

US slaps new sanctions on Venezuela

AFP, Caracas

The United States imposed new sanctions on crisis-hit Venezuela on Wednesday, targeting members of a controversial, all-powerful, loyalist assembly installed last week to bolster what Washington calls the "dictatorship" of President Nicolas Maduro.

The measures were aimed at six members of the so-called Constituent Assembly -- among them the brother of late president Hugo Chavez -- as well as a military officer in charge of security for the body, and a board member of the national electoral authority.

They added to previous US sanctions on Maduro himself -- a rare step against a sitting head of state -- imposed just before the assembly was elected on July 30 in a vote marred by violence, fraud allegations and an opposition boycott.

The Venezuelan government reacted by saying the US was "making a fool of itself in front of the world." The US announcement came as the Constituent Assembly and Venezuela's supreme court took actions to limit the opposition's ability to challenge Maduro.

The assembly has established a "truth commission" which Maduro has said should examine alleged crimes by opposition leaders -- especially those in charge of the country's legislature, which his Socialist Party lost control of two years ago.

The assembly has also fired the attorney general, Luisa Ortega, who broke ranks to become an outspoken critic of the president.

The supreme court ordered the jailing of an opposition mayor who allowed anti-government protests in his Caracas district, and was mulling similar cases against others.

Major Latin American nations and Canada have also rejected the legitimacy of the Constituent Assembly and slammed Venezuela for "breaking democratic rule."

Since the protests turned violent four months ago, nearly 130 people have died.



North Koreans take vow in a rally on Wednesday to fully support the North Korea's stance against the US, on Kim Il-Sung square in Pyongyang. North Korea yesterday said US President Donald Trump was "bereft of reason" and would only respond to force, as it elaborated on a threat to attack the US Pacific territory of Guam. PHOTO: AFP

ALLEGED GULEN LINKS

Turkey seeks arrest of 35 media workers

AFP, Istanbul

Turkish authorities yesterday issued arrest warrants for 35 employees of media groups on suspicion of links to the alleged mastermind of the failed 2016 coup Fethullah Gulen, the state-run news agency said.

Nine people have been detained so far, Anadolu news agency said, adding that the suspects were accused of using a messaging app allegedly used by Gulen to mobilise followers in Turkey and of belonging to a "terror" group.

Thousands of people have already been arrested in Turkey for using the Bylock messaging app, which the authorities say was used by Gulen supporters to coordinate actions ahead of the plot.

The latest arrests come amid growing alarm over press freedom in Turkey under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Thin line between defense, offense

Could US Congress stop Trump from bombing North Korea?

CNN ONLINE

President Donald Trump threatened North Korea with "fire and fury" Tuesday if Pyongyang doesn't stop threatening the United States. But can the President launch a military strike on his own?

The Constitution may give Congress the ability to declare war, but in reality it has little ability to stop the president if he's determined to strike North Korea.

That's because the president has his own authority as commander in chief to defend the country from threats, and in practice the Executive Branch has used that authority for a range of military actions.

Congress could pass a law prohibiting the use of force or blocking funding for military action in North Korea. But short of an outright ban, the Trump administration would have authority to act for at least 60 days as it determines the US is under threat, according to national security and legal analysts.

"The Constitution gives tremendous authority for the president of United States to act on his own," said Roger Zakheim, a former House Armed Services Committee aide.

"Both in terms of constitutional law and in practice, for the President to take

military action there's a lot of precedent if the perceived act of belligerence puts the national security of the United States at risk," added Zakheim, a visiting fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and lawyer at Covington and Burling.

In the wake of Trump's "fire and fury" comment on Tuesday, lawmakers began calling for Congress to authorize any preemptive military action



against Pyongyang.

But the White House takes a different view about the role of Congress and the Trump administration did not go to Capitol Hill for approval of its military strikes against the Syrian regime.

In April, then-press secretary Sean Spicer was asked if the President was prepared to act alone on North Korea or if Congress should be involved.

Spicer responded Congress would be notified, but said the President would "utilize the powers under Article II of the Constitution," which covers the Executive Branch.

The disconnect between Capitol Hill and the White House lies in the disagreement over what constitutes a threat to US national security, a question that comes with lots of legal ambiguity that gives the Executive Branch wide latitude.

Steve Vladeck, a CNN legal analyst and professor at the University of Texas School of Law, said the Constitution effectively distinguishes between offensive military action, which requires congressional approval, and defensive military action, which does not.

But in practice, it comes down to more of a political question than a legal one.

"It's probably the case that Congress could not stop the President from defending the United States from an imminent attack. It probably is the case that Congress could prevent the President from launching offensive military operations without provocation. And all of the fight is over the gray area in between those two points," Vladeck said.

"Where the line is between defense and offense?"

Declare Odinga president

Demands Kenya opposition as country awaits results

AFP, Nairobi

Kenya's main opposition coalition yesterday demanded that its candidate Raila Odinga be declared president, claiming it had evidence he had won an election that has already led to angry protests over fraud claims.

The latest allegations by the National Super Alliance (Nasa) are likely to further ratchet up tensions a day before official results are expected from Tuesday's vote.

President Uhuru Kenyatta has an unassailable lead in provisional results, but Odinga claims these are a "sham" result of a massive hacking attack on the electronic vote tallying system.

Heads of foreign observer missions from the European Union, African Union, Commonwealth and Carter Center urged party leaders to be patient and refrain from inflaming tensions, expressing confidence in the election commission (IEBC).

However shortly after they spoke, one of Nasa's leaders Musalia Mudavadi gave a televised press conference unveiling new claims from "confidential sources" within the IEBC that their servers showed Odinga

was the true winner.

Mudavadi said he would provide data and screenshots showing that on the IEBC servers, Odinga was shown to have 8.04 million votes against Kenyatta with 7.75 million.

The IEBC public website, which is publishing results as they stream in electronically from polling stations, shows Kenyatta with 8.1 million votes ahead of Odinga with 6.7 million.

Odinga, 72, who claims elections in 2007 and 2013 were stolen from him, on Wednesday charged that hackers broke into the IEBC's systems and rigged the count using the log-in details of top IT official Chris Msando, found murdered and tortured last month.

His allegations sparked isolated protests in his strongholds in several Nairobi slums and the western city of Kisumu on Wednesday, where protesters engaged in running battles with riot police.

The capital's police chief said officers shot dead two men who had allegedly attacked them with machetes. In the south-eastern Tana River region, police killed two alleged knife attackers who stormed a vote-tallying centre and stabbed one person.



Uhuru Kenyatta



Raila Odinga

Russian spy plane soars over Pentagon, Capitol

NDTV ONLINE

A Russian surveillance plane soared through secure airspace over Washington on Wednesday, presumably collecting intelligence as it traveled near the Pentagon, the Capitol and other government buildings, two US officials said.

The Russian Air Force Tupolev Tu-154 aircraft made the flight through the Treaty on Open Skies, which Russia, the United States and 32 other nations have signed. The treaty established criteria under which countries can make unarmed observation flights over the soil of other treaty members in an effort to promote transparency and international arms control efforts, according to the State Department.

The Capitol Police issued an alert Wednesday that warned that an "authorized

low-altitude aircraft" would enter restricted airspace between 11 am and 3 pm. The alert did not state who owned the plane, but said it "will be large and may fly directly over the US Capitol."

A Defense Department official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss ongoing operations, confirmed that the flight alluded to was Russian and operating in the area through the treaty.

The flight, first reported by CNN, is expected to be followed by another one Wednesday evening that flies

over President Donald Trump's property in Bedminster, New Jersey, where he is vacationing. According to the treaty guidelines, US airmen are aboard the Russian jet observing when an Open Skies flight occurs.

The United States carries out similar surveillance flights through the treaty while using an OC-135B, an Air Force observation jet.



Women console a relative of a suspected militant who according to local media was killed in an encounter with Indian security forces at Gulab Bagh village in Tral, during his funeral prayers in Nawdal village in Pulwama district, yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

US links Mexico football captain to drug cartel

AFP, Washington

The US Treasury on Wednesday accused Rafael Marquez, captain of Mexico's national football team and a former FC Barcelona player, of being a "front person" for a major drug trafficking organization.

Marquez, who has captained his team a record four times in the World Cup, was one of 22 people and 43 entities the US Treasury placed on a sanctions list in relation to a Guadalajara-based drug trafficking group controlled by businessman Raul Flores Hernandez.

The Treasury said Marquez has a "longstanding relationship" with Flores, has acted as a "front person" for him and held assets on his drug cartel's behalf.

It said Flores, who was indicted in Washington, DC and California in March on charges of cocaine traffick-

'WWII bomb' found at Fukushima nuke plant

AFP, Tokyo

A suspected World War II bomb was found on the premises of Japan's crippled Fukushima nuclear plant, an official said yesterday, with police called in to investigate.

The 85-centimetre (2.9 foot) long object, believed to be an unexploded bomb dropped by the United States during the war, was discovered by workers constructing a parking lot close to the facility's reactors, a spokesman for Fukushima operator Tokyo Electric Power Co (TEPCO) said.

TEPCO called police immediately upon finding the object, suspending construction work and roping off the area around one kilometre (0.62 mile) from the reactors, he added.

There was no impact on ongoing decommissioning operations at the nuclear plant, which suffered meltdowns in March 2011 after a powerful earthquake spawned a huge tsunami.

Unexploded US bombs and shells are still occasionally found in Japan more than 70 years after the conflict ended in 1945, particularly on the southern island of Okinawa where an extremely bloody battle took place in the war's closing months.

US-CUBA TIES

New row over mystery illness

Havana diplomats expelled after a number US diplomats were forced to leave the island nation

AFP, Washington

Washington expelled two Cuban diplomats after a number of US embassy staff were forced to leave Havana because of unspecified medical symptoms that were first reported last year, the State Department said Wednesday.

The Cuban diplomats were asked to leave their embassy on May 23, State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert said at a briefing, without specifying the number of Americans affected by these symptoms or detailing their nature.

"We first heard of these incidents back in late 2016," Nauert said.

"Some US government personnel who were working at our embassy in Havana, Cuba ... reported some incidents which have caused a variety of physical symptoms. We don't have any definitive answers about the source or the cause of what we consider to be incidents," she said.

She added: "We had to bring some Americans home or some Americans chose to come home as a result of that. And as a result of that, we've asked two Cubans to leave the United States and they have."

Later Wednesday, the Cuban government confirmed the report.

It said it had objected to the expulsion of its officials, while also urging the United States to work together to shed light on the incidents earlier this year in Havana.

Relations between the US and Cuba were restored in 2015 after a half-century break by then US president Barack Obama and his Cuban counterpart Raul Castro.

But the rapprochement was partially rolled back by Obama's successor Donald Trump who in June announced tightened rules for Americans traveling to Cuba, banned ties with a military-run tourism firm and reaffirmed the existing US trade embargo.

Shelling kills 4 in Syria safe zones

AFP, Beirut

Syrian government bombardment on two areas included in fragile "de-escalation zones" in the country killed four people yesterday, a monitoring group said.

One person was killed in air strikes on a safe zone in central Syria, and another three died in shelling on a zone near the capital, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Seven others were wounded in the regime shelling that killed three civilians in a town in the Eastern Ghouta zone, a rebel bastion near Damascus, the Observatory said.

The attack came a day after government shelling killed five civilians and wounded 10 more in the nearby town of Kfar Batna, the British-based Observatory said.

Air strikes have also pummeled rebel-held parts of the Jobar district of Damascus and the adjacent district of Ain Tarma.

Eastern Ghouta is one of four "de-escalation zones" announced in May by opposition backer Turkey and regime allies Iran and Russia after talks in Kazakhstan.

Three of the zones have been agreed so far: in Eastern Ghouta, the northern parts of central Homs province, and in Syria's south.

The fourth zone, in northwestern Idlib province, has yet to be implemented.



ing, flew under the radar for years by operating in strategic alliances with the heads of the more notorious Sinaloa cartel and another, the Jalisco New Generation cartel.

Marquez, who voluntarily reported to the Mexican Justice Ministry, denied any involvement.

"I categorically deny any type of relationship with said organization and the referred events," the football star said in a statement.

The sanctions freeze any assets, such as bank accounts and property, that a blacklisted person holds in a US jurisdiction, and bans any US individuals or companies from doing business with them.