

DRAFT OF US SYRIA INTERVENTION Senate mulling no troops on ground

AFP, Washington
The Senate drafted a bipartisan measure Tuesday that imposed a 90-day deadline for American military intervention in Syria and barred the use of US troops on the ground there.

Congress this week is debating President Barack Obama's push for a military response to what he says was Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's use of chemical weapons against his own people last month on the outskirts of the capital Damascus.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee re-worded the resolution put forward by the White House to restrict it to "limited and tailored use of the United States Armed Forces against Syria, according to a copy of the draft obtained by AFP.

The authorization provided by the resolution "shall terminate 60 days after the date of the enactment of this joint resolution, except that the president may extend, for a single period of 30 days, such authorization" if he deems it necessary for the carrying out of such military operations, according to the measure.

"The authority granted in section 2 does not authorize the use of the United States Armed Forces on the ground in Syria for the purpose of combat operations," it added.

House Democrats on Tuesday released their own joint resolution on military intervention in Syria, with a strict 60-day deadline for intervention with no apparent extension.

Congress returns from its summer recess on September 9. Senate leaders have said they intend to hold a vote on the resolution next week, while House leaders have said they aim to act quickly but have not provided a time frame.



A protester interrupts during a hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, on Tuesday. Inset, US Secretary of State John Kerry and US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel along with US Joint Chief of Staff Gen Martin Dempsey (not in picture) yesterday appeared before the committee to present the Obama's views on Congressional authorization for the use of military force in Syria. PHOTO: AFP

Assange files spying charges against US

AFP, Berlin

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange has filed charges in Germany claiming a US Marines intelligence officer spied on him during a Berlin computer conference four years ago, prosecutors said yesterday, confirming media reports.

Assange said the spying at the Chaos Computer Club's 2009 annual congress was made public when the ex-Marine gave witness testimony in June this year in the military trial of WikiLeaks source Bradley Manning, who was later sentenced to 35 years' jail.

The then Stuttgart-based Marine, identified in media reports only as Matthew H., allegedly targeted Assange, who was speaking about the WikiLeaks platform, its German co-founder Daniel Domscheid-Berg and the French Internet activist Jeremie Zimmermann.

Assange argued that such foreign intelligence activity is illegal in Germany, NDR public broadcaster and the Sueddeutsche Zeitung daily reported, citing his complaint to the federal prosecutor's office in the city of Karlsruhe.

The media reports also said Assange had offered to testify by video link from Ecuador's embassy in London, where he has been holed up since June 2012 to avoid deportation to Sweden where he is wanted for questioning on sexual assault charges.

The Australian anti-secrecy activist denies the charges and says he fears being extradited to the United States, which wants to try him for publishing online hundreds of thousands of US diplomatic cables and secret military communications.

US public opposed to strike: Polls

AFP, Washington

Two new polls out Tuesday have found strong opposition to US military intervention in Syria among a war-weary American public despite increasing support in Washington for punitive strikes.

A survey carried out by the Pew Research Center over the weekend found that 48 percent of Americans oppose "conducting military airstrikes" against Syria over its alleged use of chemical weapons compared to 29 percent who support such action. A Washington Post-ABC news poll found a similar margin, with nearly six in 10 Americans opposed to missile strikes.

Russia realigns naval powers

AFP, Moscow

Russian naval vessels in the Mediterranean are capable of reacting to an escalation in the Syria conflict, a military source said yesterday, as Moscow fine tunes its maritime presence ahead of possible US military action.

According to Interfax, the Russian destroyer Smetlivy will soon join the group in the Mediterranean as well as the destroyer Nastoichivy.

The anti-submarine ship Admiral Panteleyev has already entered its zone of operation as the flagship of the current rotation of the naval grouping in the Mediterranean, a military source said.

The missile cruiser Moskva, from the Black Sea fleet is now on its way to the eastern Mediterranean. On arrival it will assume the role as the Russian flagship, Interfax said.

Already in place in the eastern Mediterranean are the frigate Neustrashimy, as well as the landing ships Alexander Shabalin, the Admiral Nevelsky and the Peresvet.

They will be joined by the large landing ships Novocherkassk and Minsk on September 5-6, Interfax said.

Senate mulls Syria vote 'Strike could worsen crisis'

AFP, Washington

Lawmakers demanded changes to the authorization for the use of US military force against Syria yesterday before a crucial vote on President Barack Obama's call for punitive strikes.

Meanwhile, US Secretary of State John Kerry told lawmakers yesterday that Arab nations had offered to help pay for any US military intervention in Syria.

"With respect to Arab countries offering to bear the cost and to assist, the answer is profoundly yes, they have. That offer is on the table," Kerry said as he appeared before a House of Representatives panel.

The offer was "quite significant," he said. "Some of them have said that if the United States is prepared to go do the whole thing the way we've done it previously in other places, they'll carry that cost. That's how dedicated they are to this."

He was appearing before the House Foreign Affairs committee on the second day of the administration's blitz on Capitol Hill to persuade lawmakers to approve limited military strikes.

'Strike could worsen crisis'

AFP, United Nations

UN leader Ban Ki-moon warned Tuesday that a western military strike could worsen the Syria conflict, but called on the divided UN Security Council to unite against the use of chemical arms.

Without explicitly opposing any military operation that the United States and some of its allies are considering, Ban urged caution.

"I take note of the argument for action to prevent future use of chemical weapons," Ban told a press briefing at UN headquarters before heading to the Group of 20 summit in Russia.

"At the same time, we must consider the impact of any punitive measure on efforts to prevent further bloodshed," Ban said.

"Everything should be handled within the framework of the United Nations Charter," he added.

"The use of force is lawful only when in exercise of self-defense in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter and, or when the Security Council approves such action," he said.

NEWS IN brief

Turkish envoy to return to Egypt

AFP, Ankara

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said yesterday that Turkey's ambassador to Egypt would return to Cairo, three weeks after he was recalled over the bloody crackdown on supporters of the country's ousted Islamist president.

"Do not forget that we recalled the ambassador for consultations," Erdogan told reporters at an Ankara airport before leaving for Saint Petersburg to attend

Egypt jamming signal: Al-Jazeera

AFP, Doha

Qatari-owned news channel Al-Jazeera has accused Egyptian authorities of jamming the network's satellite signals, as the broadcaster kept up its critical coverage of Cairo's crackdown on Islamists.

The network said it has been forced to change frequencies several times to allow viewers to watch its

Al-Qaeda set up anti-drone cells!

AFP, Washington

Al-Qaeda's leaders have set up cells of engineers to try to shoot down, disable or hijack US drones, The Washington Post reported late Tuesday citing top-secret US intelligence documents.

The al-Qaeda leadership is "hoping to exploit the technological vulnerabilities of a weapons system that has inflicted huge losses against the terrorist network," the Post said

Cleveland rapist found hanged



AFP, Washington

The former US bus driver jailed for life for kidnapping and raping three young women he held as sex slaves for a decade was found hanged in his cell late Tuesday, authorities said.

The death of Ariel Castro brought an abrupt and dramatic ending to a sordid case that shocked America and the world with its revelations of systematic sexual depravity and brutality.

Castro was found hanged in his cell, the Ohio Department of Corrections said in a statement carried widely by US news outlets.

The circumstances of his hanging were not immediately clear. He had been in solitary confinement. Officials said he might have committed suicide.

Castro's crimes -- keeping the three young women in what came to be known as a house of horrors and raping and otherwise brutalizing them for around a decade -- disgusted the country and led to an outpouring of national pity for the three victims. They were abducted separately between 2002 and 2004.



This picture taken on Tuesday shows six-year-old boy, Guo Bin, known as Bin-Bin, who was blinded when his eyes were gouged out after he went missing while playing outside on August 24, being held by his mother as she accepts donations from well wishers in a hospital in Taiyuan, north China's Shanxi province. Bin-Bin, who had blinded by a woman believed to be his aunt may one day see again after a Hong Kong hospital offered him "electronic eyes". PHOTO: AFP

Iraq unrest rages on; 35 killed

AFP, Baghdad

Attacks around Baghdad and north Iraq left 35 people dead yesterday, including 18 members of a Shia family killed by militants, the latest in a nationwide surge of violence.

The unrest came a day after a wave of bombings targeting Shias in Baghdad and shootings and bombings elsewhere killed 61 people, further raising fears Iraq is slipping back into the all-out sectarian bloodshed that left tens of thousands dead in 2006 and 2007.

Authorities, meanwhile, announced the arrest of an alleged senior aide to Izzat al-Duri, the highest-ranking member of executed dictator Saddam Hussein's regime still on the run.

Wednesday's violence struck towns on the outskirts of Baghdad as well as predominantly Sunni cities in the north of the country, with the deadliest attack hitting south of the capital.

No group claimed responsibility for the latest violence, but Sunni militants linked to al-Qaeda frequently carry out attacks against Iraq's Shiite Muslim majority who they regard as apostates.

Separate attacks in Besmaya, Iskandiriyah and Tarmiyah, also on Baghdad's outskirts, killed nine people, including seven soldiers.

Cops fire rocket to catch fish, kill children

AFP, Kabul

Afghan security forces have arrested eight policemen for accidentally killing six children when firing a rocket into a river to catch fish, officials said yesterday.

The incident took place last Friday in the Doshi district of the northern province of Baghlan when policemen on the bank of a river fired a rocket-propelled grenade into the water.

"The rocket went astray and hit a place where children were playing, killing six and wounding two others," the interior ministry said in a statement.

"Eight police personnel accused of misusing government weapons that killed these children have been arrested and handed over to military prosecutors for investigation," it said. The children were aged between 10 and 14.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai telephoned the families of the victims, offering them his condolences and assured them that "justice will be served," according to a statement from his office.

1984 ANTI-SIKH RIOTS US court summons Sonia Gandhi

PTI, Jalandhar

On a complaint by a Sikh group, a US federal court has issued summons against Congress party president Sonia Gandhi for shielding party officials allegedly involved in inciting attacks on Sikhs in November 1984.

A class action suit against Sonia Gandhi has been filed by "Sikhs for Justice" (SFJ), a US-based human rights group, along with victims of 1984 anti-Sikh violence under Alien Tort Claims Act (ATCA) and Torture Victim Protection Act (TVPA). In the September 3 lawsuit filed before Eastern District of New York, SFJ and victims are seeking compensatory and punitive damages against Congress party president for her role in shielding and protecting Kamal Nath, Sajjan Kumar, Jagdish Tytler and other Congress party leaders from being prosecuted for their crimes against humanity.

The 27-page complaint against Gandhi alleges that between November 1 and 4, 1984 about 30,000 members of the Sikh community "were intentionally tortured, raped and murdered by groups that were incited, organised, controlled and armed" by the ruling Congress party. The lawyer, who filed the petition, argued that Sonia Gandhi's conduct of protecting the perpetrators of November 1984 massacre gave rise to liability under applicable international and domestic laws, international treaties and federal common law.



Manning seeks Obama's pardon

AFP, Washington

Lawyers for Chelsea Manning filed a request for a pardon from President Barack Obama on Tuesday following the soldier's 35-year jail sentence for the biggest intelligence leak in US history.

"Private Manning's pardon request was filed today by our office," attorney David Coombs said on Twitter.

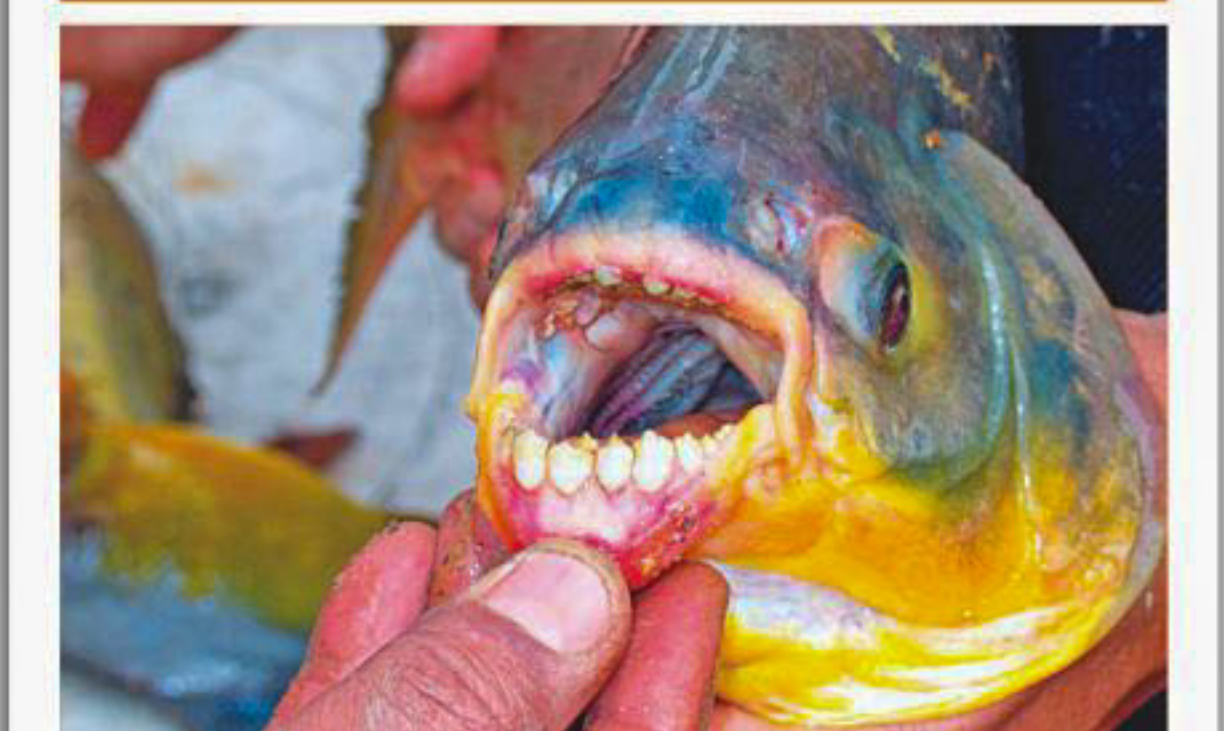
The lawyer had indicated his intention to seek a pardon on August 21, when a military judge sentenced Manning to 35 years behind bars for her massive disclosure of intelligence including some 700,000 classified diplomatic and military documents.

Manning, formerly a US Army intelligence analyst, was prosecuted as a man, Bradley Manning, but the day after being sentenced asked to be recognized as a woman.

A separate statement released by Amnesty International on Tuesday urged Obama to take a sympathetic stance towards Manning and grant clemency, saying the soldier's sentence was a "blight on the US human rights record."

"President Obama should grant Manning clemency for time served, protect whistleblowers, and provide accountability for crimes like those Manning exposed," Amnesty said.

ODDLY enough



'The Nutcracker' fish

DAILY MAIL ONLINE

A rare fish known for gnawing through men's testicles while they are out swimming has been found in the River Seine in Paris. The sharp-tooth Pacu is a Piranha-style creature with a variety of nicknames, including 'The Nutcracker'.

Mainly found in steamy South American waters, it is known for gliding below male swimmers and taking a nibble out of their most sensitive organ, sometimes allegedly ripping it off and swallowing it.

A fisherman in Paris called the river police when he reeled in the frightening looking fish, which can weigh as much as 25 kilos, last Friday morning. The Pacu is technically a vegetarian, but tends to be attracted to male genitalia for unknown reasons.