400K, Negative]

Indonesian investigators are closing in on the flight recorders from a Boeing Co. passenger jet that crashed on Saturday. They confirmed the plane was intact when it struck the Java Sea. [Editorial note: consult source link for video]

**[Indonesia] Indonesia intensifies search for crashed plane's black boxes (AP)**

AP [1/10/2021 9:52 PM, Niniek Karmini, 13480K, Neutral]

The search for the black boxes of a crashed Sriwijaya Air jet intensified Monday to boost the investigation into what caused the plane carrying 62 people to nosedive at high velocity into the Java Sea.

The Boeing 737-500 jet disappeared minutes after taking off from Jakarta, Indonesia's capital, during heavy rain on Saturday, and the search so far has yielded plane parts and human remains but no sign of survivors.

Authorities have said signals from the boxes containing the cockpit voice and flight data recorders were detected between Lancang and Laki islands in the Thousand Island chain just north of Jakarta's coast. Officials said they have marked a location where the sounds were being emitted from the black boxes, which detached from the tail of the aircraft when it plummeted into the sea.

The cockpit voice recorder holds conversations between pilots, and the data recorder tracks electronic information such as airspeed, altitude and vertical acceleration. When found, they will be transported to port and handed to the National Transportation Safety Committee overseeing the crash investigation.

More than a dozen helicopters, 53 navy ships and 20 boats, and 2,600 rescue personnel have been searching since Sunday and have found parts of the plane in the water at a depth of 23 meters (75 feet), leading rescuers to continue searching the area.

Television footages showed landing gear, wheels and a jet engine among the parts found, while other rescuers brought a dozen body bags containing human remains to a police hospital in eastern Jakarta for the identification process.

The National Search and Rescue Agency chief Bagus Puruhito said divers using high-tech "ping locator" equipment were looking for an identified target beneath 20 meters (65 feet) of seabed mud.

The transport committee's chairman, Soerjanto Tjahjono, said the black boxes could provide valuable information to investigators. Once the device is found and taken to the investigators' facility, it will take three to five days to dry and clean the device and to download its data, Tjahjono said.

He said it need more time to analyze it, "depending on the complexity of the problem."

The committee's investigator Nurcahyo Utomo, said they have collected recordings and transcripts of the conversation between the pilot and air traffic controllers as part of their investigation into the cause of the crash.

Utomo said his team is still examining radar data on the plane's movements and interviewed the air traffic officers who were in charge of controlling the crashed flight. More interviews of witnesses, including with the airlines' technicians, fishermen and experts, will be done in the near future.

Investigators are investigating all parts of the plane found by searchers from the seafloor such as the Ground Proximity Warning System, a device that could warn the pilot if the plane is too close to the ground, a radio altimeter and several other parts mostly from the lower side of the aircraft's tail, Utomo said.

He said that Singapore's Transport Safety Investigation Bureau will help his committee in searching for the black boxes and the United States' National Transportation Safety Board will join in investigating the crash.

Indonesia, the world's largest archipelago nation, with more than 260 million people, has been plagued by transportation accidents on land, sea and air because of overcrowding on ferries, aging infrastructure and poorly enforced safety standards.

In October 2018, a Boeing 737 MAX 8 jet operated by Lion Air plunged into the Java Sea just minutes after taking off from Jakarta, killing all 189 people on board. The plane involved in Saturday's disaster did not have the automated flight-control system that played a role in the Lion Air crash and another crash of a 737 MAX 8 jet in Ethiopia five months later, leading to the grounding of the MAX 8 for 20 months.

The Lion Air crash was Indonesia's worst airline disaster since 1997, when 234 people were killed on a Garuda airlines flight near Medan on Sumatra island. In December 2014, an AirAsia flight from the Indonesian city of Surabaya to Singapore plunged into the sea, killing 162 people.

Sriwijaya Air has had only minor incidents in the past, though a farmer was killed in 2008 when a plane went off the runway while landing due to a hydraulic issue.

The United States banned Indonesian carriers from operating in the country in 2007, but reversed the decision in 2016, citing improvements in compliance with international aviation standards. The European Union has previously had similar bans, lifting them in June 2018.

#### **[Indonesia] Why Indonesia's plane safety record is a concern (AP)**

AP [1/10/2021 8:38 AM, VICTORIA MILKO, 2164K, Neutral]

Saturday's plane crash in Indonesia, in which a Sriwijaya Air carrying 62 people plunged into the Java Sea shortly after takeoff, has once again cast the limelight on the safety of the country's aviation industry.

Indonesia's aviation record is one of the worst in Asia, with more civilian airliner passenger accidents since 1945 than any other country in the region. Past accidents have been attributed to poor pilot training, mechanical failures, air traffic control issues and poor aircraft maintenance.

While experts say there have been many improvements in recent years, the latest crash has experts questioning the true progress of Indonesia's aviation oversight and regulation.

### WHY HAS INDONESIA HAD SO MANY PLANE CRASHES?

It's due to a combination of economic, social and geographical factors.

The industry had little regulation or oversight in the early years of Indonesia's aviation boom, after the economy was opened following the fall of Suharto in the late 1990s and end of decades of dictatorships.

Low-cost air carriers bloomed and flying became a common way for people to travel across the vast archipelago nation where many areas still lack efficient or safe transportation infrastructure.

According to data from the Aviation Safety Network, Indonesia has had 104 civilian airliner accidents with over 1,300 related fatalities since 1945, ranking it as the most dangerous place to fly in Asia.

The United States banned Indonesian carriers from operating in the country from 2007 to 2016 because they were "deficient in one or more areas, such as technical expertise, trained personnel, record-keeping or inspection procedures." The European Union had a similar ban from 2007 until 2018.

### HAVE THINGS IMPROVED?

Yes, they have.

"Engagement with the industry has significantly improved and oversight has become more rigorous," aviation expert and editor-in-chief of AirlineRatings.com Geoffrey Thomas told The Associated Press.

That includes more frequent inspections, stronger regulation of maintenance facilities and procedures, and better pilot training, he said.

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration granted Indonesia a Category 1 rating in 2016, meaning it determined that the country complied with International Civil Aviation Organization safety standards.

### WHY DID THE LATEST CRASH HAPPEN?

It's too soon to tell. The plane left from Jakarta during heavy rain, but experts said poor weather was among several possible reasons, including human error and the plane's condition.

Fishermen in the vicinity of the crash said they heard an explosion, followed by debris and fuel surrounding their boat. But heavy rain impaired their vision and they were unable to see much more.

Sriwijaya Air has had only minor incidents in the past, though a farmer was killed in 2008 when one of its planes went off the runway while landing due to a hydraulic issue.

The airline's president director, Jefferson Irwin Jauwena, said the plane that crashed was airworthy. It was a Boeing 737-500 that was 26 years old and had previously been flown by airlines in the United States. He told reporters the plane was flown earlier in the same day of the crash.

But experts said an investigation is needed to determine whether the plane was in fact fit to fly.

#### WHEN WILL WE KNOW MORE?

Plane parts are among the debris being recovered from the water and could provide insight. The location of the black boxes in seabed mud has been identified, and divers and others are working to retrieve the flight data recorder and cockpit voice recorder from the sea.

But the investigation could take weeks, likely months, said Indonesian aviation consultant Gerry Soejatman.

Indonesia is expected to lead the investigation, with international observers typically welcomed as well. There should be an interim report from Indonesia's National Transportation Safety Committee within a month, Soejatman said.

"The analysis will start with that report," he said.

#### **[Indonesia] Indonesia hopes to retrieve black boxes of crashed jet from Java Sea (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/10/2021 8:11 PM, Agustinus Beo Da Costa, Gayatri Suroyo, 5304K, Neutral] Indonesian divers on Monday will try to retrieve the data recorders of a Sriwijaya Air jet that plunged into the sea two days ago with 62 people on board minutes after take off from Jakarta's main airport.

In a sign of the fading chance of finding survivors, the head of the search operation also said that there would be a focus on finding the bodies of victims.

The Boeing 737-500 jet was headed on a domestic flight to Pontianak on Borneo island, about 740 km (460 miles) from Jakarta, before it disappeared from radar screens four minutes after take-off and crashed into the Java sea.

The incident is the first major air crash in Indonesia since 189 passengers and crew were killed in 2018 when a Lion Air Boeing 737 MAX in 2018 also plunged into the Java Sea soon after take-off from Soekarno-Hatta International Airport.

"Anything that we can retrieve, debris, victims or anything else, we will try," search and rescue operation director Rasman MS told a briefing at a Jakarta sea port.

"The quicker we can find victims, the better."

Monday's search would be conducted in a wider area under the sea and along the coast, in

case debris had been carried by the current, he said.

Around 20 additional ships would be deployed, taking the total number of rescue vessels to 53, he said.

Authorities pinpointed the area where the data recorders, known as black boxes, are located on Sunday as they lifted chunks of the jet's fuselage off the sea bed. Rescuers have also found human body parts and their personal effects.

Speaking aboard a ship, Navy official Abdul Rasyid said divers would need to navigate around jagged debris in the area where the black boxes were detected.

Nurcahyo Utomo, an investigator at Indonesia's National Transportation Safety Committee (KNKT), told Reuters the jet may have been intact before it hit the water, given that debris found so far had been scattered in a relatively tight area underwater.

One of the jet's turbines was found and shipped back to a port in Jakarta on Sunday.

#### PROBE TO RELY ON DATA RECORDERS

The KNKT has previously said the U.S. National Transportation Safety Board and Boeing would be involved in the investigation of the cause of the crash.

In a statement at the weekend, Boeing offered condolences over the crash and said: "We are in contact with our airline customer and stand ready to support them during this difficult time."

Flight SJ 182 had 12 crew and 50 passengers on board, all Indonesians and including 10 children.

Tracking service Flightradar24 said the aircraft took off at 2:36 p.m. local time (0736 GMT) and climbed to 10,900 feet within four minutes. It then began a steep descent and stopped transmitting data 21 seconds later.

The Sriwijaya Air plane was nearly 27 years old, much older than Boeing's problem-plagued 737 MAX model. Older 737 models are widely flown and do not have the stall-prevention system implicated in the MAX safety crisis.

With few immediate clues on what caused a catastrophic loss of control four minutes after take-off, investigators will rely heavily on retrieving flight recorders intact from the seabed.

They will also study maintenance and engine records, pilot rosters and training, air traffic recordings and other data.

Newer jets and their engines emit streams of data to help airlines plan maintenance. But neither the 737-500 nor its engines leave such a digital trace, industry experts say.

The crash comes at a sensitive time and place for Boeing after poor software contributed to crashes of the newer 737 MAX in Indonesia and Ethiopia. But the long service history of the

model involved in Saturday's crash, and its lack of similar software, mean design is seen less likely to be a key factor.

**[Indonesia] Sriwijaya Air crash: Indonesia divers search wreckage as black box hunt resumes (Yahoo News/BBC)**

Yahoo News/BBC [1/10/2021 11:31 PM, Staff, 11261K, Neutral]

The Indonesian navy has released footage of divers searching through the wreckage of a passenger plane which crashed into the sea at the weekend as the hunt for its black boxes resumes.

Sriwijaya Air Boeing 737 left Jakarta with 62 people on board, but vanished from the radar on its way to Borneo island on Saturday.

Search teams have already found aircraft parts and human remains.

The plane's black boxes, which have been located, are yet to be recovered.

One official stressed the urgency of the search mission, which resumed on Monday morning, calling it a "24-hour" operation.

"It's going to be an around-the-clock operation," Rasman MS, head of the search and rescue agency's crash operations told reporters.

"There will be no breaks. The sooner we can find the victims, the better."

According to news wire AFP, some 2,600 personnel are currently involved in the search operation along with dozens of boats and helicopters, which are hauling body parts, wreckage and passengers clothing from waters about 23 metres (75ft) deep.

There are also more than 50 ships involved in the search for the wreckage of flight SJ182, along with 13 aircraft.

There appears to be no hope of finding any survivors.

An investigator with Indonesia's National Transportation Safety Committee (KNKT) told news agency Reuters that authorities hoped to find the black boxes on Monday.

He added that it was possible that the plane broke apart when it hit water, based on debris found so far.

"It possibly ruptured when it hit waters because if it had exploded mid-air, the debris would be distributed more widely," said Nurcahyo Utomo.

Investigators are already analysing items which they believe to be a wheel and part of the plane's fuselage. A turbine from one of its engines is also among the debris that has been recovered.

The Sriwijaya Air passenger plane departed from Jakarta's main airport at 14:36 local time (07:36 GMT) on Saturday.

Minutes later, at 14:40, the last contact with the plane was recorded, with the call sign SJY182, according to the transport ministry.

The usual flight time to Pontianak, in West Kalimantan province in the west of the island of Borneo, is 90 minutes.

There were thought to be 50 passengers - including seven children and three babies - and 12 crew on board, though the plane has a capacity of 130. Everyone on board was Indonesian, officials say.

The plane is thought to have dropped more than 3,000m (10,000ft) in less than a minute, according to flight tracking website Flightradar24.com.

Witnesses say they saw and heard at least one explosion.

The missing aircraft is not a 737 Max, the Boeing model that was grounded from March 2019 until last December following two deadly crashes.

According to registration details, the plane was a 26-year-old Boeing 737-500.

It was in good condition, Sriwijaya Air chief executive Jefferson Irwin Jauwena told reporters. Take-off had been delayed for 30 minutes due to heavy rain, he said.

Sriwijaya Air, founded in 2003, is a local budget airline which flies to Indonesian and other South-east Asian destinations.

The plane went missing about 20km (12 miles) north of the capital Jakarta, not far from where another flight crashed in October 2018.

A total of 189 died when an Indonesian Lion Air flight plunged into the sea about 12 minutes after take-off from the city.

That disaster was blamed on a series of failures in the plane's design, but also faults by the airline and the pilots.

It was one of two crashes that led regulators to pull the Boeing 737 Max from service. The model resumed passenger flights in December after a systems overhaul.

#### **[Malaysia] Malaysia buys additional 12.2 million doses of Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/10/2021 11:43 PM, Rozanna Latiff, 11261K, Positive]

Malaysia on Monday signed a deal to buy an additional 12.2 million doses of a COVID-19 vaccine manufactured by U.S. and German drugmakers Pfizer and BioNTech, the health ministry said in a statement.

The deal brings the total amount of the Pfizer vaccines procured by Malaysia to 25 million doses, enough to cover 39% of its population, the ministry said.

#### **[New Zealand] New Zealand Central Bank Probing Data Breach (Bloomberg)**



Bloomberg [1/10/2021 6:37 PM, Staff, 6400K, Negative]

The Reserve Bank of New Zealand says it's investigating an illegal breach of a third-party file sharing service used to share and store some sensitive information. [Editorial note: consult source link for video]

**[New Zealand] NZ central bank says it was not specific target of cyber attack (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/11/2021 12:08 AM, Praveen Menon, 5304K, Negative]

A cyber attack that breached the data systems of New Zealand's central bank also affected other users of a third-party file sharing application, the bank said on Monday.

The breach was contained but it will take time to determine the impact, Adrian Orr, the governor of the Reserve Bank of New Zealand, said in a statement.

"We have been advised by the third party provider that this wasn't a specific attack on the Reserve Bank, and other users of the file-sharing application were also compromised," Orr added.

**[North Korea] N. Korea's Kim adds title: General secretary of ruling party (AP)**

AP [1/10/2021 6:35 PM, Hyung-Jin Kim, 2164K, Neutral]

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un was given a new title, "general secretary" of the ruling Workers' Party, formerly held by his late father and grandfather, state media reported Monday, in what appears to a symbolic move aimed at bolstering his authority amid growing economic challenges.

The party's ongoing congress, the first in kind in five years, announced Kim's new title during its sixth-day session on Sunday. A congress statement said Kim "has gloriously realized the historic mission to complete the country's nuclear build-up plan," according to the official Korean Central News Agency.

It's largely a symbolic appointment as Kim already was the party's top leader. During a 2016 party congress, he was named to "party chairman," the equivalent of "general secretary" held by his father Kim Jong Il and grandfather Kim Il Sung. Before the 2016 congress, Kim Jong Un had led the party with the title of "first secretary."

Since inheriting power upon his father's death in late 2011, Kim, 37, has gradually consolidated his grip on power through a series of high-profile executions and purges that removed his potential rivals. He has also taken up a spate of top jobs that includes chairman of the State Affairs Commission and supreme commander of the North's 1.2 million-member military, along with the top party post.

The two late North Korean leaders have kept posthumous titles — Kim Jong Il remains "eternal general secretary" and Kim Il Sung is "eternal president."

The Kim family has ruled North Korea with a strong personality cult that elevated key family members to a god-like status since Kim Il Sung founded the country in 1948. Their family's mythical "Paektu" bloodline, named after the highest peak on the Korean Peninsula, only gives their direct family members the rights to rule the impoverished yet nuclear-armed nation.

Among notable personnel changes announced Monday was the name of Kim Jong Un's influential sister, Kim Yo Jong, missing from a new list of officials at the party's powerful Politburo. Being in charge of relations with rival South Korea, she was an alternate member of the Politburo and some observers earlier predicted she would be promoted to a full member of the bureau in a bid by her brother to reinforce the Kim family's rule. It wasn't immediately clear why the 32-year-old was dismissed from her Politburo post.

On Sunday, state media said the congress had determined to change the party's "Executive Policy Council into Secretariat." The decision would lead to party officials to relinquish their current titles such as chairman and vice chairman and start using old titles such as secretary or vice secretary.

Under the previous title systems, there were too many chairmen and vice chairmen at various levels and authorities likely thought that wasn't helpful for Kim Jong Un's authority, Cheong Seong-Chang, a fellow at the Wilson Center's Asia Program said. He said Kim was believed to have restored the old "general secretary" title because that would benefit his dictatorship.

Kim has previously inherited other high-profile titles by his father and grandfather, such as the military's supreme commander.

The congress is being held as Kim faces what appears to be the toughest moment of his nine-year rule amid the COVID-19 pandemic and following a series of natural disasters this past summer.

During the congress, Kim Jong Un vowed to enlarge his nuclear arsenal and build more sophisticated weapons systems to cope with what he calls intensifying U.S. hostile policy. He also admitted a previous five-year economic development plan failed and disclosed a new development that focuses on building a stronger self-reliant economy.

Kim has pushed the so-called "byungjin" policy of simultaneously seeking economic growth and the expansion of his nuclear weapons as a deterrent to the U.S. After claiming to have achieved the ability to strike the U.S. mainland with nuclear weapons, Kim launched high-stakes summits Trump in 2018, but their diplomacy later fell apart due to wrangling over the sanctions the following year.

South Korea's military said Monday it has obtained intelligence showing North Korea staged a military parade at a Pyongyang square the previous night. A statement from the Joint Chiefs of Staff said it was checking whether that was an actual parade or its rehearsal.

South Korea's spy agency earlier said the North would hold a massive military parade in celebrations of the congress and in show of force against the incoming administration of President-elect Joe Biden in the U.S.

**[North Korea] North Korea says leader Kim elected as general secretary of ruling party: KCNA (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/10/2021 5:35 PM, Hyonhee Shin, 5304K, Neutral]

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has been elected as general secretary of the ruling Workers' Party, state media KCNA said on Monday, taking over the title from his late father

in a largely symbolic move seen aimed at further cementing his power.

The election took place on Sunday during the party's ongoing multi-year congress, designed for Kim to map out blueprints for his diplomatic, military and economic policy over the next five years and make key personnel decisions.

The congress "fully approved" a proposal for promoting Kim to general secretary of the party, KCNA said, calling the position "head of the revolution and centre of guidance and unity."

Kim has wielded almost absolute power in dynastically ruled North Korea since taking over following the death of his father Kim Jong Il in 2011. In 2012, the party named Kim Jong Il "eternal general secretary" and Kim Jong Un "the first secretary" at a conference.

The party also held elections for its Central Committee, a key governing body that includes the powerful politburo, KCNA said.

Kim Yo Jong, the young leader's sister and senior party official who had previously been a candidate member of the politburo, was not on the list, confounding widespread expectations from observers of the reclusive regime.

**[North Korea] Mixed signals for N.Korean leader's sister as Kim seeks to cement power (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/10/2021 9:52 PM, Hyonhee Shin, 5304K, Neutral]

The name of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's sister was missing from a new list of the ruling Workers' Party's politburo, according to state media on Monday, raising questions about her status after several years of increasing influence.

The party held elections on Sunday for its Central Committee at a congress, which maps out diplomatic, military and economic policy goals over the next five years.

Kim Yo Jong, Kim Jong Un's sister, remained a member of the Central Committee but was not included in its politburo, lists released by the North Korean state news agency, KCNA, showed.

In 2017, Kim became only the second woman in patriarchal North Korea to join the exclusive politburo after her aunt Kim Kyong Hui. South Korea's intelligence agency said in August she was serving as her brother's "de facto second-in-command".

But the signals were mixed for observers of the reclusive regime. Her absence from the politburo list comes days after she took the leadership podium for the first time alongside 38 other party executives as the congress began.

"It is too early to draw any conclusion about her status, as she is still a Central Committee member and there's a possibility that she has taken up other important posts," said Lim Eul-chul, a professor of North Korean studies at Kyungnam University in Seoul.

Kim Yo Jong's influence has grown dramatically in recent years.

As she emerged as a political figure, she appeared to be her brother's personal secretary.

She later acted as his special envoy to South Korea and a deputy director of a party department overseeing personnel and organisational affairs.

Michael Madden, a North Korea leadership expert at the U.S.-based Stimson Center, said Kim Yo Jong enjoyed the highest degree of influence on policy deliberations and decisions regardless of whether she was on the politburo or not.

"We have become accustomed to seeing her in a more public role, but Kim Yo Jong's political roots and her formative career experience are behind the scenes, not sitting on a platform listening to speeches," he said.

Leader Kim Jong Un cemented his power at the congress with his election as party general secretary, taking the title from his late father, Kim Jong Il.

Kim has wielded almost absolute power in North Korea's dynastic system since taking over following the death of his father in 2011.

In 2012, the party named the late Kim Jong Il "eternal general secretary" and Kim Jong Un "the first secretary".

KCNA said the congress "fully approved" a proposal to promote Kim to the position, which it called "the top brain of the revolution" and "the centre of the leadership and the unity".

"Kim's takeover shows his confidence, that he has now officially joined the ranks of his father and grandfather," said Yang Moo-jin, a professor at the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul.

"It also indicates his strategic intention to centralise the party system around him and reinforce his one-man rule."

The reforms to the party leadership announced over the weekend may seem cosmetic to outside observers but they are arcane changes to how policies are decided and implemented, Madden said.

"These changes are intended to give (Kim) a great degree of flexibility in how he makes decisions while also streamlining the processes through which decisions reach his desk," he said.

One figure who appeared to be rising quickly was Jo Yong Won, newly named to the politburo's five-strong presidium and the party's formidable Central Military Commission.

Choe Son Hui, a vice foreign minister who was instrumental in preparing for a second, failed summit with U.S. President Donald Trump in 2019, was demoted.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in pledged efforts to help engineer a breakthrough in stalled denuclearisation talks as U.S. President-elect Joe Biden prepares to take office.

Kim has said he would expand diplomacy, but vowed on Friday to develop weapons including a "multi-warhead" intercontinental ballistic missiles, calling the United States "our biggest enemy".

South Korea's military said it has detected signs North Korea held a military parade on Sunday night to mark the congress.

**[North Korea] North Korea issues threat to U.S. as message to Biden (Washington Times)**

Washington Times [1/10/2021 8:38 PM, Guy Taylor, 459K, Neutral]

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un is marking the impending end of the Trump administration early by leveling a major threat to expand Pyongyang's nuclear weapons and missile programs unless the incoming Biden administration dials back America's "hostile" policy toward North Korea.

In a warning that President-elect Joseph R. Biden has yet to respond, Mr. Kim made global headlines Friday by declaring that the U.S. remains his country's "biggest enemy," despite the three meetings he had with President Trump, whose outreach to the young dictator ultimately failed to deliver a breakthrough denuclearization deal.

Mr. Kim made the statement on his 37th birthday in a speech to his regime's ruling Workers' Party Congress. At a gathering in Pyongyang last week, he sowed uncertainty over how U.S. policy toward North Korea will look under Mr. Biden, who once called Mr. Kim a "thug" and has criticized Mr. Trump's summits with the dictator.

Based on his history and his campaign rhetoric, Mr. Biden is unlikely to pursue the kinds of high-stakes direct meetings with Mr. Kim that Mr. Trump favored. The incoming president is instead expected to return to the policy of "strategic patience" embraced during the final years of the George W. Bush administration and throughout the Obama era, when Mr. Biden was vice president.

The approach will likely revolve around efforts to continue isolating Pyongyang through U.S. and United Nations sanctions while taking care to avoid rewarding the Kim regime with any major diplomatic overtures. But some fear Mr. Kim is likely to test the new administration, perhaps with a nuclear or long-range ballistic missile test.

Such concerns have been underscored during recent days by Mr. Kim's Workers' Party speech, declaring that North Korea "need[s] to strengthen [its] national defense capabilities without a moment of hesitation to deter the United States' nuclear threats and to bring peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula."

The Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) quoted Mr. Kim as saying the "key to establishing new relations between [North Korea] and the United States is whether the United States withdraws its hostile policy."

North Korea's "external political activities going forward should be focused on suppressing and subduing the U.S., the basic obstacle, [and] biggest enemy against our revolutionary development," said Mr. Kim, who listed sophisticated weapons systems that he said were under development.

According to The Associated Press, a KCNA report over the weekend said the weapons systems include a multiwarhead missile, underwater-launched nuclear missiles, solid-fueled long-range missiles and spy satellites.

Mr. Kim was also cited as saying North Korea must advance its intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) precision attack capability on targets as far as 9,300 miles away — an apparent reference to the U.S. mainland — while developing technology to manufacture smaller nuclear warheads to be mounted on long-range missiles more easily.

"The reality is that we can achieve peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula when we constantly build up our national defense and suppress U.S. military threats," the North Korean leader said.

International observers widely regard KCNA, the official propaganda outlet of the North Korean regime, as a murky window into the notoriously secretive activities of the isolated government in Pyongyang. It is known to offer at times conflicting and difficult-to-interpret reports.

The news of Mr. Kim's remarks about the U.S., for instance, coincided with KCNA reports citing the North Korean leader as stressing the need to drastically improve his nation's ties with the outside world. The New York Times maintained over the weekend that Mr. Kim said at one point during the Workers' Party Congress that he did "not rule out diplomacy."

Although it was not clear whether the remark was directed at Washington, Mr. Kim has a history of launching provocations and hurling heated threats only to later agree to diplomatic engagement. That was the case at the start of the Trump era, when the president was also engaging in threatening rhetoric. Mr. Trump warned in 2017 that he would unleash "fire and fury" like the world has never seen if North Korea did not dial down its weapons provocations. Ultimately, he agreed to hold his first summit with Mr. Kim in Singapore in 2018.

Talks between North Korean, South Korean and American officials have been stalled since a summit in Hanoi in 2019 ended in failure. Mr. Trump walked out of Hanoi claiming Mr. Kim had demanded sweeping sanctions relief in exchange for only a partial abandonment of the North's nuclear programs, which have been built clandestinely in violation of decades of U.N. Security Council resolutions.

In his remarks last week, Mr. Kim said his regime intends to pursue a policy of boosting ties with China, its biggest ally and economic lifeline. At the same time, Mr. Kim slammed U.S.-ally South Korea for continuing to hold joint military drills with American forces and for introducing its own increasingly modern weapons.

South Korea's Unification Ministry responded over the weekend that it hopes for the a resumption of North Korean-U.S. talks. It said the inauguration of a new president in Washington could serve as a good chance to improve ties.

Analysts are circumspect.

Nam Sung-wook, an expert on North Korea at Korea University in South Korea, told The Associated Press that "Kim's speech foreshows the North Korean-U.S. relations won't be smooth in the next four years with Biden in office."

David Maxwell, a former U.S. Special Forces colonel and North Korea expert with the



Foundation for Defense of Democracies think tank in Washington, called on the incoming Biden administration to avoid yielding to the rhetorical pressure from Mr. Kim.

"Kim may think he is challenging President-elect Biden to implement a different policy toward [N]orth Korea and to break with all past administrations to include the Trump administration," Mr. Maxwell said in comments circulated via email.

"He is saying to Biden — 'dare to be different' and then we will talk. But we should not be duped by Kim's continued long con and political warfare strategy," Mr. Maxwell said, adding that Mr. Kim is "acting similarly toward South Korea."

"He is blaming the failed [N]orth-South engagement on the South (and the Minister of Unification has responded predictably and as Kim desires," Mr. Maxwell said. "The South will double down on engagement despite Kim's anti-South rhetoric. The subversion of the South continues."

Others said there was little question about the gravity of Mr. Kim's threats, particularly with regard to the North Korean leader's vow to expand his nuclear weapons arsenal.

"It lights a fire under the Biden administration," said Ankit Panda, a Stanton Senior Fellow in the in the Nuclear Policy Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

"Kim is making clear that if Biden decides not to prioritize North Korea policy, Pyongyang will resume testing and qualitatively advancing its nuclear capabilities in ways that would be seriously detrimental for Washington and Seoul," Mr. Panda told Bloomberg News.

#### **[North Korea] North Korea held nighttime military parade on Sunday –South Korea military (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/10/2021 7:58 PM, Hyonhee Shin, Sangmi Cha, 5304K, Neutral]

South Korea's military said on Monday it has detected signs that North Korea held a nighttime military parade on Sunday for its ruling Worker's Party congress.

The parade was spotted at Kim Il Sung Square in the capital Pyongyang, but there was a possibility it was a rehearsal, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement.

#### **[North Korea] North Korea may have held secret military parade, reports South (Yahoo News/The Telegraph)**

Yahoo News/The Telegraph [1/11/2021 2:00 AM, Nicola Smith, Neutral]

South Korea's military on Monday revealed that North Korea may have carried out an overnight military parade to coincide with its ongoing ruling party congress in the nation's capital, Pyongyang.

"Our military detected signs that North Korea held a military parade related to the party congress at Kim Il-sung Square in Pyongyang late at night yesterday," the Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement reported by South Korean newswire Yonhap.

"South Korea and US military authorities are closely following them, including possibilities that the activity could be a rehearsal," it added.



North Korea's strictly controlled state media was silent about the suspected parade, but it reported on Monday that leader Kim Jong-un had been elected as general secretary of the ruling Workers' Party, taking over the title from Kim Jong-il, his late father.

The move is largely symbolic but further strengthens his position in the authoritarian state where he already wields almost absolute power. However, contrary to expectations, his sister Kim Yo-jong, who is believed to be one of his closest advisors and who has been attending the congress, was not elected to the party's Central Committee, a key governing body that includes the powerful politburo.

The reshuffle was held on Sunday during the party's eighth congress – the first it has held since 2016 – which Kim has used to set out his plans for the reclusive regime's diplomatic, military and economic policies.

Kim's opening speech last Wednesday began with the candid admission that the previous five-year economic development plan had "fallen greatly short of its goals" but his familiar fiery rhetoric had returned by the weekend when he called the US "the foremost principal enemy." He promised to increase North Korea's defence capabilities "to a higher level" and boasted that his military was developing new weapons systems including a nuclear-powered submarine, tactical nuclear weapons and advanced warheads designed to penetrate missile systems.

"The development of nuclear weapons will be pushed forward without interruption," he said in a statement reported by state media, indicating that historic summits held since 2018 with the US and South Korean presidents have failed to curb his nuclear ambitions. South Korean sources said the suspected parade on Sunday may have been scaled back because of Covid-19 restrictions and bitterly cold weather, and no details have been released about the type of weapons that may have been on display.

The Communist regime last held a parade, also in the dead of night, on October 10 to mark the 75th founding anniversary of the ruling Workers' Party.

It unveiled a new intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) and a submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM), along with a broad range of new weaponry.

State television the next day showed the ICBM on a transporter vehicle with at least 22 wheels, larger than anything previously displayed and Kim warned that his country would "fully mobilise" its nuclear force if threatened.

Despite the negative signals coming from Pyongyang, Moon Jae-in, the South Korean president, vowed on Monday in his New Year's address to make a "last-ditch effort" to pull off a "great transition" in nuclear talks with the North that have been stalled since the failed summit between Kim and President Trump in February 2019.

"Our will to meet (with North Korea) anytime, anywhere, even in a non-face-to-face formula remains unchanged," he said.

**[Philippines] Philippines Targets to Vaccinate Entire Population By 2023 (Bloomberg)**  
**Bloomberg** [1/10/2021 10:57 PM, Andreo Calonzo, 6400K, Positive]

The Philippines targets to vaccinate its entire population of more than 100 million people by

2023, officials said.

Vaccine rollout may start as early as February, although bulk of the inoculations will begin in the second half of 2021, vaccine czar Carlito Galvez said at a Senate hearing Monday.

The government is finalizing supply deals with AstraZeneca Plc., Serum Institute of India, Pfizer Inc.-BioNTech SE, Johnson & Johnson, Sinovac Biotech Ltd., Moderna Inc. and Russia's Gamaleya National Center of Epidemiology and Microbiology, he said.

Herd immunity may be achieved this year, Health Secretary Francisco Duque said at the same hearing, as the government targets to buy 148 million coronavirus vaccine doses to inoculate more than half of the population in 2021. Some 82.5 billion pesos (\$1.7 billion) have been allocated for vaccine purchases this year, bulk of which are from loans.

### **[Singapore] Singapore Restricts Work Flexibility for Some Foreign Employees (Bloomberg)**

Bloomberg [1/10/2021 7:23 PM, Joanna Ossinger, 6400K, Neutral]

Singapore is tightening restrictions on intra-corporate transferees, one category of workers brought from overseas offices of multinational corporations, the Straits Times reported.

Intra-corporate transferees are a common feature of free-trade agreements worldwide that, for example, allow professionals to move for short periods to set up offices or for temporary projects, the Straits Times said. Intra-corporate transferees pass holders make up less than 5% of employment-pass holders in Singapore.

The changes could reduce the number of dependents' pass holders entering Singapore and send a stronger signal that multinational corporations need to give consideration to hiring locals before transferring in a foreign employee, the Straits Times said, citing observers of the situation. The developments could also discourage employers from applying for employment passes via intra-corporate transfers, the paper said.

Employment pass holders in Singapore declined 2% from December 2019 to June 2020, the paper reported, citing the Ministry of Manpower. EP holders need to earn a monthly salary of at least S\$4,500 (\$3,390).

Among the changes to the foreign workforce that have been made recently:

Transferees won't be allowed to remain in the country for a limited period to find a new job if their work passes are canceled, while Employment Pass holders are permitted to remain for a short time if they meet specific criteria

Since November, intra-corporate transferees have been told they can't bring family members to Singapore via dependents' passes or long-term visit passes, though employment-pass holders can do so if they meet qualifying criteria, the paper said.

### **[South Korea] South Korea's Moon says will make 'last-ditch' effort for North Korea breakthrough (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/10/2021 8:45 PM, Sangmi Cha, 5304K, Neutral]

South Korean President Moon Jae-in said on Monday he remains committed to engaging

with North Korea, and that cooperation on issues such as anti-epidemic work could help lead to a breakthrough in stalled talks in the last years of his term.

Seoul will make efforts to jumpstart talks between the United States and North Korea as U.S. President-elect Joe Biden prepares to take office, Moon said during his annual New Year's speech.

"Dialogue and co-prosperity are key drivers of the peace process on the Korean Peninsula," he said. "Our will to meet anytime, anywhere, and willingness to talk...remains unchanged."

Moon, whose term ends in 2022, has made engagement with North Korea one of his signature goals, and he said he would liaise closely with Biden's administration.

Talks aimed at convincing North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons and improve relations with the United States and South Korea have been stalled, with Pyongyang accusing Seoul and Washington of maintaining hostile policies.

"We will strengthen the alliance with the United States in line with the inauguration of the Biden administration, while making last-ditch efforts for a grand breakthrough in stalemated North Korea-U.S. and inter-Korean talks," Moon said.

North Korea has been holding an ongoing party congress, where leader Kim Jong Un discussed called for developing more advanced nuclear weapons and revitalising the country's economy.

Over the weekend Kim blasted South Korea for offering cooperation on "inessential issues" such as the coronavirus, humanitarian aid, and tourism.

Kim said inter-Korean relations could be restored if the South changes its attitudes and stops actions such as buying new weapons and conducting military drills with the United States.

In October, however, Kim said that he hoped the two Koreas could reconcile after the end of the pandemic.

**[South Korea] Backlash after Seoul advises pregnant women to look after their husbands during labour (Yahoo News/The Telegraph)**

[Yahoo News/The Telegraph](#) [1/10/2021 11:55 AM, Raphael Rashid, 11261K, Neutral]  
The Seoul city government has come under fire for offering sexist tips for women on a website promoting childbirth, which included suggestions that they should prepare underwear for their husbands before going to hospital to give birth.

The guidelines, published on the "Seoul City Pregnancy and Childbirth Information Centre" website, aimed at providing tips on preparing for pregnancy, education on childbirth, and general information for both new or expectant mothers.

When the website launched in 2019, the city government said it would help "induce social interest" in overcoming South Korea's low birth rate, which is currently the world's lowest. The population declined for the first time in the country's history in 2020.

The controversial content only came to light after going viral on social media earlier this month. The inappropriate parts have now been deleted.

The guidelines told women who were getting ready to go to hospital to “throw away the old food in the fridge and prepare 3-4 side dishes” and “prepare instant food such as instant curry so that your husband who isn’t good at cooking can conveniently prepare them”.

The tips also advised to prepare several days’ worth of underwear, socks, and shirts for the husband and children, and to check the remaining amount of daily necessities at home such as toilet paper and soap to make sure they are not inconvenienced by the mother’s absence while in hospital.

On physical appearance, the website said pregnant women must not put off washing the dishes and cleaning the house so that they do not gain weight. It also told women to hang up smaller clothes worn prior to marriage to motivate them to exercise after giving birth.

On social media, critics pointed that such anachronistic fixed gender roles were the very reasons women were putting off marriage and pregnancy, in what remains a largely patriarchal society. A petition on the presidential Blue House website demanding those responsible for the website to apologise and be punished gained over 20,000 after one day.

South Korean media report the guidelines were “supervised” by the Korean Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology.

**[South Korea] S.Korea reports 451 new coronavirus cases, first time under 500 since start of Dec -KDCA (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/10/2021 7:39 PM, Sangmi Cha, 5304K, Neutral]

South Korea reported 451 new coronavirus cases as of Monday midnight, the first time the daily infections had dropped below 500 since the beginning of December last year, the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency said on Monday.

Of the new cases, 419 were locally transmitted and 32 were imported.

**[Taiwan] Taiwan’s new passport hopes to banish confusion with China (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/11/2021 2:10 AM, Yimou Lee Ann Wang, Neutral]

Taiwan rolled out a newly redesigned passport on Monday that gives greater prominence to the island’s day-to-day name, aiming to avoid confusion with China amid the COVID-19 pandemic and Beijing’s stepped-up efforts to assert sovereignty.

Existing Taiwanese passports have “Republic of China”, its formal name, written in large English font at the top, with “Taiwan” printed at the bottom, creating confusion internationally according to the government.

During the early days of the pandemic Taiwan says some of its citizens were confused with Chinese nationals and on occasion unfairly subject to the same COVID-19-related entry bans when the disease was well under control in Taiwan though not in China. The new passport enlarges the word “Taiwan” in English and removes “Republic of China”, though that name in Chinese and in small English font around the national emblem remains. Bureau of Consular Affairs Director General Phoebe Yeh told Reuters that as of mid-

morning Monday, they had received more than 700 applications for the new passport, compared with a daily average of 1,000 typically.

"The purpose is to increase the visibility of Taiwan so that our people will not be mistakenly identified as coming from China when they travel abroad," she said.

Chen Li-ting, one of the first to apply for the new passport, said the change was "fantastic". "I thought it would happen sooner or later. That is, sooner or later the word Taiwan would appear more and more. And in the future Republic of China will perhaps disappear," he said.

China, referring to the new passports, has said it does not matter what "petty moves" Taiwan made, it would not change the fact that Taiwan was an inseparable part of China. China claims democratic Taiwan as its sovereign territory, and says only it has the right to speak for the island internationally, a position it has pushed strongly during the pandemic, especially at the World Health Organization (WHO).

## South and Central Asia

### **[India] HDFC's Karnad on Workplace Equality in India (Bloomberg)**

Bloomberg [1/10/2021 9:02 PM, Staff, 6400K, Neutral]

The World Bank says female participation in the Indian workforce fell to just over 20 percent in 2019. And, Covid-19 hasn't helped - women are less likely to be employed immediately post-lockdown. Bloomberg's Rishaad Salamat spoke with HDFC Managing Director Renu Sud Karnad on how India and private companies are trying to keep women on the payroll. [Editorial note: consult video at source link]

### **[India] India's quick nod to homegrown COVID-19 vaccine seeds doubt (AP)**

AP [1/11/2021 2:10 AM, Aniruddha Ghosal and Sheikh Saaliq, Neutral]

As the director of a large hospital in the Indian state that has seen the country's most coronavirus cases, Dr. S.P. Kalantri had been waiting for the day a vaccine would be approved and bring protection not only to his community but also himself.

But now he has his doubts about getting the shots after India took a regulatory shortcut to approve a vaccine by Indian drugmaker Bharat Biotech before late clinical trials showed it was effective in preventing illness from coronavirus infections.

"I'd rather wait and watch," said Kalantri, who runs a hospital in Maharashtra state's Wardha district. He's not alone. Several groups and unions representing scientists and doctors have also expressed their concerns over scant evidence of the effectiveness of the vaccine.

Many scientists have said that approving a vaccine without evidence from late trials is risky and a lack of transparency in the approval process could increase vaccine hesitancy in the world's second-most populated country, where more than 10.4 million coronavirus cases have been reported among the nearly 1.4 billion people.

The homegrown vaccine was one of two that India authorized for emergency use on Jan. 3. The approval for the other — a version of the AstraZeneca vaccine made by world's largest vaccine maker Serum Institute of India — was given on the basis of partial results from

studies in Britain and Brazil that suggested it was about 70% effective at preventing illness from coronavirus infection.

Initially, a member of India's COVID-19 task force said that the Bharat Biotech vaccine would be a "backup." But on Jan. 5, health officials said it would be given to people after getting their consent and ensuring more frequent follow-ups, suggesting both vaccines will be deployed. It remains unclear as to which states will receive which vaccine and on what basis.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has touted the vaccines as evidence of India's growing self-reliance due to its protectionist policies.

On Jan. 16 India will start the massive undertaking of inoculating an estimated 30 million doctors, nurses and other front line workers, before attention turns to around 270 million people who are either aged over 50 or have co-morbidities.

China and Russia have also administered vaccines while late clinical trials were still underway. But India, which is the world's largest manufacturer of vaccines, has drawn criticism for using two different standards — needing efficacy data for one and not the other — for greenlighting the use of the two vaccines as well as a lack of transparency in the process. The panel of experts that eventually gave the nod to the vaccines met three times. In the first two meetings, on Dec. 30 and Jan. 1, they were dissatisfied with Bharat Biotech's application and asked for more data on its ability to prevent illness from COVID-19, minutes from the meeting show. The AstraZeneca vaccine, meanwhile, was greenlit on Jan. 1.

But on Jan. 2, the experts permitted the restricted use of the Bharat Biotech vaccine as an "abundant precaution" after the company claimed that the vaccine had the potential to target a more contagious variant of the virus found in Britain.

Since its approval, Bharat Biotech's chairman and managing director Krishna Ella has acknowledged that the vaccine's effectiveness against the U.K. variant is "only a hypothesis."

Although minutes from the Jan. 2 meeting maintain that the company presented "updated data," there isn't any clarity as to what new evidence prompted the experts to change their minds, resulting in the need for "guess work," said Dr. Anant Bhan, who studies medical ethics and was not on the panel.

Dr. Vineeta Bal, who studies immune systems at India's National Institute of Immunology, echoed the need for transparent approvals that includes data that confirms efficacy.

"This is a process that Indian government officials are themselves sabotaging," she said.

India's main opposition Congress party has said that the premature clearance was "unprecedented, inadvisable and risks lives." That concern was echoed by the health minister of Chattisgarh state, TS Singh Deo, who said the Bharat Biotech vaccine shouldn't be used in the state.

"Rushing into general use before trials are complete will set a precedent where other companies will seek emergency use authorization before completing mandated trials. This

may also jeopardize the valuable lives and health of our citizens," Deo said.

Some have implied that the approval of the vaccine was based on nationalism. After the AstraZeneca vaccine was approved and before the clearance for the Bharat Biotech vaccine was issued, a leader from Modi's party tweeted that he was shocked to learn that a foreign vaccine had been approved, while an Indian vaccine lay "in the ditch."

The head of India's drug regulator has declined to comment on the controversy, while the identity of the experts on the panel that approved the vaccines has not been made public.

Balram Bhargava, who heads the Indian Council of Medical Research, the country's apex medical research body, said the "restricted use" of a vaccine on the basis of data from early clinical trials is legally possible in a pandemic. The body is a co-sponsor of the trials.

Also muddying the waters was a public spat between the top executives of Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech in which they each questioned the effectiveness of the other's vaccine. The executives later issued a joint statement saying the events were a "miscommunication and misunderstanding" and that they were focused on the vaccine rollout.

"Such actions do raise doubts in the minds of people and may promote vaccine hesitancy," said Dr. Shahid Jameel, who studies viruses at India's Ashoka University.

He said that while Bharat Biotech's homegrown vaccine was promising, the approval process needs to be based on hard data and evidence.

"Belief has no value in science," Jameel said.

### **[Kyrgyzstan] Populist, Prisoner, President: A Convicted Kidnapper Wins Kyrgyzstan Election (New York Times)**

New York Times [1/10/2021 3:50 PM, Ivan Nechepurenko, 28290K, Negative]

A populist politician and convicted kidnapper won a landslide victory on Sunday in a snap presidential election in Kyrgyzstan triggered by a popular uprising against the previous government.

Sadyr Japarov, the winning candidate, got nearly 80 percent of the vote, according to the central electoral commission of the mountainous country, the only democracy in Central Asia. More than 80 percent of voters also supported Mr. Japarov's proposal to redistribute political power away from Parliament and into the president's hands.

In September, Mr. Japarov, 52, was still in jail, serving a lengthy term for orchestrating the kidnapping of a provincial governor, a charge he denounced as politically motivated. A violent upheaval that erupted in October over a disputed parliamentary election sprung Mr. Japarov from a prison cell to the prime minister's chair.

A few days later, he assumed the interim presidency before resigning to run for that office. The country's main investigative body quickly canceled Mr. Japarov's conviction.

Reviled by his critics as a corrupt nationalist with links to organized crime, Mr. Japarov tried to consolidate society behind his campaign. There were scattered reports of voting



irregularities as of late Sunday, when the election authorities said turnout was around 39 percent.

On Sunday night at a news conference in the capital, Bishkek, he said Kyrgyzstan needs political stability now most of all.

"I call on all opponents to unite; the minority should submit to the majority," Mr. Japarov said during the news conference. "I come to power during challenging times; there is a crisis everywhere."

Arkady Dubnov, a Central Asia expert in Moscow, described Mr. Japarov as a populist "Robin Hood" figure who came to power on the promise of giving people quick relief. Speaking Sunday on Ekho Moskv, a Russian radio station, Mr. Dubnov noted that more upheaval was inevitable in Kyrgyzstan.

"The way how the whole system of power in Kyrgyzstan was whipped and uprooted in just 48 hours shows how government institutions are unstable in this country," he said.

A landlocked former Soviet republic of 6.3 million people, Kyrgyzstan has suffered recurrent political strife. Three of its presidents, including Mr. Japarov's immediate predecessor Sooronbay Jeenbekov, have been toppled in violent revolts since the country's independence from Moscow in 1991.

Deep poverty, clan rivalry and regional divisions between north and south have made it hard for successive governments to impose full control over the country. Many governments have been corrupt, profiting from lucrative smuggling routes that cross the country from China.

During the most recent political turmoil, protesters captured the main government building that houses Parliament and the president's offices. Angered by credible allegations of widespread vote-buying in last fall's parliamentary election, a violent mob stormed through the building, leaving piles of debris behind.

After the protests, President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia said Kyrgyzstan's main problem was that its elites were trying "to fit their domestic policy into the mold of some Western countries."

"They are always trying to run ahead of the train," Mr. Putin said at a news conference in December. "At the same time, they lack the level of political consciousness and institutional maturity of the kind, for example, France has."

In pushing to expand his powers, Mr. Japarov seems to be following Mr. Putin's lead. But that path may be risky. Kurmanbek Bakiyev, another predecessor of Mr. Japarov's, tried to consolidate all levers of power in his hands during his 2005-2010 term. He ended up being deposed in a bloody riot.

A country where Russian is a state language, Kyrgyzstan is closely allied with Moscow. Mr. Japarov pledged during his campaign to maintain close ties. Russia operates an air base near Bishkek and is also the leading destination for hundreds of thousands of migrant workers from Kyrgyzstan.

"We lived together with Russia for 70 years during the Soviet time," Mr. Japarov said on Sunday after casting his vote. "After the union collapsed, we have been allies for 30 years," he said, calling Russia "the strategic partner."

Neighboring China is another key partner for Kyrgyzstan. The economic giant to the east is the principal investor in Kyrgyzstan's impoverished economy and the government's main lender.

**[Kazakhstan] Kazakh ruling party set to retain hold on power in Sunday's vote (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/10/2021 1:11 PM, Mariya Gordeyeva and Tamara Vaal, 5304K, Neutral] Kazakhstan's ruling party was set to sweep Sunday's parliamentary election, as it has done for decades, with no major opposition groups running in the vote and small street protests rapidly quelled by police.

The country's 80-year-old ex-president Nursultan Nazarbayev, who stepped down in 2019, remains hugely influential as chairman of the national security council and leader of the Nur Otan party, which controls 84 of 107 seats in the outgoing lower house.

Nur Otan won almost 72% of Sunday's vote, according to exit polls by local pollster, Public Opinion research institute. As with the current legislature, two other parties cleared the 7% threshold to win some seats.

Although four parties ran in the election apart from Nur Otan, none has openly criticised Nazarbayev or his handpicked successor President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, focusing their fire on lower-level officials and their policies instead, an arrangement that government critics say is meant to create an illusion of pluralism.

Dozens of opposition supporters rallied at the main squares of Kazakhstan's biggest city Almaty on Sunday, shouting "Boycott!" and "Nazarbayev go away!"

Police in riot gear quickly surrounded them and detained a few dozen people, although the interior ministry later said they were all released shortly afterwards with no arrests.

The Nationwide Social Democratic Party, the main opposition party in the Central Asian nation, boycotted the vote. Another opposition movement, the Democratic Party, failed to secure official registration ahead of the vote.

While the election outcome will dampen hopes of political reform encouraged by Kazakhstan's Western partners, it will help to ensure stability that has helped the country of 19 million attract hundreds of billions of dollars in foreign investment, primarily into the oil, gas and mining sectors.

In an attempt to modernise the system without relinquishing his party's tight grip on power, Tokayev has overseen the introduction of quotas for women and under-29s in political parties' candidate lists.

"(Further) reforms are being prepared," Tokayev told reporters after casting his ballot in the capital city of Nur-Sultan. "Reforms must not stop."

**[Pakistan] Pakistan power cut plunges country into darkness (Yahoo News/BBC)**

Yahoo News/BBC [1/10/2021 11:12 AM, Staff, 11261K, Neutral]

Electricity is gradually being restored in Pakistan following a huge power cut across the country, which led to every city reporting outages.

Homes nationwide were suddenly plunged into darkness from about midnight.

Power is now back in most cities but officials warn that it could still be a few hours before electricity is fully restored.

The outage is believed to have been caused by a fault at a power plant in the south of the country.

Power cuts are not uncommon in Pakistan. Essential facilities such as hospitals often use diesel-fuelled generators as a back-up power supply.

"A countrywide blackout has been caused by a sudden plunge in the frequency in the power transmission system," Pakistan's power minister, Omar Ayub Khan, wrote on Twitter in the early hours of Sunday.

Mr. Khan later said that power had been restored in most major cities but that it would take a few more hours for the grid to go completely back to normal.

He added that the outage occurred after a fault developed at the Guddu power plant in Sindh province shortly before midnight on Saturday (19:00 GMT).

Investigators were at the site to ascertain the cause of the fault, Mr. Khan said.

Blackouts sometimes occur in Pakistan because of chronic power shortages, with many areas having no electricity for several hours a day. The issue has previously led to street protests.

In 2013, Pakistan's electricity network broke down completely after a power plant in southwestern Balochistan province developed a technical fault.

Pakistanis seem to have largely taken this power cut in their stride. Outages lasting a number of hours are not uncommon, though they are rarely on this scale, and normally occur during the hotter summer months. The last time there was a near national blackout like this was in 2015.

So far, there have been no reports of problems at hospitals, which have their own back-up supplies. A senior member of staff at a major hospital in the city of Karachi told me they could maintain services for 48-72 hours without mainline power.

Many businesses and richer families invariably own diesel or petrol fuelled generators too, allowing them to continue using electricity whenever power cuts occur. There were reports of queues at some petrol stations earlier in the day as people tried to keep refilling their generators.

Others will have been without internet and phone access, or hot water, but — already used

to periods without electricity — appear to have accepted the outage with an air of resignation.

## Western Hemisphere Affairs

### **[Brazil] Brazil sees 29,792 new cases of coronavirus, additional 469 deaths - health ministry (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/10/2021 4:51 PM, Carolina Mandl, 5304K, Negative]

Brazil recorded 29,792 additional confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus in the past 24 hours, along with 469 deaths from COVID-19, the Health Ministry said on Sunday.

Brazil has registered more than 8.1 million cases of the virus since the pandemic began, while the official death toll has risen to 203,100, according to ministry data.

### **[Brazil] Brazil tops 1,000 daily average coronavirus deaths for the first time since Aug (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/10/2021 7:45 PM, Anthony Boadle, Carolina Mandl, 5304K, Neutral]

Brazil's weekly rolling average of deaths per day reached 1,111 cases on Sunday, surpassing 1,000 deaths for the first time since early August, according to a Reuters calculation.

In the week ending Aug. 2, Brazil had registered 1,014 deaths on average per day, while this week it ended at 1,111.

Brazil has recorded 29,792 additional confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus in the past 24 hours, along with 469 deaths from COVID-19, the Health Ministry said on Sunday.

The country has registered more than 8.1 million cases of the virus since the pandemic began, while the official death toll has risen to 203,100, according to ministry data, the world's second-deadliest coronavirus outbreak.

The rise in deaths in Brazil comes amid growing pressure to speed up the vaccine roll out, which is lagging regional peers. Mexico, Chile and Argentina have already begun immunizations.

The country's health regulator Anvisa received on Friday the application for the emergency use of AstraZeneca's and Sinovac's vaccines.

### **[Honduras] US prosecutors say Honduras President helped send cocaine to Americans (CNN)**

CNN [1/10/2021 9:50 PM, Caitlin Hu, 7975K, Neutral]

US federal prosecutors say Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández helped an alleged drug trafficker deliver thousands of kilos of cocaine to the United States in exchange for hefty bribes -- a claim the Honduran Presidency rejected on Sunday as "100% false."

A motion submitted Friday by prosecutors in the Southern District of New York details new evidence in a case against alleged drug trafficker Geovanny Fuentes Ramírez, including witness testimony of alleged transactions and promises made between Fuentes and

Hernández in 2013 and 2014.

The Honduran president is not identified by name in the motions. He is referred to as "CC-4" and clearly identified by descriptions of his campaign for president and by the naming of his brother.

He vowed to "shove the drugs right up the noses of the gringos," referring to Americans, the document alleges.

Hernández has not been charged. He confirmed in 2019 that he had been investigated by the US Drug Enforcement Administration, and has repeatedly denied all allegations.

Fuentes pleaded not guilty to the charges against him in June 2020, according to CNN Español. His lawyers did not respond to requests for comment sent by CNN on Saturday.

The court document filed Friday describes a close working relationship between Fuentes and Hernández. It alleges that Hernández -- among other top Honduran officials -- accepted bribes while running for the presidency in 2013, and in exchange offered military support and the use of the country's armed forces "as security" for drug running operations.

"In approximately 2013 and 2014, CC-4 promised to protect [Fuentes] from arrest and extradition; promised to help the defendant transport cocaine with the assistance of Honduras's armed forces; said he wanted to use the defendant's Laboratory because of its proximity to a key shipping port; directed the defendant to work with Tony Hernández (CC-4's brother) with respect to drug-trafficking activities; and stated that he was going to "shove the drugs right up the noses of the gringos," the document reads.

Prosecutors write that the allegations of corruption illustrate a "broader criminal plan of the defendant, CC-4, CC-10, and others, to use drug trafficking to help assert power and control in Honduras."

According to the document, a witness also heard Hernández allegedly admit to "embezzling United States aid through non-governmental organizations and stealing from Honduras's social security fund" in conversation with a prominent political donor.

In a statement posted to Twitter on Saturday, the Honduran Presidency rejected the claims as "100% false," describing prosecutors' witnesses as "confessed criminals" who lied "to seek revenge and to reduce their sentences."

"The claim that Pres. Hernández supposedly accepted drug money from a Geovanny Daniel Fuentes Ramirez, or gave protection or coordination to drug traffickers is 100% false, and appears to be based on lies of confessed criminals who seek revenge and to reduce their sentences," read a tweet from the President's Office.

"This and other opportunistic allegations are contested by the essential fact that during the Hernández Administration, coca trafficking through Honduras fell from 87% to 4% from 2013 to 2019, as recognized by the publications of the Department of State (INCRS) of those years," it continued.

Hernández's brother Juan Antonio Hernández Alvarado was convicted in New York on drug

trafficking charges in 2019. He had pleaded not guilty to all charges and chose not to testify during the trial, CNN reported then.

One of the most explosive allegations during that trial was that he funneled drug money to National Party campaigns "to impact Honduran presidential elections in 2009, 2013, and 2017," according to the US Department of Justice. His brother, President Hernández, won office in 2013 and was reelected in 2017, after a disputed vote sparked days of deadly protests.

Allegations surfacing in the US drug trafficking investigation have recently renewed calls for Hernández 's resignation in Honduras.

### **[Mexico] Mexican president's spokesman tests positive for coronavirus (AP)**

AP [1/10/2021 8:41 PM, Staff, 13480K, Neutral]

The spokesman for Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has tested positive for coronavirus, he said on Sunday, the same day the country reported its first case of a potentially more contagious COVID-19 variant that is spreading in the United Kingdom.

Spokesman Jesús Ramírez Cuevas wrote on his Twitter account, "I am in good health and I will be working from home." There was no word on whether the president had been tested.

Ramírez Cuevas is close to López Obrador, often handing him documents or going on trips with the president.

López Obrador is 67 and has high blood pressure, but almost never wears a mask.

On Sunday, López Obrador toured the Pacific coast seaport of Manzanillo and gave a speech, as usual without a mask on.

Also on Sunday, health authorities in the northern border state of Tamaulipas detected a case of the U.K. variant, known as B.1.1.7. That strain has also been found in the United States, Canada, Italy, India and the United Arab Emirates.

Scientists in the U.K. have said the variant may be more contagious than previously identified strains.

The Tamaulipas state health department said the case was detected in a 56-year-old man who arrived on Dec. 29 at an airport in the border city of Matamoros, across the border from Brownsville, Texas, aboard a flight from Mexico City.

Later, federal health authorities said the man was a U.K. citizen who travelled from Amsterdam to Mexico City, and then caught a connecting flight to Matamoros, where he apparently had a work assignment. The man was tested only because his company required it; Mexico does very little testing of its own.

The man was asymptomatic when tested, but has since been hospitalized and placed on a ventilator.

Officials said 31 of those aboard the flight had shown no symptoms and two others tested negative, but that 12 more could not be located. This is the first confirmed case of the new

variant in Mexico.

Mexico reported about 10,000 newly confirmed coronavirus cases nationwide Sunday and about 500 more deaths. Hospitals in Mexico City, the current epicenter of the pandemic in Mexico, were 92% full.

Only about 6,320 people received vaccines in Mexico Sunday, for a total of 107,250 so far.

**[Mexico] New coronavirus strain first seen in Britain confirmed in Mexico (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/10/2021 8:03 PM, Adriana Barrera, 5304K, Negative]

The new variant of the coronavirus first detected in Britain has been confirmed in northern Mexico, health officials said on Sunday, adding a new layer of concern to an already severe national outbreak.

The confirmation of the especially contagious new variant of the virus marks the first time it has been found in Mexico, home to the pandemic's forth-highest death toll globally.

A 56-year-old British man who flew on Dec. 29 from Mexico City to the city of Matamoros, just south of the U.S.-Mexico border, tested positive for the new strain, both state and national health officials said on Sunday.

The man arrived to the Mexican capital a day earlier on a flight from Amsterdam, said Jose Luis Alomia, the head of epidemiology for the national health ministry, at a regular government news conference.

The official explained that upon arriving in Matamoros, the man did not show any symptoms of COVID-19, the disease caused by the virus. But he nonetheless tested positive again after a second test was administered to him on Dec. 31.

Alomia stressed that while the new variant has been detected, it is not believed to be circulating on any significant scale among the population.

A dozen passengers on the same Mexico City-Matamoros flight have not yet been identified, officials said, while the rest of the 45-passenger flight have all tested negative, including the plane's crew.

The British man remains hospitalized in Matamoros, and was placed on a ventilator on Saturday.

Officials did not say that any form of contact tracing or testing had been conducted on passengers on the Amsterdam-Mexico City flight.

The fast-spreading new strain of the virus has also been found in South Africa and Australia, prompting authorities to take more aggressive action to prevent even greater contagion as countries across the globe struggle to contain the pandemic.



## Sub-Saharan Africa

### **[Seychelles] Seychelles rolls out COVID-19 vaccination using China's Sinopharm, says president's office (Reuters)**

Reuters [1/11/2021 1:30 AM, George Obulutsa, Neutral]

Seychelles has started vaccinating its population against COVID-19 with doses from China's Sinopharm vaccine, President Wavel Ramkalawan said.

Ramkalawan's office said in a statement seen by Reuters on Monday that the initial target was for the vaccine to reach 25,000 people and first priority was for healthcare workers. The statement said the Indian Ocean archipelago had received 50,000 doses of the vaccine as a donation from the United Arab Emirates.

Ramkalawan's office said he and former president Danny Faure and other senior government officials were vaccinated as part of efforts to bolster confidence among the population to take part in the exercise. It said India's government had offered another 100,000 doses of the Oxford Astra-Zeneca vaccine that were due to arrive at the end of January.

With a population of just over 98,000 people, Seychelles has reported a total of 531 coronavirus cases and one death, data from its health ministry showed.

### **[Uganda] Uganda elections 2021: Who is Bobi Wine? (Yahoo News/BBC)**

Yahoo News/BBC [1/10/2021 7:18 PM, Staff, 11261K, Neutral]

There has never been a peaceful handover of power in Uganda, but pop star-turned-politician Bobi Wine is hoping to change that by unseating long-serving President Yoweri Museveni in Thursday's vote. BBC Africa correspondent Catherine Byaruhanga takes a look at the challenger.

A few weeks before the general election and what could be the biggest day of Bobi Wine's life, he brought his presidential campaign to his family's ancestral home.

The 38-year-old pop star, whose real name is Robert Kyagulanyi, made his reputation in the informal settlements of the capital, Kampala, but here in Kanoni, a sleepy rural town in central Uganda, his support is just as evident.

Hundreds of young people, mostly men dressed in red, seem to emerge from the bushes and gardens and surround his motorcade. Bobi Wine, also known as the "ghetto president", climbed through the sunroof of his white Toyota Landcruiser and waved at the crowds - they frantically respond.

In an unlikely sartorial move for a presidential candidate, he has started wearing a bullet-proof vest and protective helmet.

In December, a bullet was shot through his vehicle's windscreen narrowly missing a passenger. Bobi Wine said that he thought his life was in danger.

In Kanoni, as had happened countless times during the campaign, he ran into a police and military blockade - teargas and bullets were fired. The authorities said they were simply

trying to disperse crowds and enforce Covid-19 guidelines.

But Bobi Wine believed this was yet another sign of intimidation. He has been consistent in saying that it will not succeed as he feels that he is at the head of a mass movement.

"People are not just following me. People are following an ideal that I represent," he told the BBC in 2019.

"I did not start it and I will not end it. I'm just one of the millions and millions of Ugandans that want better."

The manifesto of his National Unity Platform (NUP) party is geared towards basic needs like improving access to healthcare, education, clean water and justice. All of this, the NUP says, can only be done by removing President Museveni from power.

Over the last two decades Bobi Wine's musical output has been filled with songs about these issues and they have inspired a fervent following.

Twenty-three-year-old law student Marion Kirabo is vying to be a local councillor and she is one of his supporters.

"Even before his political life he was someone the youth could identify with," she says.

"Especially through his music, you could clearly see that he understood the social issues that young people were facing, especially young people from the ghetto."

When President Museveni came to power in 1986, Bobi Wine was just about to turn four, and living in Kanoni.

Central Uganda had been the battleground of the bush war that brought Mr Museveni's rebel National Resistance Army, and its political wing, the National Resistance Movement (NRM), to power.

Bobi Wine's grandfather, Yozefu Walakira, was part of a different rebel contingent but from time to time during the conflict hosted Mr Museveni in his house.

Walakira died during the civil war after being injured when his home was bombed - an attack which also killed three family members.

Bobi Wine's family later moved to Kampala, his mother Margaret Nalunkuuma, a nurse, was the main breadwinner and bought land in the Kamwokya slum where the musician lived and built his now world-famous recording studio.

Some of his primary and secondary schools were often within walking distance from Kamwokya.

As a teenager he discovered a passion for the arts, but when he first attended the prestigious Makerere University he started out studying for a social sciences degree. After one semester he switched courses and took on music, dance and drama, earning a diploma from the university in 2003.

In 2017, the reggae star turned his hand to politics as he saw it as the logical next step.

"You know, all through my musical career, I've been singing about the challenges that... people go through," he told the BBC.

"So it's as if I've been campaigning, all my musical career."

His song Tuliambala Engule (We Shall Wear the Victor's Crown) has become one of the campaign's unofficial anthems.

He won a by-election to become MP for Kyaddondo-East, a constituency to the north of the capital and even though an independent he aligned himself with the opposition. In a series of by-elections he campaigned for candidates who defeated hopefuls from the NRM.

There was a sound of regret in Bobi Wine's voice when he reflected on his rival's career in a BBC interview in 2019.

"Why did such a prized revolutionary decide to become one of the world's most despised dictators?" he asked.

"But it's also a lesson to many of us, knowing that we are saying what President Museveni was saying when he was in our times. And also to remember that it is only the idea of building strong institutions that can save us from ourselves."

The comparisons between a younger Mr Museveni - charismatic, energetic and inspiring - with today's Bobi Wine are hard to escape.

The rebel commander was just 41 years old when he seized power, promising Ugandans security, a stronger economy and a better future.

Some do wonder whether his new challenger full of idealism and populist rhetoric might not make the same mistakes.

Activist Siperia Mollie Saasirabo, 24, who says she is now in "political exile" in Kenya, is disillusioned with Bobi Wine.

In 2019, she became the face of student protests over a fee hike at Makerere University. For that, she was abducted by people she believed were plain-clothed soldiers, badly beaten and left barely conscious.

At the end of that year, she briefly joined Bobi Wine's party but left because of what she saw as a lack of ideological grounding.

"He was asked about his economic system when he is president," she says, referring to a July 2020 interview Bobi Wine gave to a local radio station.

"He was asked whether he was on the left or the right of the ideological setting, and his answer was he was neither on the right or the left and he will just use what works. It just does not make sense for me."

Apart from the large crowds that gather to support him, like the one in Kanoni, it is hard to tell how truly popular he is and whether the cheers will be turned into votes. Data on registered voters and their voting patterns are very limited.

Francis Kibirige, national co-ordinator for the Afrobarometer survey in Uganda, has been carrying out opinion polls and studies in Uganda since 2000.

He says the question remains as to whether Bobi Wine has done enough to transcend opposition politics and chip away at the huge vote that President Museveni and the NRM have gained in previous elections.

He argues that NRM supporters see the party and the president as "the guarantor of peace" and Bobi Wine's NUP has not done enough to persuade them otherwise.

Just as in most of the previous five elections under Mr Museveni, this one has been marred by allegations of violence against the opposition, press and civil society activists. In November, at least 54 people were left dead after police and soldiers moved in to break up protests over Bobi Wine's arrest.

In this context there are some who are already questioning the validity of the vote.

Bobi Wine, however, has encouraged people to cast their ballots and says voters should make sure there is no rigging at polling stations.

He is under no illusion that unseating Mr Museveni will be easy. "While we know that we are up against a brute force, we are confident," he told the BBC in a 2020 interview.

"We are confident because the people of Uganda are on our side. And we are confident because history is on our side."

## **Network TV News Coverage**

### **Total Coronavirus Cases Reported Worldwide More than 90 Million (FOX News)**

(B) FOX News [1/10/2021 10:03 PM, Staff]

Across the globe, the total number of coronavirus cases reported worldwide is now more than 90 million. That's according to data from Johns Hopkins University which says that the US still leads the world in both cases and deaths. India, Brazil, and Russia follow.

### **[Iran] Iran Says South Korean Diplomatic Delegation Arrived to Negotiate Release of Tanker (FOX News)**

(B) FOX News [1/10/2021 7:04 PM, Staff]

Iran says a South Korean diplomatic delegation has arrived in the country to negotiate the release of a tanker. The vessel's seizure came as Iranian officials have been pressuring South Korea to release some seven billion dollars in assets tied up due to American sanctions.

**[Indonesia] Investigators On the Scene of Deadly Plane Crash, Black Boxes to be Recovered Tomorrow (ABC World News Tonight With David Muir)**

(B) ABC World News Tonight With David Muir [1/10/2021 9:44 PM, Staff]

Investigators are on the scene of a devastating plane crash in Indonesia. They have located the black boxes and will retrieve them when the sun comes up. Underwater footage shows divers searching the bottom of the Java Sea where pieces of the plane came to rest. One important clue has already been uncovered: what is believed to be one of the engines. 62 people were on board including seven children and three babies.

**[Indonesia] Investigators Hope Black Boxes Will Offer Clues as to What Happened to Indonesian Plane (NBC Nightly News With Lester Holt)**

(B) NBC Nightly News With Lester Holt [1/10/2021 7:11 PM, Staff]

The first ghostly images of Saturday's mysterious crash in Indonesia as Navy divers hunt for clues scattered on the ocean floor. Others are working late into the night to recover debris like airplane parts, luggage, clothing, and corpses. This is not a rescue mission. All 62 people on board the Boeing 737-500, including 10 children, were killed. Families are devastated. One man spoke with his wife on the phone just before takeoff. "I was joking by saying when she arrives, we'd eat satay together," he said, saying that she replied, "We'll eat my favorite meal, tofu, too." The flight was flying over the Java Sea from the Indonesian capital Jakarta, but only four minutes after takeoff amid heavy rains, it suddenly plunged. The plane's black boxes have been located but not yet recovered. Investigators are hoping that they will offer clues as to what went wrong.

**[Honduras] President of Honduras Accused of Helping to Traffic Cocaine to US (ABC World News Tonight With David Muir)**

(B) ABC World News Tonight With David Muir [1/10/2021 9:52 PM, Staff]

The President of Honduras has been accused of helping to traffic cocaine to the US. Prosecutors cited Juan Orlando Hernandez as a co-conspirator in a drug trafficking case. They allege he took million of dollars in bribes and used the military to protect cocaine laboratories and shipments. He has not been charged and has denied the allegations.

## Headlines

**The Washington Post**

(1/11/2021 6:00 AM)

Pelosi moves ahead with efforts for Trump's removal as Democrats split on how hard to push for impeachment

The Capitol mob: a raging collection of grievances and disillusionment

As spending climbs and revenue falls, the coronavirus forces a global reckoning

Outgoing Capitol Police chief: House, Senate security officials hamstrung efforts to call in National Guard

**The New York Times**

(1/11/2021 6:00 AM)

House Moves to Force Trump Out, Vowing Impeachment if Pence Won't Act

Police Reassess Security for Inauguration and Demonstrations After Capitol Attack

The 51st State? Washington Revisits an Uphill Cause With New Fervor

Inside a Deadly Siege: How a String of Failures Led to a Dark Day at the Capitol

**The Wall Street Journal**

(1/11/2021 6:00 AM)

House to Move to Impeach Trump After Push to Have Pence Remove Him From Office  
Twitter, Facebook and Others Silenced Trump. Now They Learn What's Next.Apple, Amazon Move to Marginalize ParlerTrump's Ban on Chinese Stocks Roils Investors**ABC News**

(1/11/2021 6:00 AM)

Impeachment article has 200 cosponsors: US rep.Members of Congress possibly exposed to COVID-19 during siege on CapitolCapitol Hill riot could prove to be COVID-19 superspreader event, experts say**CBS News**

(1/11/2021 6:00 AM)

Trump may face 2nd impeachment after deadly Capitol riotGottlieb says vaccine strategy "not working" and U.S. needs "to hit the reset" buttonD.C. mayor asks feds to boost security preparations for inauguration**CNN**

(1/11/2021 6:00 AM)

Trump faces shameful prospect of second impeachment with Democrats set to move quickly this weekLaw enforcement braces for more extremist violence in DC and around the US ahead of Inauguration DayAs the world begins its vaccination push, delayed rollouts draw criticism and concern**Fox News**

(1/11/2021 6:00 AM)

Pelosi says lawmakers moving forward with impeachment, calls Trump 'imminent threat' to 'our Democracy'Secret Service investigating death threats against PenceIran to execute 2nd wrestler, sparking outrage from US State Department**NBC News**

(1/11/2021 6:00 AM)

Pelosi says House will move on impeachment if other efforts to remove Trump failFBI, NYPD told Capitol Police about possibility of violence before riot, senior officials sayCapitol physician says lawmakers may have been exposed to Covid-19 during riot lockdown**Washington Schedule****President**The White House

(1/11/2021 6:00 AM)

The President has no public events scheduled today.

**Vice President**The White House

(1/11/2021 6:00 AM)

See source link. Schedule not yet available.

**Senate**Senate

(1/11/2021 6:00 AM)

There are no public events scheduled today.

**House of Representatives**House of Representatives

(1/11/2021 6:00 AM)

There are no public events scheduled today.

**{End of Report}**



**From:** "Buangan, Richard L" <BuanganRL@state.gov>

**To:** Feith, David (b)(6)@state.gov>

(b)(6)@state.gov>;

Stilwell, David R <StilwellDR@state.gov>;

(b)(6)@state.gov>;

**CC:** EAP-Press <EAP-Press@state.gov>;

(b)(6)@state.gov>;

Keshap, Atul (b)(6)@state.gov>

**Subject:** Re: Urgent HHS statement for review

**Date:** Fri, 4 Dec 2020 19:00:27 +0000

We're good (b)(5) Move it forward.

---

Richard L. Buangan  
Deputy Assistant Secretary  
Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs (EAP)  
U.S. Department of State  
Email: (b)(6)@state.gov

On Dec 4, 2020, at 12:53, Feith, David (b)(6)@state.gov> wrote:

Many thanks. Please see edits in track-changes attached. Also clean copied here for the traveling party:

State/EAP edits to draft HHS statement  
December 4, 2020

(b)(5)

**From:** (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Sent:** Friday, December 4, 2020 1:28 PM  
**To:** Feith, David (b)(6)@state.gov>; Stilwell, David R (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Cc:** (b)(6)@state.gov>; Buangan, Richard L (b)(6)@state.gov>; EAP-Press  
<EAP-Press@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov>; Keshap, Atul (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Subject:** Re: FOR A/S STILWELL CLEARANCE ASAP: 11:30 AM: Urgent HHS statement for review

Standing by and waiting for your edits/comments.

(b)(6)

---

**From:** Feith, David (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Sent:** Friday, December 4, 2020 1:26 PM  
**To:** Stilwell, David R (b)(6)@state.gov; (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Cc:** (b)(6)@state.gov; Buangan, Richard L (b)(6)@state.gov; EAP-Press <EAP-Press@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov; Keshap, Atul (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Subject:** RE: FOR A/S STILWELL CLEARANCE ASAP: 11:30 AM: Urgent HHS statement for review

Hi all – please confirm we are not/not sending EAP clearance on this yet. Thanks.

---

**From:** Feith, David  
**Sent:** Friday, December 4, 2020 1:11 PM  
**To:** Stilwell, David R (b)(6)@state.gov; (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Cc:** (b)(6)@state.gov; Buangan, Richard L (b)(6)@state.gov; EAP-Press <EAP-Press@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Subject:** RE: FOR A/S STILWELL CLEARANCE ASAP: 11:30 AM: Urgent HHS statement for review

Seeing this now, will send suggestions in a minute --

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**From:** Stilwell, David R (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Sent:** Friday, December 4, 2020 1:06 PM  
**To:** (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Cc:** (b)(6)@state.gov; Buangan, Richard L (b)(6)@state.gov; Feith, David (b)(6)@state.gov; EAP-Press <EAP-Press@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Subject:** Re: FOR A/S STILWELL CLEARANCE ASAP: 11:30 AM: Urgent HHS statement for review

Good. There's some great reporting out of Taiwan on this topic. (b)(5)

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**From:** (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Sent:** Friday, December 4, 2020 11:30:57 AM  
**To:** Stilwell, David R (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Cc:** (b)(6)@state.gov; Buangan, Richard L (b)(6)@state.gov; Feith, David (b)(6)@state.gov; EAP-Press <EAP-Press@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Subject:** FOR A/S STILWELL CLEARANCE ASAP: 11:30 AM: Urgent HHS statement for review

A/S Stilwell,

Please see the statement below in response to the WSJ article that PRC is using to claim COVID did not start in Wuhan. CM has made edits below in yellow.

Apologies for the short fuse. Would appreciate your earliest clearance so that we can get our edits in.

Thank you,

(b)(6)

(b)(5)



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**From:** (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Sent:** Friday, December 4, 2020 12:13 PM  
**To:** (b)(6)@state.gov; (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Cc:** EAP-Press <EAP-Press@state.gov>  
**Subject:** RE: FOR SARAH/BROOKE CLEARANCE ASAP: 11:30 AM: Urgent HHS statement for review

Clear for CM. (b)(5)

(b)(5)

(b)(6)

Director, Office of Chinese and Mongolian Affairs  
Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs

(b)(6)@state.gov

202-647-6787 (desk)

(b)(6)

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**From:** (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Sent:** Friday, December 4, 2020 12:04 PM  
**To:** (b)(6)@state.gov; EAP-CM-Global-DL <EAP-CM-Global-DL@state.gov>; EAP-CM-Bilat Unit-DL <EAPCMBilatUnit@state.gov>; EAP-CM-ECON-DL <EAP-CM-ECON-DL@state.gov>  
**Cc:** EAP-Press <EAP-Press@state.gov>  
**Subject:** Re: CLEARANCE ASAP: 11:30 AM: Urgent HHS statement for review

Hi (b)(6)

Some edits for CM/Econ below in yellow highlights. (b)(5)

(b)(5)

(b)(6)

Environment, Science, Technology, and Health Officer

Office of Chinese and Mongolian Affairs

U.S. Department of State

(b)(6)

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**From:** (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Sent:** Friday, December 4, 2020 10:16 AM  
**To:** EAP-Press <EAP-Press@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov; IO-Press-DL <IO-Press-DL@state.gov>  
**Cc:** OES-PA-DG <OES-PA-DG@state.gov>  
**Subject:** 11:30 AM: Urgent HHS statement for review

Hello, please see HHS reactive statement below in response to the WSJ article that China is using to claim COVID did not start in Wuhan. I would appreciate your comments/clearance by 11:30.

Thank you

(b)(6)

OES/PPO

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The draft reactive statement below is in response to the WSJ article that China is using to claim COVID did not start in Wuhan. Once HHS comments have been received, it will go to State Dept for review.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/covid-19-likely-in-u-s-in-mid-december-2019-cdc-scientists-report-11606782449>

(b)(5)

(b)(5)



(b)(6)





**From:** David Feith (b)(6)  
(b)(6)  
GibbsJJ (b)(6) <GibbsJJ (b)(6)  
**To:** (b)(6)@state.gov (b)(6)@state.gov>;  
(b)(6)@state.gov (b)(6)@state.gov>;  
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(b)(6)@state.gov (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Subject:** Re: Department Press Briefing – February 9, 2021  
**Date:** Mon, 15 Feb 2021 14:41:25 -0500

WSJ editorial today, including citing Daszak's absurd CNN exchange. Now WSJ and WAPO have both called for USG to share more on the sick researchers (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/02/05/coronavirus-origins-mystery-china/?arc404=true>).

[https://www.wsj.com/articles/who-are-the-covid-investigators-11613401955?mod=opinion\\_lead\\_pos2](https://www.wsj.com/articles/who-are-the-covid-investigators-11613401955?mod=opinion_lead_pos2)

Who Are the Covid Investigators?

Members of a WHO origin probe have conflicts of interest.

By The Editorial Board

Feb. 15, 2021 10:12 am ET

The world needs to learn all it can about the origins of the novel coronavirus, and the World Health Organization has been investigating. But there's increasing reason to question the effort due to China's lack of cooperation and conflicts of interest on the WHO team.

A Beijing-approved WHO delegation recently concluded a 12-day visit to Wuhan, where the virus emerged more than a year ago. The group visited local hospitals and sites like the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) and Huanan Seafood Market. But such field trips aren't very helpful without unhindered access to raw data. The Chinese government, which controls research into Covid-19's origin, has limited WHO access to such information.

Chinese officials are spinning that Covid-19 came from outside China. Some Communist Party functionaries have suggested the virus was imported through frozen food, but few scientists take the idea seriously. Many believe it arrived through "zoonotic spillover," passing perhaps from bats, through another species, to humans. Another theory is that the virus came from a laboratory such as the one in Wuhan.

The WIV has conducted controversial "gain of function" research on coronaviruses. Such experiments can provide viruses with new capabilities—such as the ability to infect a different species. The U.S. State Department has said "several researchers inside the WIV became sick in

autumn 2019” and had “symptoms consistent with both COVID-19 and common seasonal illnesses.” This is important to investigate.

Yet the recent WHO trip ended with a propaganda coup for Beijing. Peter Ben Embarek, head of the WHO team, declared the lab hypothesis “extremely unlikely” and “not in the hypotheses that we will suggest for future studies.” Mr. Embarek said he had spoken with lab personnel extensively, and “they’re the best ones to dismiss the claims.” But apparently the frozen-food theory was worth looking into.

This was too much even for WHO director-general Tedros Ghebreyesus. “The expert team is still working on its final report,” he clarified last week. “All hypotheses remain open and require further study.” But who ensures that?

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One prominent member of the WHO team is zoologist Peter Daszak. Also part of the Lancet COVID-19 Commission, Mr. Daszak has vowed to investigate “with an open mind” and “not be bound by preconceived ideas.”

Yet emails obtained by the nonprofit U.S. Right to Know show that Mr. Daszak long ago made up his mind about the lab-leak theory. In February 2020, he helped organize a statement in the Lancet condemning “conspiracy theories suggesting that COVID-19 does not have a natural origin.” In one email, Mr. Daszak wrote that the document should “not be identifiable as coming from any one organization or person.” But EcoHealth Alliance, the global nonprofit he leads, played an outsize role.

His interest is understandable. The British-born U.S. citizen has deep ties with the WIV. Millions of U.S. government dollars went to his organization to fund research at the Chinese institution. Mr. Daszak, who has consistently defended the Chinese government, didn’t respond to a request for comment.

“You’re looking for small clusters of outbreaks that went to a clinic because they were severe and their symptoms were just like Covid,” Mr. Daszak said during a CNN interview from Wuhan earlier this month. “That didn’t happen. We didn’t see that in the data earlier than December.” Never mind that Washington said it found exactly that at the WIV.

While Mr. Daszak touted the “really remarkable openness from China,” other experts from the WHO committee complained about political pressure and uncooperative hosts blocking access to important data. The Australian team member Dominic Dwyer in particular deserves credit for speaking candidly.

Also of concern is Marion Koopmans, who oversees the viroscience department at the Erasmus University Medical Center in Rotterdam, Netherlands. A decade ago Ms. Koopmans’s deputy, Ron Fouchier, made international news by modifying a deadly flu virus to spread between ferrets. If an investigation finds it likely that the Covid-19 pandemic was caused by gain-of-

function research, that would have repercussions for labs around the world, including at Erasmus MC. A spokesman for the organization didn't respond to a request for comment.

A WHO spokesman told us that "we wanted to ensure a well-represented international team with geographic and topic area expertise balance." That makes sense, and such a team would consult scientists like Ms. Koopmans and Mr. Daszak. But their critical role as investigators undermines confidence in the probe.

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Donald Trump's criticism of WHO was often dismissed as politically self-interested, but the inquiry has unnerved the organization's supporters as well. "We have deep concerns about the way in which the early findings of the COVID-19 investigation were communicated and questions about the process used to reach them," U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said in a Saturday statement. Deep concerns? Such as?

"Please don't rely too much on US intel: increasingly disengaged under Trump & frankly wrong on many aspects," Mr. Daszak tweeted last week. Making as much of the intelligence as possible available, and vocally and clearly raising U.S. concerns, is the best way for the White House to respond to this spin from China and its apologists.

On Wed, Feb 10, 2021 at 9:43 AM David Feith <[davidjfeith@gmail.com](mailto:davidjfeith@gmail.com)> wrote:  
Team, fysa. Sent this yesterday to various folks (new and old) around the building. Hope all's well.

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **David Feith** (b)(6) >

Date: Tue, Feb 9, 2021 at 6:27 PM

Subject: Fwd: Department Press Briefing – February 9, 2021

To:

Folks — flagging lot of interest in COVID and the lab leak hypothesis at the top of today's State press briefing. SPOX gave repeated careful answers stating that:

- (1) USG wants to see WHO evidence,
- (2) USG will compare WHO info with USG info/intel, and
- (3) the new Admin is neither criticizing nor endorsing the previous Admin's Jan. 15 statement on evidence of a possible lab leak, which itself asserted no conclusions on the origin of COVID.

Useful exchanges, which seem to nicely tee up close consideration by the new USG team of the evidence available, including the evidence that drew our attention at the end of the last Admin, on sick researchers inside the WIV, etc.

Of course, in light of the WHO team deciding outrageously to end inquiry into the lab leak possibility (while at the same time saying it will look further into the frozen food theory), greater USG scrutiny of the evidence is all the more important.

Other useful references, while we're at it:

<https://www.google.com/amp/s/nymag.com/intelligencer/amp/article/coronavirus-lab-escape-theory.html> and

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/02/05/coronavirus-origins-mystery-china/?arc404=true>.

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **U.S. Department of State** <[usstatebpa@public.govdelivery.com](mailto:usstatebpa@public.govdelivery.com)>

Date: Tue, Feb 9, 2021 at 5:54 PM

Subject: Department Press Briefing – February 9, 2021

To: <(b)(6)>

You are subscribed to Press Releases for U.S. Department of State. This information has recently been updated, and is now available.

### **Department Press Briefing – February 9, 2021**

*02/09/2021 05:35 PM EST*

Ned Price, Department Spokesperson

1:34 p.m. EST

**MR PRICE:** Good afternoon. I just have one thing at the top, and then we'll get started.

The United States is deeply concerned about the absence of an election implementation agreement in Somalia. While this is an issue for Somalis to resolve, the United States views immediate elections as critical to Somalia's future. Consensus can be reached. We call on Somalia's leaders to resume their dialogue urgently so that national elections can take place now. The impasse hinders pressing reform and counterterrorism efforts, and continued delays will only increase the risk of instability.

It is the responsibility and the duty of national and regional leaders to act in the interests of the people of Somalia, who, of course, deserve the best from their leaders. Partial, parallel, or alternative election processes, including prolonged interim governing arrangements, would increase prospects for instability and be a major setback for Somalia. The United States opposes the use of violence by any party. We remain committed to the development of democracy in Somalia, and we want Somalis to enjoy the long-term stability, prosperity, and peace they deserve.

With that, Matt, do you want to kick us off?

**QUESTION:** Thanks, Ned. I've got a question about COVID, actually two, but they're kind of – well, they're obviously related, but they're on different things. So I'm going to just start with the first one, and then other people can go. And we'll get back to the second one unless someone else asks it in the meantime.

You have seen, I imagine, the WHO statement out of Wuhan or out of China today saying that they do not believe that corona – that the coronavirus was the result of a lab leak. You will also know, having been alive for the last year, that the previous administration, including the previous secretary of state, had suggested on numerous occasions that the virus may have gotten out as a result of a leak from a lab. The WHO statement or finding, whatever you want to call it, today says that that does not appear to be the case, and so I am wondering what you guys make of this.

**MR PRICE:** Well, Matt, when it comes to the report you're alluding to or the findings you're alluding to, I think in the first instance we look forward to receiving the report and the data from the WHO investigation. Broadly speaking, we have expressed our concerns regarding the need for full transparency and access from China and the WHO – access from China and the WHO to all information regarding the #earliest days of the pandemic. It's imperative that the world learns as much as possible about the earliest days of the COVID-19 pandemic so that we can understand its origins and so, importantly, we can prevent future biological catastrophes.

Now, you referenced statements from the previous administration. If I'm not mistaken, I believe this department on January 15th put out a fact sheet, and in that fact sheet it was not conclusive regarding the origins of the coronavirus. So where we are today is that we look forward to receiving this report and the full data and to digging into that ourselves, knowing that we do need that full transparency.

**QUESTION:** Okay. Well, so you've put a premium on full transparency thus far. And recognizing that it is not finished yet, are you satisfied? Are you pleased with the transparency that the Chinese have given to the WHO team?

**MR PRICE:** Well, I think the jury is still out. I think, clearly, the Chinese, at least heretofore, had not offered the requisite transparency that we need and that just as importantly, again, the international community needs so that we can prevent these sorts of pandemics from ever happening again. This goes back to one of the very first actions that President Biden took as president when he re-engaged with the WHO.

Look, we know that there needs to be international cooperation if we are going to be able to be in a position to staunch future outbreaks or epidemics before they become pandemics. The WHO is leading this investigation. We clearly support this investigation. We recognize there is an urgent need for an investigation. But I wouldn't want to be conclusive yet about any sort of cooperation that the WHO may or may not have received from China.

**QUESTION:** But thus far, are you pleased with the cooperation that you have seen that they have gotten or are you —

**MR PRICE:** Again, I wouldn't want to be conclusive before we've seen the report. I think it's premature for us to go there.

Yeah.

**QUESTION:** Same topic. As Matt referenced, Secretary Blinken's predecessor has said there was enormous evidence supporting the lab theory. Is it the Secretary's view that that's not the case, that there is not enormous evidence?



**MR PRICE:** The Secretary's view is the view of the department, and that is that we need to see this report. We look forward to seeing this report. We're supportive of the WHO investigation. And I think more broadly too, we can speak to our own efforts. We will work with our partners and also draw on information collected and analyzed by our own intelligence community to evaluate the report once we've received it as well as the data from the WHO evaluation.

So look, I think rather than rush to conclusions that may be motivated by anything other than the science, we want to see where that data leads us, where that science leads us, and our conclusions will be predicated on that.

Yes.

**QUESTION:** But just following up on that —

**MR PRICE:** Let's move it around a little bit now.

**QUESTION:** Yeah, just following up on that, the Chinese have suggested that maybe that you should expand the investigation because the cases only — the first cases were in December 2019 and there have been cases elsewhere in the world. Do you think that there should be investigations into the origins elsewhere, or do you think this focus should remain on Wuhan?

**MR PRICE:** Well, we are talking in this case about the origins of the coronavirus. I don't think there is any reasonable person who would argue that the coronavirus originated elsewhere, so that is why our focus is on this WHO investigation. We look forward, again, to seeing the report, to seeing the underlying data, to using what we may have within our own reach based on our own intelligence and analysis to corroborate what the WHO has found and to reach our own conclusions.

Yes.

**QUESTION:** Following up on what Matt and John said, the previous administration had a great deal of intelligence and other evidence about what it believed was the origin of the coronavirus, and you guys presumably have access to the same intelligence. The secretary — previous secretary came out and said, as John said, that he believed there was significant evidence of a possible lab origin. Are you guys — why can you not draw conclusions from the evidence that they were drawing conclusions from? And are you then not ruling out the possibility that there was a lab origin to the virus?

**MR PRICE:** Well, I would note a couple things. Number one, I've certainly seen the reports of what the WHO seems to have found. And those reports indicate they, at least in this initial stage, have reached a conclusion vis-a-vis the origins of the virus. But again, we want to see that for ourselves.

What I can speak to regarding what you have heard from this department prior to January 20th, I would point you to the January 15th fact sheet. The January 15th fact sheet was very clear that it was inconclusive. It didn't give credence to one theory over another. That is why, again, we are looking forward to receiving this full WHO report, to reviewing it, to reviewing the underlying data, and to cross-referencing what may be in our own holdings with that.

Yes.

**QUESTION:** Ned, so part of this was they said that the lab theory they don't think should be in the hypothesis that we will suggest for future studies. So does the State Department agree that we should cease that vein of inquiry and stop investigating whether or not it did come from a lab?

**MR PRICE:** The State Department, again, wants to see the report. We want to see the underlying data. We intend to marry that underlying data with what is in our own broader holdings, to include within our Intelligence Community. We are going to base our conclusions on nothing other than the data, nothing other than the science. And based on that, we'll come to a conclusion.

**QUESTION:** One more on the WHO. The previous administration as well made the argument that the WHO allegedly was influenced by China, and that was one of the reasons that the previous administration moved to exit it. Are you confident with how the WHO is handling this? Do you feel confident that whatever they reach will be independent and not unduly influenced by one country?

**MR PRICE:** Well, this goes back to what I was saying before. It also goes back to what I was saying yesterday in a very different context, that across the board the United States believes as a general matter that when we engage, when we are at the table, we can help shape world events, we can help shape institutions. When we are not within the WHO, when we're not acting in that capacity, we don't have any influence to see to it that the WHO functions as the way it was intended to function, the way we hope it would – it should function.

So clearly, by re-engaging with the WHO, the United States will be in a position to push any necessary needed reforms. And to be clear, there are necessary and needed reforms. Just as any institution or just about any institution, the WHO is far from perfect. That is precisely why we re-engaged it, why President Biden announced our intention to re-engage it on his first day in office on January 20th.

**QUESTION:** So you've made reference several times to the January 15th State Department report saying it's inconclusive. You also said at one point that you don't want to rush to a conclusion that might be motivated by something other than science. I think that's a quote, unless I've gotten my notes wrong, which is possible, but I think that was pretty much what you said. Are you suggesting that the previous administration's or the previous Secretary's comments about this were motivated by something other than science?

**MR PRICE:** Matt, I – my orientation from this podium will be to look forward, not to look back. I am talking about our orientation. We are going to be guided by the science; we are going to be guided by the data. I wouldn't want to characterize the actions of the previous administration. I'm here to characterize our own actions.

**QUESTION:** Well, but – yeah, but you did, because you said that —

**MR PRICE:** No, I didn't, Matt. I said our actions will be guided by the data and guided by the science.

**QUESTION:** You said that you were not going to rush to conclusions that might be motivated by something other than science.

**MR PRICE:** Correct.

**QUESTION:** Suggesting to all but the most – I don't know – a slug that the previous administration was



motivated by something other than science. Are you —

**MR PRICE:** Matt —

**QUESTION:** Are you saying that you're not trying to suggest that? Is the slug wrong?

**MR PRICE:** There was — I haven't diagrammed the sentence, Matt, but I think there was one subject in that sentence, and it was us. I never raised the previous administration. I don't intend to from this podium.

Yes.

**QUESTION:** Can I ask some more on this? Do you think that the U.S.'s absence in this interim from the WHO has made it less objective in things like this? Do you think its objectivity was damaged by not having the U.S. in the room to be involved in these discussions and these decisions?

**MR PRICE:** Well, I think what is undeniable is that the U.S. had not been engaged with the WHO during a critical period. That is precisely why on the campaign trail then-candidate Biden pledged to reenter the WHO on his first full day — on his first day in office. That is precisely why on his first day in office he made good on that promise. Again, when we are at the table, when we are taking part, when the United States is present, when we're engaged, whether that's with the WHO, with UN bodies, with other elements, we can see to it that our interests and our values are there, that they are being represented. And I think when it comes to the WHO, that's precisely what we're going to do.

Yes.

**QUESTION:** During his confirmation hearing, Secretary Blinken said that the administration intends to join COVAX. Do you have any update on that effort and whether or not you'll provide a certain amount of funding for the vaccine distribution?

**MR PRICE:** So I don't have an update for you on specific funding. I think what I can say generally is that the United States will support multilateral efforts in the international COVID-19 public health and humanitarian response, including Access to the COVID-19 Tools Accelerator and the COVAX facility. In addition, we'll also be taking steps to provide congressional-appropriated funds to Gavi, which will support international vaccine procurement and distribution. We'll also develop a framework for providing surplus U.S. Government vaccine doses to countries in need once there is sufficient supply in the United States, including through the COVAX facility as appropriate.

And just to anticipate a follow-on question, we believe and we know that we can do both, that we can support these humanitarian efforts and these global efforts while ensuring that we have a safe and equitable access to the vaccine here in the United States to our own citizens, which of course is our priority in the first instance.

Yes, Rich.

**QUESTION:** Thanks, Ned. In your evaluation of the current refugee resettlement system, what kind of challenges do you have getting to 125,000 next year, and will that require an investment beyond what Congress has been providing over the past few years?

**MR PRICE:** Well, what I can say is that this is a priority of the President's. It is a priority of the President's because it is very much in our DNA to be a country that welcomes, that provides refuge, that provides safe haven to those in need. This of course was a priority that you heard from then-candidate Biden. It was, of course, something that the President has spoken to in recent days.

The White House has set an ambitious target. There is a target for this fiscal year; there's a target for the next fiscal year. And of course, as with many elements of our policy, many processes that we look to, it will take some time for us to get to those targets, precisely because, in this case, the U.S. refugee admissions process has – had essentially come to a standstill in recent years. And so there will be an effort within this building, with our interagency partners, to see to it that we can revive that program, that program that has important humanitarian functions, that has important strategic functions, that is reflective of who we are as an American people. Of course, this won't happen overnight, just because it will take some time to get those engines back up and running. But the President is committed to it.

**QUESTION:** What's your assessment of what those engines are like right now? Is it —

**MR PRICE:** Well, I think I just said the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, of course, has been profoundly underutilized in recent years. And so we are starting from a very slow rolling speed. But again, it is the President's commitment that we ensure this program is up and running in a way that provides refuge, provides relief, provides safe haven to those fleeing violence, conflict, persecution the world over. Again, it has humanitarian value, strategic value, and it's reflective of who we are. And that's why we're making it a priority.

Lalit.

**QUESTION:** Thank you. Thank you, Ned. Three years into this – three weeks into this administration, top leadership of this government have spoken to their Indian counterparts. Last one was yesterday, when the President spoke with Prime Minister Modi. From this podium, can you articulate for us what would India-U.S. relationship would look like in the next four years?

**MR PRICE:** Sure. Let me give you just some broad top lines. And I think you probably saw that Secretary Blinken today spoke with his Indian counterpart, Foreign Minister Jaishankar. I think I would start by saying the U.S.-India Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership is both broad as well as multifaceted. We'll continue to engage at the highest levels of our government to deepen cooperation on many fronts, and we are confident that the strong and upward trajectory of our partnership will, in fact, continue.

India is one of the most important partners in the Indo-Pacific region to us. We welcome India's emergence as a leading global power and its role as a net security provider in the region. We cooperate on a wide range of diplomatic and security issues, including defense, nonproliferation, regional cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, counterterrorism, peacekeeping, the environment, health, education, technology, agriculture, space, and oceans. And of course, that list is not exhaustive. We also work closely —

**QUESTION:** It sounded pretty exhaustive.

**MR PRICE:** (Laughter.) I could go on. We also work closely in international organizations, and we welcome India joining the Security Council in last month of this year for a two-year term. We also remain India's largest and most important trading partner, with total bilateral trade increasing to \$146 billion in

2019. U.S. companies, of course, are a large source of India's foreign direct investment.

And then finally, I would just highlight the people-to-people ties, the broad and important people-to-people ties. Across this country, nearly 4 million Indian Americans call the United States home, contributing in their communities and proudly serving their country in uniform.

**QUESTION:** One more question.

**MR PRICE:** Sure.

**QUESTION:** Several leaders of the Democratic Party, including Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal, Vice President Harris in her previous role as a senator, have spoken and raised concerns about India's human rights situation, including the farmers' protest, and previously Kashmir CAA, and other issues. We saw it mentioned in Biden campaign, some of the policy documents. When Secretary Blinken spoke to his Indian counterpart, this issue was raised by him?

**MR PRICE:** Well, what I can say – and this applies not only to India but to every partner of ours across the board – we are committed to supporting democratic values, including a free and open civil society and the strong rule of law. We regularly engage with the Government of India – including, as you referenced and I alluded to, today – on our shared commitment to democratic values. We believe it's the bedrock for the U.S.-India relationship. And it's actually in keeping, as you know, with India's own democratic values, its pluralistic values, and its history of tolerance. So we regularly engage with our Indian counterparts on —

**QUESTION:** One more – can I ask one more on China? In the last one year, China has aggressively tried to intrude upon, encroach upon Indian territories. What is the administration's position on that?

**MR PRICE:** Well, we're closely monitoring the situation. We note the ongoing talks between the governments of India and China, and we continue to support direct dialogue and a peaceful resolution of those border disputes. We are concerned by Beijing's pattern of ongoing attempts to intimidate its neighbors. As always, we'll stand with friends, we'll stand with partners, we'll stand with allies to advance our shared prosperity, security, and values in, in this case, the Indo-Pacific.

**QUESTION:** A very quick one: Is a Quad summit in the works?

**MR PRICE:** So we don't have anything to announce at this time. What I would say generally is that the Quad is a key example of the United States and our closest partners, including, in this case, India, pulling together for the good of a free and open Indo-Pacific region. We view the Quad as having essential momentum and important potential, and that's why we're going to build on it by deepening cooperation on areas of traditional focus – and that includes maritime security – while also working closely with Quad partners to confront some of the defining issues of our time. That of course includes COVID-19; it includes climate. It includes – going back to our previous conversation – democratic resilience as well.

**QUESTION:** Thank you.

**MR PRICE:** Yeah. Sorry, Iran?

**QUESTION:** On Iran, yes.

**MR PRICE:** Iran, okay.

**QUESTION:** Hi. Mouhamed Elahmed with Al Jazeera Arabic. So Iran's intelligence minister warned that Iran would seek nuclear arms if cornered by the West. So how do you respond to such threats, which is the first indication yet from Iran that it would seek obtaining nuclear arms if pressured more by the U.S. and its allies?

**MR PRICE:** Well, it's not yet clear to us that Mahmoud Alavi was speaking for anyone but himself. I would say that we, of course, took note of those remarks. They are very concerning. Would also note – and I referenced this yesterday as well – that Iran has an obligation under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty – the NPT – never – never, never, never – permanent prohibition to acquire nuclear weapons, and it reaffirmed that commitment under the JCPOA. I think that's where we'd leave our reaction.

Yes. Yeah.

**QUESTION:** Do you have a response to the UN report saying that there has been cooperation between Iran and North Korea on ballistic missile development? And what does that – what conclusion do you draw from that about the possibility of cooperation with Iran? Are you – do you mistrust their intentions even more, given this cooperation?

**MR PRICE:** Well, I don't think it really changes our strategic orientation to Iran. If the old adage is trust and verify, in this case it may be mistrust and verify. When it comes to this report, we've seen the press reporting, of course. We won't comment on a UN report that has not yet been published, but it is true that we continue to use a variety of nonproliferation tools to work to prevent the further advancement of Iran's missile program and its ability to proliferate this technology to others, including North Korea. And this includes working with our partners to stop specific shipments of equipment and technology to these programs, using our engagement in multilateral fora to raise awareness of Iran's missile activities, and to urge countries to take steps to address these activities, and finally imposing nonproliferation sanctions pursuant to our domestic authorities against entities supporting Iran's missile program.

That's why we've also said that our goal is not only to have Iran come back into full compliance with the JCPOA, but then to use the JCPOA, which we would seek to in the first instance lengthen and strengthen, as a platform for follow-on agreements to include other areas of Iran's malign activities. And that includes, of course, its ballistic missile program.

**QUESTION:** Thank you.

**MR PRICE:** Yeah.

**QUESTION:** In terms of North Korea, could you give us an update on how much progress the administration has made towards working on – working out its new approach to North Korea and how it's going to convince the government there to give up its nuclear weapons?

**MR PRICE:** Well, we are now, what, a little over two weeks into this administration, so I – that would be my first stipulation. But I will say when it comes to that approach, we will adopt a new approach that keeps the American people and our allies safe, and that will begin through a policy review of the state of play in North Korea. And we're going to do that in close consultation and coordination with the Republic of Korea,

with Japan, with other allies and partners on ongoing pressure options and potential for future diplomacy.

Our focus in formulating this new policy and approach and undertaking these consultations will be on reducing the threat to the United States and our allies, as well as improving the lives of the North the South Korean people. And as I think you have heard us say before, at the core, we do remain committed to the denuclearization of North Korea but don't have any additional details to read out at this time.

Shaun. North Korea?

**QUESTION:** Just is the administration concerned at all that a delay of engaging with the North Koreans could result in them doing something to get the United States attention – testing a nuclear weapon or launching a delivery system?

**MR PRICE:** I think we would be more concerned with the prospect of not closely coordinating with our partners – in this instance, of course, the Republic of Korea and Japan. You've heard us say it, whether it's North Korea, whether it's Iran, whether it is any other global challenge: In the first instance, we want to make sure we are on precisely the same page to make sure our allies and partners know that we are there for them, that we have their back, that we are on this diplomatic endeavor together. So that's our first —

**QUESTION:** The U.S. alliances when it comes to East Asia – the Japanese, the South Koreans – not always on the exact same page when it comes to the North Korean threat. Are you getting the sense as you're doing that outreach that you are on the same page?

**MR PRICE:** Well, that's exactly why we're doing it. I think the risk in moving too soon, whether the issue is Iran, whether the issue is North Korea, is that we don't bring along our allies and our partners with us. And it's very important that we do the diplomatic legwork that – before we undertake any approach – that we – and just that we know what our strategic objectives are, but as importantly, our partners and our allies also know what our strategic objectives are. And of course the underlying goal there is to harmonize them, to make sure our approach is coordinated and, in turn, the most effective.

Shaun. Shaun.

**QUESTION:** Sure. Could we go to Myanmar, to Burma?

**QUESTION:** No, could you stay on both North Korea and Iran?

**MR PRICE:** Okay.

**QUESTION:** Just for a second. You say a new policy and a new approach. Does that mean that we should not expect to see President Biden or Secretary Blinken flying to Asia, meeting with Kim Jong-un? Is that what you mean by that? And do you mean that you believe that the previous administration's approach to North Korea was a failure?

**MR PRICE:** I am not going to speak to the previous administration's approach. I am just stating facts about where we are and I'm speaking to the review that we are undertaking. When it comes to where Secretary Blinken or President Biden might fly, I wouldn't expect them to fly anywhere anytime soon out of the country. I would expect when we are prepared to travel that you will see Secretary Blinken going first to our



close allies and partners, and I would imagine that would include to our Asian allies early on.

**QUESTION:** And then you said in reference to Iran that they had said as part – you said that Iran had said as part of the JCPOA that they would never, never, never, never – maybe you only said it three times – acquire a nuclear weapon. Does this administration really believe that?

**MR PRICE:** The Nonproliferation Treaty imposes a permanent ban on a non-nuclear state obtaining a nuclear weapon.

**QUESTION:** Yeah, I know that.

**MR PRICE:** We absolutely believe that.

**QUESTION:** But —

**MR PRICE:** We believe strongly in the nonproliferation regime; we believe strongly in the Nonproliferation Treaty that undergirds that regime.

**QUESTION:** Yeah, but Ned, you – of course that's what it said and I believe that's what it says as well. Do you believe that Iran is actually committed to this?

**MR PRICE:** We believe that – well, we know that Iran is still a party to the treaty. We believe —

**QUESTION:** You know what, you also believed that Russia was a party to the Open Skies agreement, and you just said – you said just a couple days ago that they weren't – and the INF Treaty – and you said that they weren't adhering to it.

**MR PRICE:** Yeah. What we know —

**QUESTION:** So there's a big difference between signing up to a treaty or an agreement and actually complying with it.

**MR PRICE:** Well —

**QUESTION:** So do you actually believe that Iran is serious and is full-on on never, never, never acquiring a nuclear weapon?

**MR PRICE:** We know that is Iran's obligation under the Nonproliferation Treaty. We also know, as we have discussed here, that Iran is far out of compliance with its JCPOA obligations. That is why we have continued to reiterate the point that Iran needs to resume that full compliance with its JCPOA obligations, and from there, we'll pursue the path of diplomacy.

Shaun.

**QUESTION:** Can we go to Myanmar? Could you provide an update with – of any diplomacy that's gone on recently? You mentioned yesterday standing with the people of Burma. Can you explain what, if anything, the U.S. can do to that? And do you have any – specifically any comment on actions in the past day? Today the military authorities ransacked the offices of the NLD, Suu Kyi's party, the National League for

Democracy, and there was the use of force on some protesters.

**MR PRICE:** Yeah. Well, what I would say broadly is that we strongly condemn violence against demonstrators. All individuals in Burma have rights to freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly, including for the purposes of peaceful protest. We repeat our calls for the military to relinquish power, restore democratically elected government, release those detained, and lift all telecommunication restrictions, and to refrain from violence. You saw in the readouts that have been issued in recent days – recent hours even – by this building, by the White House that Burma has been a constant refrain in our engagement with leaders around the world.

You saw the very strong statement emanate from the UN Security Council late last week on Friday, I believe it was. We are continuing to make this a priority. We are making no bones about where we stand when it comes to the military's need to relinquish power. As you've also heard us say, we are undertaking a careful review of the assistance that we provide to Burma and with an eye towards ensuring that those responsible for this coup do face significant consequences.

Yes.

**QUESTION:** Is it still the case that the U.S. hasn't had any contact with the generals who made this coup? And I guess related to that, you've been talking about you're talking to allies who might have closer relationships with Myanmar. Do you know if any of those allies or any other of the countries you've been talking to have been able to talk directly to the senior general —

**MR PRICE:** Yeah.

**QUESTION:** — Senior General Min Aung Hlaing?

**MR PRICE:** So look, I will speak for this building. I think I said yesterday that we had made attempts both informal and formal to reach Aung San Suu Kyi in the hours and days after the coup. Those efforts were denied. There are countries in the region that do have an – closer relationships with some of those behind these actions. I wouldn't want to speak for them, but I can tell you the international community is attempting every avenue to ensure that democracy and civilian leadership is restored in Burma. It's precisely why it has continued to be a refrain in the readouts you've seen from this building, from the White House, and why I expect you will hear more about our policy course of action in the coming days.

Yes.

**QUESTION:** Venezuela. A GAO report concluded yesterday that U.S. sanctions against Maduro's regime maybe have exacerbated the humanitarian crisis there. Is that going to compel the Biden administration to find another way aside from sanctions to force Maduro from power even if they are targeted, as Secretary Blinken has suggested they might be?

**MR PRICE:** Well, what I would say in the first instance is that the – the U.S. is the largest donor of humanitarian aid for the Venezuelan regional crisis. We are committed to supporting Venezuelans who are suffering due to the crisis caused by the Maduro regime. The illegitimate regime's repression, corruption, and mismanagement have left millions of people in Venezuela in need of humanitarian aid. And it's created one of the worst migration crises ever seen in the Western Hemisphere. An estimated 5.4 million people have fled the country. We have been and we remain extensively engaged in the good faith efforts of the



interim government of Venezuela to bring relief to the Venezuelan people who struggling with poverty and health needs. And we do remain the largest donor of humanitarian aid for the Venezuelan regional crisis, having provided more than \$1.2 billion to help people affected by the crisis both in Venezuela and across the region. This amount includes more than \$47 million in humanitarian assistance specifically to support water and sanitation, case management, and disease surveillance in response to COVID-19.

Sanctions, I – to your question, are designed to allow for the provision of humanitarian assistance and the commercial sale of export – and export of agricultural commodities, food, medicine, medical devices to Venezuela. We do remain the second-largest food exporter to Venezuela as well. President Biden, as I think you have heard him say in recent days even, understands the pain the current crisis in Venezuela is inflicting on Venezuelans and their families. We know that that pain is the result of one individual and one regime, and that is the corrupt Maduro regime and the dictatorship of Nicholas Maduro.

**QUESTION:** But given that the sanctions in this GAO report have actually been identified to exacerbate the humanitarian situation, has that changed your thinking on what exactly you might do that are aside from sanctions?

**MR PRICE:** We are always looking for ways to support the people of Venezuela. And we are looking for ways to support their democratic aspiration, their humanitarian need. And we'll continue to do that. I think the point remains that the United States has stood with the people of Venezuela in providing them this aid and in doing all that we can to ensure that our pressure on the Maduro regime is not worsening the humanitarian implications and the humanitarian suffering of the Venezuelan people. Of course, as we review this, as we review our sanctions policy across the board, if there are ways that we can provide additional humanitarian assistance, if there are ways that we can further alleviate the suffering of the Venezuelan people, we will certainly do so.

I know we've gone on very long. We'll go one in the back.

**QUESTION:** I've got a question about Belarus since you talked about the Day of Solidarity with the people of Belarus. Is the new ambassador planning to go to Minsk to present her credentials to Alexander Lukashenko, or do you see her more as kind of an envoy to the opposition at this point?

**MR PRICE:** Well, the ambassador-designate, as I think you know, was traveling to partner countries last week. Again, here, we are coordinating closely with our European partners on this challenge. I don't have any update for you on her plans, any plans to travel to Belarus. I think there is a lot we can do to support the people of Belarus from this building and in tandem with our partners across the European continent as well.

**QUESTION:** On Russia, sir. It's kind of late. The EU's top diplomat has sort of signaled a hardening stance of the EU towards Russia over Navalny, and the treatment he received in Moscow got a bit of attention. So is the U.S. considering sort of – is this going to potentially accelerate your imposition of sanctions on Russia related to Navalny?

**MR PRICE:** We have been moving expeditiously and with alacrity since day one of this administration to ensure that our maneuvers to hold the Russian regime accountable for its malign activity across the board – to ensure that we did just that. Of course, in the early days of this administration, we saw a violent crackdown on Russian citizens who took to the streets to do nothing more than to exercise the rights that they are guaranteed under the Russian constitution. We are – the DNI is evaluating a whole series of malign activities. We, of course, are taking into account Russia's egregious actions in this case and its human rights

abuses more broadly. But we have always been moving as quickly as possible when it comes to policy maneuvers you may well hear about going forward.

I think with that, we'll call it a day.

**QUESTION:** Wait, wait. Hold on one second. You said you're moving – since taking office, you've been moving expeditiously and with alacrity. So what have you done?

**MR PRICE:** I think —

**QUESTION:** You've announced a review, but what have you actually —

**MR PRICE:** We have announced a review, I think, in day —

**QUESTION:** Well, I can announce a review of my Netflix. So what —

**MR PRICE:** Well, Matt – Matt, reviews – reviews do reach their culmination.

**QUESTION:** Well, okay. So are you suggesting —

**MR PRICE:** And so this is a not a review for the sake of a review.

**QUESTION:** Well, okay, fair enough. So are you suggesting that the – that with alacrity and expeditiously, these reviews will come to a conclusion very soon and —

**MR PRICE:** I am suggesting that we are moving expeditiously and with alacrity. I wouldn't want to put a timeframe on it, but I think you have clearly seen us take a number of actions, coordinate with our allies and our partners, leave no doubt in our public statements where we stand.

**QUESTION:** Well, wait. No, I haven't seen a number of actions. What are the actions that have been taken?

**MR PRICE:** You haven't seen the G7 statement that was issued shortly into this administration? You haven't seen the Secretary speak out? You haven't seen the President speak out? You haven't seen the President direct his DNI to undertake a review of a number of malign activities? We have been very consistent on this, Matt.

**QUESTION:** That's a lot of talk. That's not action. I mean, don't you remember growing up, "Actions speak louder than words"?

**MR PRICE:** And Matt – Matt —

**QUESTION:** Announcing a review is not exactly taking action.

**MR PRICE:** Matt, we are not undertaking a review just for the sake of a review.

**QUESTION:** Gotcha. I hope.

**MR PRICE:** The review will come to a culmination and conclusion. Thank you very much, everyone.

**QUESTION:** Thank you.

**MR PRICE:** We'll do this again tomorrow.

(The briefing was concluded at 2:17 p.m.)

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United States Department of State

11/2/2022  
Deputy Secretary of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

**SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED**

**TO:** Acting Deputy Secretary Smith  
**THRU:** Mustafa Popal  
**FROM:** (b)(6)  
**DATE:** February 16, 2021  
**SUBJECT:** Concerns with WHO Investigation into COVID Origins

Sir,

Attached please find a recent op-ed from the Washington Post that articulates well the concerns with the WHO's recent investigation into the origins of COVID-19, which China had blocked for a year. Over the weekend, the White House voiced concerns about the investigation and China's limited cooperation.

Members of the WHO team continue to publicly defend China's cooperation for the investigation, saying they found "trust and openness" with Chinese interlocutors. However, the WHO team has avoided publicly opposing the restrictions imposed by Chinese authorities.

The investigation highlights the larger problem with the WHO vis-à-vis China: China's continued lack of transparency concerning pandemics (from the 2003 SARS outbreak China to the ongoing COVID pandemic) and the WHO's inability or unwillingness to exact sufficient transparency from China to investigate the origins of COVID let alone avert the next potential outbreak from China.

We will continue to work with IO, EAP and others in the building to follow up on this issue.

Washington Post Editorial Board  
Feb. 13, 2021

Discovering the origins of a disease is scientific detective work of the first order, requiring immense patience, careful forensics and luck. The World Health Organization correctly set out last year to identify the origins of the coronavirus that first broke out in China. But China, a large and powerful police state, demands the story to be told on its own terms.

Chinese authorities covered up the early indications of spreading disease. Then they waged an aggressive propaganda campaign that denied the virus could have come from a laboratory accident, while pointing the finger at other countries as a virus source, and claiming it could have been imported into China on contaminated frozen food packaging, which many scientists doubt. China dragged its feet on accepting a WHO investigating team, and when they finally arrived, China closely managed what they were told.

Distressingly, members of the WHO experts group seemed to echo the Chinese narrative in a Feb. 9 Wuhan news conference. Peter Ben Embarek, the head of the WHO experts group, said a laboratory accident or leak was “extremely unlikely” to explain the virus leap to humans — and thus would not be studied further. Asked why, he said “nowhere previously was this particular virus researched or identified or known. There had been no publication, no reports of this virus, of another virus extremely linked or closely linked to this, being worked with in any other laboratory in the world.” At a WHO news conference Feb. 12, he repeated this assertion, although he said it was possible the virus is present in samples that haven’t been processed or characterized.

The laboratory leak possibility is unproved, but has attracted attention because researchers at the Wuhan Institute of Virology were conducting “gain of function” research on bat coronaviruses similar to the virus that triggered the global pandemic. This research can be dangerous and involves modifying genomes to give viruses new properties. The institute has a large collection of virus samples and sequences that are contained in databases that might offer clues to the virus origins, and a possible laboratory source. The WHO visited the institute, where it was assured that the pandemic virus did not come from its laboratories. Such a reassurance is entirely insufficient. The WHO needs to know more. Its director-general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said Feb. 12 that no hypothesis was being ruled out, and suggested that more experts might be added to the team. This is a good idea. Even better would be to establish a new team with the right skills to drill down on the unanswered questions.

The possibility that the virus originated in an animal species, and reached people via an intermediate host, presents a huge challenge to the disease detectives, and must also be pursued with equal attention. The WHO is not a regulatory agency, and is partially dependent on China's cooperation. But it must strive nonetheless to carry out the probe without interference from China's relentless political minders, who are more interested in protecting the party-state than in finding the truth.

**From:** "Stilwell, David R" (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**To:** Feith, David (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Subject:** Re: Re: Ensuring a Transparent, Thorough Investigation of COVID-19's Origin; Activity at the Wuhan Institute of Virology  
**Date:** Sun, 17 Jan 2021 01:27:20 +0000

He's flexing majority muscles, a bit prematurely. No reason we can't brief him, but it's going to be tough getting to the Capitol.

Have you reached out to (b)(6)

Get Outlook for iOS

**From:** Feith, David (b)(6)@state.gov>

**Sent:** Saturday, January 16, 2021 7:51:06 PM

**To:** Stilwell, David R (b)(6)@state.gov>

**Subject:** Fwd: Re: Ensuring a Transparent, Thorough Investigation of COVID-19's Origin; Activity at the Wuhan Institute of Virology

This is surprising. Did we know of these requests? Could they have gone to ISN?

--

David Feith

Deputy Assistant Secretary

Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs (EAP)

U.S. Department of State

(b)(6)

(b)(6)@state.gov

----- Forwarded message -----

**From:** (b)(6) (Foreign Relations) (b)(6)@foreign.senate.gov>

**Date:** January 15, 2021 at 8:42:09 PM EST

**Subject:** Re: Ensuring a Transparent, Thorough Investigation of COVID-19's Origin; Activity at the Wuhan Institute of Virology

**To:** Feith, David (b)(6)@state.gov>

David,

We have been asking — and State has been refusing — to provide us a classified briefing for almost ten months now on COVID origins. My expectations given the release of this "fact sheet" is that you all are prepared brief, and back it up with factual evidence, on Monday morning.

(b)(6)

Sent from my iPhone



On Jan 15, 2021, at 7:43 PM, Feith, David (b)(6)@state.gov wrote:

<https://www.state.gov/ensuring-a-transparent-thorough-investigation-of-covid-19s-origin/>

Ensuring a Transparent, Thorough Investigation of COVID-19's Origin

Michael R. Pompeo

January 15, 2021

The United States has repeatedly called for a transparent and thorough investigation into the origin of COVID-19. Understanding the origin of this pandemic is essential for global public health, economic recovery, and international security.

To assist the vital work of the World Health Organization (WHO) investigative team that arrived in China this week, the United States government is today sharing new information concerning the activities inside China's government laboratories in 2019.

In particular, we urge the WHO to press the government of China to address the following:

1. Illnesses at the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV): The United States government has reason to believe that several researchers inside the WIV became sick in autumn 2019, before the first identified case of the outbreak, with symptoms consistent with both COVID-19 and common seasonal illnesses. This raises questions about the credibility of WIV senior researcher Shi Zhengli's public claim that there was "zero infection" among the WIV's staff and students of SARS-CoV-2 or SARS-related viruses.
2. WIV Research on "RaTG13" and "gain of function": Starting in at least 2016, WIV researchers studied RaTG13, the bat coronavirus identified by the WIV in January 2020 as its closest sample to SARS-CoV-2 (96.2% similar). Since the outbreak, the WIV has not been transparent nor consistent about its work with RaTG13 or other similar viruses, including possible "gain of function" experiments to enhance transmissibility or lethality.
3. Secret WIV Links to Military Research: Despite the WIV presenting itself as a civilian institution, the WIV has collaborated on publications and secret projects with China's military. The WIV has engaged in classified research, including laboratory animal experiments, on behalf of the Chinese military since at least 2017.

The COVID-19 pandemic was avoidable. Any responsible country would have invited world health investigators to Wuhan within days of an outbreak. China instead refused offers of help – including from the United States – and punished brave Chinese doctors, scientists, and journalists who tried to alert the world to the dangers of the virus. Beijing continues today to withhold vital information that scientists need to protect the world from this deadly virus, and the next one.

The United States reiterates the importance of unfettered access to virus samples, lab records and personnel, eyewitnesses, and whistleblowers to ensure the credibility of the WHO's final report. Until the CCP allows a full and thorough accounting of what happened in Wuhan, it is only a matter of time until China births another pandemic and inflicts it on the Chinese people, and the world.

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<https://www.state.gov/fact-sheet-activity-at-the-wuhan-institute-of-virology/>

Fact Sheet: Activity at the Wuhan Institute of Virology  
Office of the Spokesperson  
January 15, 2021

For more than a year, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has systematically prevented a transparent and thorough investigation of the COVID-19 pandemic's origin, choosing instead to devote enormous resources to deceit and disinformation. Nearly two million people have died. Their families deserve to know the truth. Only through transparency can we learn what caused this pandemic and how to prevent the next one.

The U.S. government does not know exactly where, when, or how the COVID-19 virus—known as SARS-CoV-2—was transmitted initially to humans. We have not determined whether the outbreak began through contact with infected animals or was the result of an accident at a laboratory in Wuhan, China.

The virus could have emerged naturally from human contact with infected animals, spreading in a pattern consistent with a natural epidemic. Alternatively, a laboratory accident could resemble a natural outbreak if the initial exposure included only a few individuals and was compounded by asymptomatic infection. Scientists in China have researched animal-derived coronaviruses under conditions that increased the risk for accidental and potentially unwitting exposure.

The CCP's deadly obsession with secrecy and control comes at the expense of public health in China and around the world. The previously undisclosed information in this fact sheet, combined with open-source reporting, highlights three elements about COVID-19's origin that deserve greater scrutiny:

1. Illnesses inside the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV):

- The U.S. government has reason to believe that several researchers inside the WIV became sick in autumn 2019, before the first identified case of the outbreak, with symptoms consistent with both COVID-19 and common seasonal illnesses. This raises questions about the credibility of WIV senior researcher Shi Zhengli's public claim that there was "zero infection" among the WIV's staff and students of SARS-CoV-2 or SARS-related viruses.

- Accidental infections in labs have caused several previous virus outbreaks in China and elsewhere, including a 2004 SARS outbreak in Beijing that infected nine people, killing one.
- The CCP has prevented independent journalists, investigators, and global health authorities from interviewing researchers at the WIV, including those who were ill in the fall of 2019. Any credible inquiry into the origin of the virus must include interviews with these researchers and a full accounting of their previously unreported illness.

## 2. Research at the WIV:

- Starting in at least 2016 – and with no indication of a stop prior to the COVID-19 outbreak – WIV researchers conducted experiments involving RaTG13, the bat coronavirus identified by the WIV in January 2020 as its closest sample to SARS-CoV-2 (96.2% similar). The WIV became a focal point for international coronavirus research after the 2003 SARS outbreak and has since studied animals including mice, bats, and pangolins.
- The WIV has a published record of conducting “gain-of-function” research to engineer chimeric viruses. But the WIV has not been transparent or consistent about its record of studying viruses most similar to the COVID-19 virus, including “RaTG13,” which it sampled from a cave in Yunnan Province in 2013 after several miners died of SARS-like illness.
- WHO investigators must have access to the records of the WIV’s work on bat and other coronaviruses before the COVID-19 outbreak. As part of a thorough inquiry, they must have a full accounting of why the WIV altered and then removed online records of its work with RaTG13 and other viruses.

## 3. Secret military activity at the WIV:

- Secrecy and non-disclosure are standard practice for Beijing. For many years the United States has publicly raised concerns about China’s past biological weapons work, which Beijing has neither documented nor demonstrably eliminated, despite its clear obligations under the Biological Weapons Convention.
- Despite the WIV presenting itself as a civilian institution, the United States has determined that the WIV has collaborated on publications and secret projects with China’s military. The WIV has engaged in classified research, including laboratory animal experiments, on behalf of the Chinese military since at least 2017.
- The United States and other donors who funded or collaborated on civilian research at the WIV have a right and obligation to determine whether any of our research funding was diverted to secret Chinese military projects at the WIV.

Today's revelations just scratch the surface of what is still hidden about COVID-19's origin in China. Any credible investigation into the origin of COVID-19 demands complete, transparent access to the research labs in Wuhan, including their facilities, samples, personnel, and records.

As the world continues to battle this pandemic – and as WHO investigators begin their work, after more than a year of delays – the virus's origin remains uncertain. The United States will continue to do everything it can to support a credible and thorough investigation, including by continuing to demand transparency on the part of Chinese authorities.

--

David Feith  
Deputy Assistant Secretary  
Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs (EAP)  
U.S. Department of State

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