

OFFENSIVE TO OUST IS FROM MOSUL

Iraq gains ground in Old City

AFP, Mosul

Special forces have recaptured more of Mosul's historic heart as they press the final stages of an assault to drive the Islamic State group from Iraq's second city, the military said yesterday.

More than eight months since the country's forces launched a gruelling operation to retake Mosul, IS has gone from fully controlling the city to holding a few neighbourhoods on its western side.

Counter-terrorism forces liberated the Makawi area of the Old City, the joint operations command announced yesterday, in a further blow at the heart of the jihadists' cross-border "caliphate".

Iraqi forces have been closing in on the Old City for months, but its narrow streets and closely spaced buildings combined with a large civilian population made for an extremely difficult fight.

Security forces recaptured a series of nearby districts, cornering the jihadists, before launching an assault inside the Old City on June 18. They have since made significant progress.

On Saturday, officers announced the recapture of a hospital and its surroundings north of the Old City, removing a nearby but unconnected pocket of IS resistance.

Federal police chief Lieutenant General Raed Shakir Jawdat said the area around the hospital, Al-Shifa, had been completely retaken, limiting IS's presence in Mosul to the Old City.

On Thursday, Iraqi forces retook the remains of the Grand Mosque of al-Nuri in their greatest symbolic victory since the battle began.

Forces breach Syria's Raqa from south

AFP, Beirut

US-backed fighters pierced jihadist-held Raqa from the south for the first time yesterday, crossing the Euphrates River to enter a new part of the Syrian city, a monitor said.

The Syrian Democratic Forces have spent months closing in on the Islamic State group's bastion Raqa and entered the city's east and west for the first time last month.

On Thursday, the US-backed Arab-Kurd alliance sealed off the jihadists' last escape route by capturing territory on the southern bank of the Euphrates.

"Today, they entered Raqa's south for the first time and seized the Al-Hal market," Rami Abdel Rahman, head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said on Sunday.

He said some SDF fighters had advanced north across the Euphrates River, while others had attacked Al-Hal from the adjacent district of Al-Mesheb in Raqa's east.

"The market is fully under SDF control but IS is waging a counter-attack," Abdel Rahman said.

The SDF's Operation Wrath of the Euphrates also announced it had captured the Al-Hal market yesterday.

Backed by the US-led coalition bombing IS, SDF fighters first broke into Raqa on June 6.

They have since seized a handful of neighbourhoods in the city's east and west but are facing fierce resistance by IS as they push closer to the city centre.

According to the coalition, an estimated 2,500 IS jihadists are defending the northern city.

IS overran Raqa in 2014, transforming it into the de facto Syrian capital of its self-declared "caliphate," which it declared three years ago.



(Clockwise from left) Members of Iraqi forces react before the start of a victory celebration after defeating the Islamic State militants and retaking the Grand al-Nuri Mosque in the Old City in Mosul, yesterday; smoke billows next to the remains of al-Hadba minaret at ruined Grand al-Nuri Mosque; and a man carries two children in his arms while fleeing from the Old City of Mosul.

PHOTO: REUTERS, AFP



'It's modern day presidential'

Trump defends Twitter use, renews attack on CNN with harsh video tweet

AFP, Washington

President Donald Trump defended his aggressive use of Twitter on Saturday just hours after firing off his latest volley in his escalating feud with US media.

Following an early morning Twitter tirade at CNN, NBC and a morning show host he taunted as "dumb as a rock," the president then went on the defensive, touting his electoral accomplishments as justification for his increasingly hostile rhetoric.

Trump's deputy spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders said that Trump's attacks on Mike Brzezinski and Joe Scarborough, who headline the "Morning Joe" program on the left-leaning MSNBC cable network and other media were part of his natural instinct to "fight fire with fire."

On Saturday, those instincts seemed to be on display.

"My use of social media is not Presidential - it's MODERN DAY PRESIDENTIAL," Trump posted on Twitter, before adding his classic tagline "Make America Great Again!"

Trump specially targeted CNN, a frequent punching bag for the president. He launched a fresh attack on CNN yesterday by tweeting a video -- bizarre even by his standards -- showing him knocking down and beating a professional wrestling "villain" whose face had been replaced by a CNN logo.

In the 28-second and 10 years old video, Trump is seen knocking down

"The FAKE & FRAUDULENT NEWS MEDIA is working hard to convince Republicans and others I should not use social media - but remember, I won the 2016 election with interviews, speeches and social media," Trump said in another tweet.

In recent days, the US leader has railed against major news organiza-

I AM THINKING ABOUT CHANGING THE NAME #FAKENEWS CNN TO #FRAUDNEWS CNN!

tions as "fake news".

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On Saturday, he riled against the news network with a series of tweets.

"I am extremely pleased to see that @CNN has finally been exposed as #FakeNews and garbage journalism. It's about time!" he tweeted, referring to an article that the cable news channel retracted, that claimed Congress was investigating links between Trump's administration and a Russian investment fund.

Three CNN journalists resigned over the article, which was posted on the network's website on June 22 before being yanked the next day.

"I am thinking about changing the name #FakeNews CNN to #FraudNews CNN!" Trump posted.

another man in a suit who is standing next to a wrestling ring. Trump then pummels the man, whose face is covered by the CNN logo, repeatedly over the head.

At the end of the video, a fake CNN logo appears in the lower right corner of the screen with the words "FNN: Fraud News Network."

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Trump to speak with China, Japan leaders on N Korea

AFP, Washington

(0045 GMT Monday) and with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at 8:00 pm.

During talks with South Korean leader Moon Jae-In -- who has pushed for a policy of engagement with Pyongyang -- on Friday, Trump called for a "determined response" to the North. But the pair failed to map out a joint strategy on how to respond to North Korean threats.

"The era of strategic patience with the North Korean regime has failed, many years it has failed. Frankly, that patience is over," Trump said.

Trump has been pushing for tougher sanctions against Pyongyang to curb its nuclear ambitions and his administration has said military action was a possibility.

There was also deep anger in the United States after Otto Warmbier, an American student who was detained in North Korea on a tourist trip around 18 months ago, was returned home in a coma earlier this month. He died several days later.



Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau poses for a selfie during Canada Day celebrations as the country marked its 150th anniversary since confederation, on Parliament Hill in Ottawa, on Saturday.

Indian woman attacked with acid 5th time

AFP, New Delhi

A woman who survived an alleged gang rape and four separate acid attacks has once again been hit by corrosive liquid, Indian police said yesterday.

The 35-year-old mother, who was allegedly gangraped in 2008 over a property dispute, was at a women's hostel in Uttar Pradesh state capital Lucknow when a man scaled the walls and poured the chemical onto her.

"She was filling water at the hand pump when the attack took place. The attacker fled from the spot," Vivek Tripathi, local police chief told AFP.

The woman, who cannot be named for legal reasons, sustained burn injuries to her face and shoulder and is undergoing treatment at a hospital.

Police have launched a manhunt to identify the assailant, the officer said.

Due to the previous string of attacks, the woman was under round-the-clock police protection, but the armed policeman was barred from entering the women's hostel.

The woman was allegedly gang-raped and attacked with acid by two men in 2008 over a property dispute.

She has subsequently been attacked twice more by the same men, in 2012 and 2013, in a bid to force her to withdraw the criminal cases against them.

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Key Republican senators are also injecting themselves directly into foreign policy decisions.

After Trump took Saudi Arabia's side in the blockade of Qatar by four Gulf countries -- putting him at odds with statements from Secretary of State Rex Tillerson -- Senate Foreign Relations Chairman Bob Corker got involved.

'Food apartheid'

Eastern Europe fumes after tests show big Western brands use cheaper ingredients in food products for the region

AFP, Sofia

It looks like Nutella, smells like Nutella and yet doesn't quite taste like the famous Italian chocolate spread. Eastern European leaders are fuming after tests suggested that big Western brands use cheaper ingredients in food products sold in former communist countries.

While Bulgaria's burly premier Boyko Borisov has slammed the practice as "food apartheid", Czech Agriculture Minister Marian Jurecka declared in late February that the east was tired of being "Europe's garbage can".

Recent government-backed studies in Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic indicated that many items sold with identical packaging were of superior quality in richer neighbouring European Union countries.

The findings prompted Bulgaria last month to carry out its own tests. A team of chemists in Sofia spent the last few weeks diligently measuring, filtering and analysing samples of popular items like butter, cheese, sausages, chocolate, baby puree and soft drinks.

On Wednesday, the national food watchdog confirmed there were discrepancies with at least seven out of 31 products bought from the same food chain stores in Bulgaria, Germany and Austria.

A chocolate dessert had less milk and cocoa than its



German counterpart, for instance, although this did not have a major impact on taste, according to the national food safety agency. Soft drinks purchased in Bulgarian supermarkets contained sweeteners, while those in Austria were prepared with sugar.

"Many of these deviations are considered minor from the viewpoint of (European Union) regulations," the agency's chief Damyan Iliev told Bulgarian media on Wednesday. "But Bulgarian consumers are being misled in that they believe they are buying the same product when in fact they are not."

The experts also noted that 16 of the tested products were sold at higher prices in the EU's poorest member state than in Germany and Austria, with baby purees twice as expensive.

The firms, however, argue that recipes are merely tweaked to suit local palates and point out that the practice doesn't break any rules. Under EU directives, companies are free to change a product's ingredients from one member state to another as long as they are clearly listed on the packaging.

But that has done little to cool boiling tempers.

While the Bulgarian tests did not mention any actual brands, Hungary's food authority in February named food giants Ferrero and Coca-Cola among the culprits.

CNN ONLINE

In ways big and small, Congress is taking back power from President Donald Trump on national security matters.

From Russia to the Pentagon budget, Republicans in Congress are proposing new checks to curb the White House's power and in some cases simply ignoring the Trump administration's desires on national security and foreign policy.

Wary of favorable comments Trump has previously made about Russia, the Senate has passed a significant Russia sanctions package that gives Congress the ability to review any administration effort to roll back sanctions against the Kremlin. Congressional committees approved three defense bills this week boosting Pentagon spending by about \$30 billion more than the Trump administration proposed after Republicans complained that Trump's budget failed to rebuild the military as he promised.

And in a surprise vote this week, a House panel approved an amendment to repeal the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force, which provides legal authority for the US wars in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan.

"I think it's sinking in, especially with Republican members of Congress, that they are not getting the kind of adult leadership out of the White house that would allow you to give deference to the White House," said Mieke Eoyang, a



Congress is taking back power from Trump on national security

national security analyst at Third Way and former congressional aide. "So you see Congress stepping up to take a much more aggressive role on national security for the first time in a very long time."

For years, a small chorus in Congress has bemoaned the legislative branch giving back its national security powers to the executive, from war-making to the budget caps imposed by the sequestration law.

At the start of the Trump administration, Republican congressional leaders on national security were hopeful that the national security team -- Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, national security adviser HR McMaster and Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats -- would steer Trump in what they consider the right direction.

Trump was praised for his decision to strike Syria in response to a chemical weapons attack. But in many cases, Trump has ignored or over-

ruled his national security team, and the president's actions and statements -- or lack of action -- has sparked a robust response on Capitol Hill.

The Senate's Russia sanctions bill may be the most significant fight thus far over the balance of national security power. The bill, which passed 98-2, would give Congress the ability to block Trump from rolling back sanctions on Moscow.

While the House Appropriations Committee's vote to repeal the 2001 war authorization is unlikely to be signed into law, it is another implicit rebuke to Trump and a sign of growing congressional discontent with an unchecked war on terror.

In other cases, Congress has taken symbolic gestures to rebuke the president. The Senate, for instance, passed an amendment reaffirming support for Nato's Article 5 principle that an attack on one member is an attack on all -- a vote that came after Trump did not reaffirm the principle during his speech at Nato headquarters. The House passed a similar resolution on the floor this week to reaffirm the US commitment to Nato.

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