

News; International

**French Ambassador To Return To U.S. After Joe Biden And Emmanuel Macron Talk; Boris Johnson Urges The World To "Grow Up" On Climate At U.N. General Assembly; WHO Calls For Lower Limits On Air Pollution To Save Lives; Some Haitian Migrants At U.S. Border Released, Others Sent Home; Refugees Making Desperate Journeys To Find Safety. Aired 12-1a ET**

John Vause, Arwa Damon, Cyril Vanier, Heather Conley, Nina dos Santos, Derek Van Dam, Rosa Flores  
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[00:00:05]

JOHN VAUSE, CNN ANCHOR: Hello, everyone, I'm John Vause.

Coming up here on CNN NEWSROOM. Boris Johnson unplugged. The British Prime Minister tells the French to get a grip over the new AUKUS defense alliance. And then, tells world leaders at the U.N. General Assembly, the climate emergency means it's time to grow up, stop acting like reckless teenagers destroying the planet.

And the extraordinary efforts by Turkey with help from the E.U. to prevent entry by Afghan asylum seekers desperate to find safe haven from the Taliban.

One of the most serious diplomatic spats in U.S.-French relations appears to be improving. With word U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken will likely meet with his French counterpart in the coming hours on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly.

Earlier, France announced its ambassador to the U.S. would soon return to Washington.

On Wednesday, President Biden and Macron spoke for the first time since a firestorm erupted last week over a new defense alliance known as AUKUS which resulted in Australia canceling a \$65 billion contract with France for diesel submarines in favor of nuclear subs built with U.S. and British technology.

The White House raised this photo of a smiling Joe Biden, as well as a carefully worded joint statement declaring optimism.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

JEN PSAKI, WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY: In terms of the tone of the call, it was friendly. It was one where we're hopeful and the president is hopeful. This is a step in returning to normal and a long, important abiding relationship that the United States has with France.

(END VIDEO CLIP) VAUSE: For the first time in 243 years of diplomatic relations, France recalled its ambassador to Washington last week, so too the representative to Canberra, furious over that defense alliance, which Europe knew nothing about until the official announcement.

We have more details now from CNN's Cyril Vanier reporting in from Paris.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

CYRIL VANIER, CNN CORRESPONDENT: In the end, it seems a 30-minute phone call between French President Macron and Joe Biden, a call described as friendly by the White House was enough to defuse the week long diplomatic crisis between France and the U.S.

France's ambassador to Washington will be returning to D.C. next week. France went into this phone call with an unusually specific list of demands. Concrete actions to rebuild trust and crucially, an acknowledgement that the U.S. could and should have handled the whole thing better.

As far as rebuilding trust and concrete steps, Macron and Biden will meet in person in Europe next month.

As far as getting a sorry from the U.S. president, France came close. Although, the discrepancy between the English and French versions of the joint statement does speak volumes.

A French language communique stating the crisis could have been avoided with better communication among allies.

The English version doesn't go quite that far, saying only that the situation could have, "benefited from open consultations".

Still, the French got something in the ballpark of an apology by the world's most powerful man, the U.S. president. And they are signaling that they are ready to move on.

Cyril Vanier, CNN, Paris.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

VAUSE: Heather Conley is the director of the Europe Russia and Eurasia program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a think-tank based in Washington, D.C.

Good to have you with us. Thank you for your time.

HEATHER CONLEY, DIRECTOR OF THE EUROPE, RUSSIA AND EURASIA PROGRAM, CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES: Great to be with you.

VAUSE: OK, there are genuine apologies. And then, there are non- apology apologies. It seems the U.S. apologize for how all this played out. As in, sorry, we should have said something earlier. But there was no apology for the end result, this trilateral defense deal and the loss of a multibillion dollar defense contract for France. Is there still a way here before this dispute is put to rest?

CONLEY: There is a way to go. But today was an important first step in the healing process. It's remarkable that it took seven days for President Biden and President Macron to speak. It took the recall of the French ambassador to Washington, and real risk of endangering broader strategic objectives for the Biden administration to begin this healing process.

But it's going to take a while, many in Europe see what happened with AUKUS and the lack of providing the French government at least with a pretty significant heads up that this would happen, that this is just a repeated problem.

Rather than relentless diplomacy, we see the Biden administration pursuing relentless surprise of our allies, and it's beginning to really shake trust and confidence.

So, this is a first step it's got to start rebuilding slowly trust and credibility, and this was a good first step. We've got a way to go.

VAUSE: Yes, as you say, this is not just about a defense contract, it's -- the big -- the big issue here is trust.

[00:05:02]

VAUSE: So, that lack of trust, that message, can Macron now sell that to other E.U. members in a way to convince them that it is now time or at least very soon will be time to move away from NATO towards what he is calling the strategic autonomy becoming less dependent on the United States? And why would that not be welcomed by Washington?

CONLEY: Well, I mean, this desire of a strong European defense identity separate from the United States has always been a feature of French foreign and security policy.

But the more that the U.S. makes these surprise decisions, demonstrates -- in some cases, embarrasses our allies and shows their dependency on the U.S. military. That was certainly the case in this very hasty and chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan. We really give support to those who believe a separate defense identity from the U.S. is the right move.

Look, I mean, I think this is -- we are now shifting, I think you see in Washington a broader sense that a stronger European defense identity is a good thing. But it has to be done in coordination with NATO, not done in any form of competition.

But what's very likely to happen is President Macron will use unfortunately these own goals by the Biden administration to really propel a French vision of this strategic autonomy.

The challenge is Europe is very fragmented, there's a lack of unity and political will. So, while this is a lot of rhetoric, and we understand that, it's really hard to see where Europe will have that political will to significantly increase defense spending and build those defense capabilities to be truly autonomous from the United States.

VAUSE: Well, we heard from the British Prime Minister on Wednesday in his own very unique way, here's Boris Johnson.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

BORIS JOHNSON, U.K. PRIME MINISTER: I just think it's time for some of our dearest friends around the world to, you know, prenez un grip about all this, and donnez-moi un break. Because this is fundamentally a great step forward for global security.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

VAUSE: Get a grip, give me a break, a very blunt and direct way of saying, you know, complaining time is over.

The context here is in terms of security and defense, France needs the U.S. more than U.S. needs France. And the only unhappiness out there over AUKUS seems to be coming from Paris and Beijing.

CONLEY: So, the Prime Minister always has an incredible way of putting things. What he's getting at is that AUKUS was a pretty bold strategic move and it speaks to the depth of the challenge that Beijing poses to security in the Indo-Pacific.

But, again, the strategic understanding is there but how we go about doing it, the same thing as the withdrawal of Afghanistan. The strategic understanding was there but how you go about doing it sometimes can be as important as the strategic move itself.

We shouldn't have surprised France. France has interest in the Indo-Pacific, they have a security presence, although they never would have been happy about this decision.

If we would have done this better, we could have had Paris as a strong partner working with AUKUS and with the U.S. bringing the E.U. towards a more robust posture. Its new strategy certainly is a great start.

But unfortunately, how we handled this ended up really, you know, masking that the important strategic move that AUKUS represents.

VAUSE: Heather Conley, thank you so much. We really appreciate your time. Thanks for being with us.

CONLEY: Thank you.

VAUSE: The U.S. is taking a world lead in COVID vaccine donations with President Joe Biden announcing an additional 500 million doses of the Pfizer vaccine will be delivered to lower income countries starting January.

During a virtual COVID summit on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly, Biden urged other world leaders to aim for a global vaccination rate of 70 percent.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP) JOE BIDEN, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: This is another half billion doses that will all be shipped by this time next year. And it brings our total commitment to donate -- of donated vaccines to over 1.1 billion vaccines to be donated.

Put in another way, for every one shot we've administered to date in America, we have now committed to do three shots to the rest of the world.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

VAUSE: So, countries in dark green, including Canada, Spain, Chile and China have fully vaccinated more than 70 percent of their population. The light green areas are where less than 13 percent have been fully vaccinated.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration have now given the green light for a Pfizer booster shot for people over the age of 65 and those at high risk of severe disease, as well as those whose jobs put them at risk of infection.

[00:10:01]

VAUSE: CDC advisors will discuss boosters in the coming day and decide what to recommend. That's based on this new FDA decision.

Third doses are already approved for the immunocompromised, and more than two million Americans have already been given the jab.

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro and his U.N. delegation are back now in Brazil, where they will remain in isolation and retested for COVID this coming weekend.

The Health Minister Marcelo Queiroga is under quarantine in New York after he tested positive for the virus on Tuesday. Queiroga was wearing a mask when he shook hands with British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Monday. He was also in the audience when U.S. President Joe Biden made his first address to the General Assembly.

The British Prime Minister Boris Johnson telling the world to -- in his words, grow up. Listen to the scientists about climate change.

In his speech at the U.N. General Assembly on Wednesday, he slammed what he called the world's infantile approach. He wants countries to speed up their commitments to try and deal with this crisis seriously.

Nina dos Santos has our report.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

NINA DOS SANTOS, CNN CORRESPONDENT: Six weeks before he's set to host a major climate change summit on his own soil here in the U.K. Boris Johnson, the British Prime Minister used his United Nations General Assembly address in New York to rally the cause for more urgent action on climate change with some rather blunt language that you can hear here. JOHNSON: My friends, the adolescence of humanity is coming to an end and must come to an end. We're approaching that critical turning point in less than two months in just over 40 days, when we must show that we are capable of learning and maturing and finally taking responsibility for the destruction we are inflicting not just upon our planet, but upon ourselves.

DOS SANTOS: While in Johnson's own inimitable style, he said that essentially the world was behaving at the moment like a bunch of reckless teenagers not conscious of the damage that they're causing. It was time for the world to wake up, to grow up and also take more responsibility and listen to the warnings of the scientists.

And the backdrop to all of this is that they've also been concerns that the diplomatic effort underway ahead of COP 26, which is set to take place in Glasgow in Scotland in just six weeks time is falling perilously behind.

And there have also been various sets of data that show that when it comes to the targets of climate change, namely limiting global warming to around 1.5 percent of pre-industrialized levels, that is also far off the mark at the moment.

Nina dos Santos, CNN in London.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

VAUSE: Well, not only is there climate change, the World Health Organization says air pollution is one of the biggest environmental threats to our health.

And for the first time in more than 15 years, air quality guidelines are being revised, with recommendations to reduce maximum exposure levels for six pollutants.

The WHO says air pollution leads to about seven million premature deaths each year, says millions of lives could be saved if these guidelines are followed.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

DR. TEDROS ADHANOM GHEBREYESUS, DIRECTOR GENERAL, WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION: Since the last update in 2005, a substantial new body of evidence has accumulated further demonstrating the degree to which air pollution affects all parts of the body, from the brain to a growing baby in a mother's womb at even lower concentrations than previously observed.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

VAUSE: Let's bring in CNN Meteorologist Derek Van Dam.

So, Derek, it is striking the similarities between measures to try and reduce, you know, the harm of global emissions and climate change actually measures to reduce air pollution. These things are very interconnected in a major way. DEREK VAN DAM, CNN METEOROLOGIST: Yes, they go together hand in hand, certainly, John. But what these guidelines that the WHO are trying to implement here are designed to help governments craft air quality regulations for future generations. And it's especially important for vulnerable generations.

So, they're honing in on what is called fine particulate matter. They want to reduce that from the old guidelines, which were at 10 micrograms per cubic meter on average across the planet, and slashing that by 50 percent to five micrograms per cubic meter.

So, what the world is fine particulate matter? Well, it comes from the burning of fossil fuels like the engines that we run from our vehicles, it comes from wildfires, it comes from agriculture as well. All these sources and it's particularly dangerous because it is so small, we're talking about less than 2-1/2 microns in diameter, that's less than the diameter of a human hair, less than the diameter of a piece of dust.

So, it can get into your lungs significantly and impact people with underlying conditions like asthma, heart disease, respiratory illnesses. And what this WHO new guideline was saying is that the reduced potential.

Here's four fatalities significant because they took a 2016 study that said if they actually enacted these 2021 guidelines in place back in 2016, they had the potential to reduce the fine particulate related deaths by over 80 percent, or roughly 3.3 million people could have been spared from this air pollution fatality.

[00:15:18]

DAM: It is one of the leading causes of mortality across the world with nine out of 10 people worldwide breathing air, exceeding these WHO guidelines as they currently stand.

Back in 2020, the increases of the fine particulate matter is all because of these wildfires that burned out of control from the western U.S.

And of course, the climate change aspect to this is underlined by the current COVID-19 pandemic as well. So, this air pollutant, decreases lung function and reduces blood flow. So, there are similarities there and of course, impacts from air pollution to COVID-19 complications make it that much worse, John.

VAUSE: Yes, Derek, thank you. Derek Van Dam there, we appreciate that.

We're taking a short break. When we come back here on CNN NEWSROOM, hundreds of Haitian migrants turned away from the U.S. border daily. But tens of thousands more could soon be on their way. This crisis continues for the Biden administration.

Also, a desperate journey in darkness across steep hills and rugged terrain as Afghan refugees in search of a better life take their chances in eastern Turkey. (COMMERCIAL BREAK)

VAUSE: More evacuations have been ordered on Spain's La Palma island where a volcano has been erupting since Sunday. Lava flows have burned home, schools, businesses and banana plantations. No injuries or deaths have been reported so far.

Experts say the lava flow has slowed and it might not reach the ocean which would avoid the chance of a chemical reaction, which could cause explosions, as well as release toxic gas.

About 5,000 migrants mostly from Haiti remain under the Rio -- Del Rio International Bridge on the U.S.-Mexico border seeking asylum. That's down from as many as 14,000 this past weekend.

Hundreds are being flown back to Haiti every day. But some have been released into southern Texas despite repeated claims from U.S. Homeland Security that they'd be expelled immediately.

With the Biden administration, under growing pressure to contain the border crisis. But even with so many Haitians being turned away, it seems thousands more could be headed to the border soon.

As CNN's Rosa Flores reports.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

ROSA FLORES, CNN CORRESPONDENT: As thousands of migrants weighed in a makeshift camp under the Del Rio International Bridge to get processed by U.S. immigration authorities, a miles long steel barrier of Texas State Trooper vehicles has gone up to deter the up to 30,000 Haitians, CNN has been told could be heading towards the border.

GOV. GREG ABBOTT (R-TX): If you are targeting Texas to come to, we're going to show up in force and shut down the border.

[00:20:05]

FLORES: Tonight, the camp beginning to dwindle in size, the fate of the migrants still there uncertain, some are returned to their home countries, others like Ralph Louise (PH) from Haiti are allowed to stay.

So, he feels well that he is able to stay.

One by one, migrants under the bridge, many of whom official say are Haitian are loaded onto buses and transported to U.S. immigration processing facilities.

ALEJANDRO MAYORKAS, SECRETARY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY: We do enforce our immigration laws. Those are not only the laws of humanitarian relief, but the laws of accountability for those who seek to enter illegally and do not have a claim for relief under law.

FLORES: Some are expelled to Haiti and other countries under a pandemic health rule. And nearly thousand have been dropped off by Border Patrol at this nonprofit refuge pending their immigration cases in the past three days, according to the group's director.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: This is a tremendous amount like nothing we've ever seen.

FLORES: That's where we met Louise (PH), a Haitian who says he and his wife waited under the bridge for about a week.

What did immigration tell you?

He says that immigration told them that if he didn't appear in court that he could get deported.

His destination is New York.

Did anybody tell you why some Haitians can stay and some Haitians have to be deported back to Haiti?

He says that his understanding is that because he had an address, a family member that he could contact in the United States that he was allowed to stay.

CNN has not been able to confirm Louise's experience applies to everyone.

The next stop for many of these migrants, a nearby gas station where vans and buses take them to cities across the nation.

He's going to Miami.

That's where we met Peter Cimarron (PH), who is from Haiti too.

Bye, Peter, thank you.

As he says he's afraid of being deported to Haiti, he has to run, his van has arrived.

It's what life has been like for these migrants recently, a hurry up and wait into an uncertain future.

The Biden administration ramping up the deportation flights to seven a day. Now, the destinations would not just include Haiti, but also countries like Brazil and Chile.

According to the administration, these are some of the transition countries where Haitian nationals have been living for the past few years.

At last check, the Del Rio mayor says that there are more than 5,000 migrants still waiting to be processed by U.S. Immigration authorities.

Rosa Flores, CNN, Del Rio, Texas.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

VAUSE: The U.N. is releasing emergency funds to try and prevent the collapse of Afghanistan's healthcare system. \$45 million will go to the U.N.'s health and children's agencies. The U.N. Aid Chief says medical supplies and fuel are both running low while the head of the World Health Organization has warned of an imminent catastrophe without urgent action.

Afghanistan's COVID vaccination rate has dropped in recent weeks, nearly two million doses are now sitting unused.

Many Afghans feel they have no choice but to leave the country searching for a better life away from the Taliban, some make it as far as eastern Turkey climbing through steep hills in the night. But those who are caught landed deportation facilities with some family separated in their search for safety.

CNN Arwa Damon reports now from Turkey.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

ARWA DAMON, CNN SENIOR INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENT: Up in the darkness on the side of a steep hill. Dozens of mostly Afghan refugees are picking their way through the thorny rocky slopes. They just crossed the Iranian border into eastern Turkey.

The handful of Turkish security forces we are with are scattered below, being guided by others manning a thermal camera.

OK, they're telling them to go left into the front.

Turkey doesn't want the refugees here and their final destiny Europe doesn't want them there.

The shots are blanks intended to scare.

For this small group of Afghans, it's over. And yet, despite the rolling (PH) journey, the sudden evaporation of his dreams, one of the young men realizes I am struggling with the slippery descent and insists on helping.

He's an athletic student, a sprinter, another in the group, a pro- mixed martial arts fighter. They don't want to appear on camera. They say it would break their parents' hearts to see them captured.

[00:25:09]

DAMON: It was dark, so dark. Zeynep (PH) who we met a few days earlier in a deportation center remembers.

It was their son. Aamir, just 10 years old, who kept them going.

What were you thinking when, you know, you were going through all of this, and you were pulling your dad and carrying the bag?

I was just thinking that we have to reach a country that is safe, he responds.

You're very brave. It was for my future. His sister Sarah says, I can't study in Afghanistan.

Zeynep (PH) does not want her daughter to be robbed of her right to learn, not the way she was 20 plus years ago.

So, you went to a secret school? One of the secret underground school.

It was under a house, she says. The door would stay shut so no one would know girls were there.

She's broken in more ways than she can put into words. They all are.

She doesn't know how long they will be here. Turkey halted deportations to Afghanistan after Kabul fell. Some of those who evade capture hide out in small ravines waiting for their payment to the smugglers to come through so they can move on to the next light (PH).

So, you were in the military?

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Yes, in Afghanistan.

DAMON: He was part of a local anti-Taliban unit. He sent his wife and three children into hiding after receiving threatening phone calls.

He left them behind so they can be reunited in a better place, one day, someday. Suffering through the humiliation of waiting out here. Many of those we spoke to said it took them numerous attempts just to get across the border into Turkey.

Turkey has been beefing up its border security, doubling the number of guard towers, infrared cameras, motion sensors, with Europe's support. Turkey is pushing refugees back at times forcefully and violently.

The day after crossing the border the captured refugees we met had already been forced back into Iran. They say they are now hiding from thieves. But nothing will stop those that have nothing left but broken promises.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: We don't have home. We don't have a country. We don't have -- why?

DAMON: A question that should echo throughout America's halls of power, whose policies failed the Afghan people and led to this.

Arwa Damon, CNN, Van, Turkey.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

VAUSE: Still to come on CNN, one debt paid, another much bigger one, still due. China's debt burden Real Estate Behemoth Evergrande shutting in uncertain costs to avoid default.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

JOHN VAUSE, CNN INTERNATIONAL ANCHOR: Welcome back, everyone. I'm John Vause You're watching CNN NEWSROOM.

[00:30:26]

Investors seem happy after China's Evergrande reached a settlement over a \$36 million debt payment. Stocks in the beleaguered real estate giant have been up sharply.

But Evergrande is facing another Thursday deadline, another, much bigger, interest payment of \$83 million, although they could negotiate an extension.

The developer owes more than \$300 billion, spread out across vast sectors of China's economy and even among foreign investors. Questions about its future have kept financial markets on edge, to say the least.

To Hong Kong now and Haibin Zhu, managing director and chief China economist at JPMorgan.

Mr. Zhu, thank you so much for being with us.

HAIBIN ZHU, MANAGING DIRECTOR AND CHIEF CHINA ECONOMIST, JPMORGAN: Hi.

VAUSE: I should mention, regulatory constraints prevent you from commenting specifically about their rank as a company, but when you talk about the big issues here, which everyone's troubles have exposed within China's economy, and there are plenty, right?

So how many other Evergrandes are out there, and how many are under similar stress, mostly because of policy changes by Beijing, which were intended to deflate a real estate bubble, without taking the property market?

ZHU: Yes, so you're perfectly right that Evergrande is not an innocent (ph) type case. It reflects an industry-wide problem.

The final problem is the conflict between the high reliance on the debt financing of business expansion model by public developers in China and the government determination to de-lever the industry.

Everyone has said the total liability exceeded 300 billion U.S. dollars. So let me -- let us look at what happens. In recent years, the government has been talking about deleveraging, but in 2020, housing create a very important role in China's post-pandemic recovery. Investment recovery much more fostered (ph) than consumption. And these (ph) investments rebounding in the real estate sector was much stronger than manufacturing and infrastructure activity.

So since late last year, the Chinese policy makers started a new round of housing tightening, including the so-called three (ph) reliance to contain the debt increased by real estate developers. And additional two red (ph) lines to contain bank exposure to the property sectors.

So the reasons behind this policy tightening, No. 1, will come a worry that another housing boom will increase the risk of a future housing market crashing.



Second, it will crowd out investment in other desirable areas like manufacturing upgrades, wind sectors, small business, and rural area developments, which is important for China's long-term sustainable growth.

Third one, stabilizing housing markets also important to improve social welfare. Namely, affordable housing, affordable health care, affordable education. Which has been a major theme for this year's policy.

But the liquidated tightening is a direct trigger for this stress for real-estate developers, not only Evergrande but also (UNINTELLIGIBLE) others.

VAUSE: Beijing has struggled for decades to reign in the property market. They've been very cautious, because real estate, as you say, is such a huge driver of economic growth, but it's led to huge oversupply.

Here's one assessment from the research group Rhodium: "There is enough empty property in China to house over 90 million people. To put that into perspective, there are five G-7 countries -- France, Germany, Italy, the U.K., and Canada -- that could each fit their entire population into those empty Chinese apartments with room to spare."

Clearly, that level of oversupply is unsustainable. But it does suggest that, you know, its contribution to China's growth is overstated, you know, at least. Because eventually, someone has to pay for all that oversupply, and that goes into negative growth, right?

ZHU: Yes. So the housing market, after two decades of growth, initially, we're talking about recent supply, but recent years, oversupply. And from demand perspective, there are a number of factors, like a lower birth rate, lower marriage. And also, the restriction on the investment purpose housing demands. And also, slower pace organization.

All of this contributes to a falling housing demand in China. So again, that -- this wide gap (ph) is a very big concern, another round of a housing boom, that will further deteriorate the housing oversupply issue.

Instead, (UNINTELLIGIBLE) going forward that China's housing market is also facing a very significant structure and balance. Very diverging on the mantle (ph) of cost version (ph). The new urbanization, meaning that the population will keep on flowing into some areas, namely metropolitan area, and the city clusters. But people flow out of the tier three, tier four cities.

So we have seen a very divergent performance. Tier one cities, we're still seeing a huge, significant housing demand and housing inflation pressure. But in some tier three, tier four cities, even in recent years, the housing is facing downward pressure. So this makes it much more difficult. Instead of, say, over the past decade we're talking about aggregate level management. Now, the housing management needs to be very city specific, and also, more targeted management.

VAUSE: Mr. Zhu, Mr. Haibin Zhu, thank you so much for being with us, sir. We appreciate your time.

Well, she became Germany's first female chancellor. Now, nearly 16 years on, she prepares to leave office. A look at Angela Merkel's new place in history when we come back.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

VAUSE: Ukraine's president is vowing a strong response after an attack on one of his top aides. At least 10 shots were fired at Serhiy Shefir's car outside Kyiv Wednesday morning. Police say it was an assassination attempt.

President Zelensky said he does not know who may be behind the shooting. But called it weakness to target his friend.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY, UKRAINIAN PRESIDENT (through translator): This is the price of changes in the country. This is the price of reform.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

VAUSE: The driver of the car was hospitalized with three gunshot wounds while the uninjured aide from the attack -- says the attack was an attempt to intimidate those in power.

In just a few days, Germany heads to the polls in an election that will determine who will succeed Chancellor Angela Merkel. The Social Democratic Party, and conservatives, are the top contenders in a tightening race.

For more than 15 years, Frau Merkel has stood as a symbol of stability in Europe. CNN's Fred Pleitgen takes a look at the legacy she'll leave behind.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

FREDERIK PLEITGEN, CNN INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): Back to the roots for one of Germany's longest serving chancellors, Angela Merkel planting a linden tree in Templin, the east German town she grew up in.

ANGELA MERKEL, GERMAN CHANCELLOR (through translator): It will always be this way. I come from here. My roots are here. And they will always be here.

PLEITGEN (on camera): Angela Merkel still calls this place her home. It is from here in Templin that she set out decades ago and eventually became one of the most powerful women in the world. (voice-over): It was no easy journey off of the little, in the male- dominated world of German conservative politics. Many rivals failed to take her seriously enough and later regretted it, says Merkel's biographer.

RALPH BOLLMANN, AUTHOR, "ANGELA MERKEL: DIE KANZLERIN UND IHRE ZEIT": When they realized that the woman from the east was able to play the game of power, it was too late.

MERKEL: When Angela Merkel became Germany's first female chancellor, in 2005, her style was completely different than previous chancellors. Calm, quiet, and reserved.

[00:40:02]

But what Merkel lacked in fiery rhetoric, she made up for as a crisis manager. Both during the Lehman collapse in 2008, and the Greek debt crisis in 2012, she took bold action to prop up the German economy, and ailing E.U. member states, possibly saving the single currency, the euro.

MERKEL (through translator): Europe will fail if the euro fails. AND Europe will win, if the euro wins.

Pleitgen: Arguably, Angela Merkel's biggest hour came in 2015 as hundreds of thousands of refugees, mostly displaced by the Syrian civil war, were literally on the E.U.'s doorstep, seeking shelter.

Angela Merkel led the E.U. as it opened its gates, taking in well over a million people.

MERKEL: We have achieved the match. We have managed this. And wherever something gets in the way, we will overcome it.

PLEITGEN: But integration of the refugees proved more difficult, giving rise to nationalist forces in Germany. A slap in the face for Angela Merkel, says the editor in chief of Germany's largest daily, "Bild," Julian Reichelt.

JULIAN REICHELT, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, "BILD": Praising Angela Merkel for open borders is much easier when you don't live in a poor neighborhood in Germany, where you live with the direct effects of open borders.

PLEITGEN: While Angela Merkel did manage to win a fourth term in 2017, her popularity was waning, and she announced she would not seek a fifth one.

Still, the challenges kept coming. With the election of Donald Trump's as U.S. president in 2016, and Trump's alienation of many of the U.S.'s allies, Merkel, a quantum chemist, often appeared stunned by some of the U.S. president's remarks.

DONALD TRUMP, FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: I have -- I have German in my blood. I'll be there.

PLEITGEN: Angela Merkel led Germany through the coronavirus pandemic, but shortly before she steps down, her party's support has been collapsing, some say, because she failed to address many important topics.

REICHELT: Zero progress when it comes to huge issues like digitization, for example. Germany, after 16 years of Merkel, basically hasn't moved at all.

PLEITGEN: Merkel herself says she wants time off after leaving office. The first female chancellor in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany, now waiting to see how her legacy will be remembered.

Fred Pleitgen, CNN, Berlin.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

VAUSE: Tune in for CNN's special live coverage of the German federal election. Find out who will be next to lead the country. Join Hala Gorani, Fred Pleitgen and Selma Abdelaziz as they bring us the very latest. Special coverage begin Sunday, 12 p.m. Eastern. That's 5 p.m. in London, right here on CNN.

I'm John Vause. Please stay with us. WORLD SPORT is up next, and I'll be back with more news at the top of the hour. You're watching CNN NEWSROOM.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

[00:45:11]

(WORLD SPORT)

[00:56:41]

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

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