

Trump Declares Emergency for Border Wall



U.S. President Donald Trump declares a national emergency at the U.S.-Mexico border as he speaks about border security in the Rose Garden of the White House in Washington, February 15, 2019.

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - President Donald Trump on Friday declared a national emergency in a bid to fund his promised wall at the U.S.-Mexico border without congressional approval, an action Democrats vowed to challenge as a violation of the U.S. Constitution.

The Republican president's move, circumventing Congress, seeks to make good on a 2016 presidential campaign pledge to build a border wall that Trump insists is necessary to curtail illegal immigration he blames for bringing crime and drugs into the United States.

Within hours, the action was challenged in a lawsuit filed on behalf

of three Texas landowners, saying that Trump's declaration violates the U.S. Constitution and that the planned wall would infringe on their property rights.

Both California and New York said that they, too, planned to file lawsuits.

Hours after Trump's announcement, the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives' Judiciary Committee said it had launched an investigation into the emergency declaration.

In a letter to Trump, committee Democrats asked him to make available for a hearing White House and Justice Department officials involved in the action. They also requested legal documents on the

decision that led to the declaration, setting a deadline of next Friday.

"We believe your declaration of an emergency shows a reckless disregard for the separation of powers and your own responsibilities under our constitutional system," said the letter, signed by Chairman Jerrold Nadler and other top Democrats on the panel.

Trump on Friday also signed a bipartisan government spending bill that would prevent another partial government shutdown by funding several agencies that otherwise would have closed on Saturday.

The funding bill represented a legislative defeat for him since it contains no money for his proposed wall - the focus of weeks of conflict between Trump and Democrats in Congress.

Trump made no mention of the bill in rambling comments to reporters in the White House's Rose Garden.

He had demanded that Congress provide him with \$5.7 billion in wall funding as part of legislation to fund the agencies. That triggered a historic, 35-day government shutdown in December and January that hurt the U.S. economy and his opinion poll numbers.

By reorienting his quest for wall funding toward a legally uncertain strategy based on declaring a national emergency, Trump risks plunging into a lengthy legislative and legal battle with Democrats and dividing his fellow Republicans - many of whom expressed grave reservations on Friday about the president's action.

Yellow Vest Protests Hit France for 14th Weekend



Yellow Vest protesters march during a demonstration near the Arc de Triomphe in Paris on February 9, 2019.

PARIS (Dispatches) - Yellow vest protesters held demonstrations around Paris and the rest of France on Saturday despite a national debate launched by President Emmanuel Macron to convince them to end their agitation.

Hundreds of people gathered peacefully Saturday on the Champs-Elysees, the stage of past rioting. This marked the 14th straight weekend of demonstrations by a movement that started against fuel taxes and grew to a mass movement against Macron and his pro-business policies.

France's "yellow vest" protests are part of a humanist movement aimed at improving the lives of everyone in the country, one demonstrator, defending those who took to the streets.

The demonstrations are named for motorists' high-visibility jackets, which began in November against politicians and a government they see as out of touch.

"I can understand that some people have had enough, but we're not doing this just for us," said Madeleine, a 33-year old unemployed protester. "It's a very humanist movement and we're doing this for everyone. So if right now they're fed up, then too bad for them."

There has been infighting between leaders of the grassroots movement,

although some have outlined plans to extend the weekly protests to Sunday.

The number of protesters has fluctuated between 300,000 nationwide in November to around 50,000 last week, according to government estimates.

In Paris, protesters gathered at the symbolic rallying point at Arc de Triomphe, a flashpoint of violent clashes with the police in the early days of the protest, before marching toward the Eiffel Tower and through other major streets in Paris.

Protesters also gathered in the southwestern city of Bordeaux, and Strasbourg in the east, while some protesters tried to block a depot operated by online retail giant Amazon in Toulouse, in the south of France, BFM Television reported.

Ten people have been killed in protest-related traffic accidents and hundreds injured since the movement kicked off on November 17.

Police have been criticized by protesters for the use of rubber projectiles that have left dozens of people injured.

Paris has deployed 5,000 police around the capital, notably around government buildings and the Champs-Elysees, which was the stage of recent violence. About 80,000 police are spread out nationally.

Russia Warns NATO Over Military Buildup in Black Sea



Russia's navy ships and helicopters take part in a military exercise called Kavkaz 2016 at the coast of the Black Sea in Crimea on Sept. 9, 2016.

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia has warned NATO members over a recent decision to beef up military presence in the Black Sea, saying such a move would further increase tensions in the volatile region.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko said the decision by the Western military alliance to strengthen its position in the sea "is not a surprise" to Moscow.

"We are talking about the strengthening of military and maritime forces of NATO member states, first and foremost, Romania and Bulgaria, plus non-coastal states entering the Black Sea more often," he said.

"It is our understanding that this activity aggravates the situation in the sphere of security," Grushko added.

The Russian diplomat made the remarks in response to NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, who said on Thursday that the alliance was considering an expansion of its presence in the region in an effort to support Ukraine. He also said the military alliance is ready to carry out war games in the region in a few days.

"We are looking into whether we can increase our presence in the Black Sea and in the near future, in a few days, we'll have NATO ships in the Black Sea, participating in

an exercise," he said.

Stoltenberg further said he would discuss "what steps NATO should take to adapt to a world with more Russian missiles" as he prepared to hold a meeting with European defense ministers.

Russian President Vladimir Putin authorized his ministers last month to start working on a new land-based cruise missile and a new land-based hyper-sonic missile before 2021 after the U.S. suspended obligations under the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF).

Washington said earlier this month that it would suspend the deal for 180 days and fully withdraw from it later if Moscow did not stop what he called "violations."

Russia has rejected the accusations and demanded that Washington destroy its weapons banned under the treaty and "return to strict compliance" with the deal.

The NATO chief, who once again raised concern about the fate of the treaty, said Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov gave him no indication that Russia might be willing to back down over missile activities, which has concerned Europe.



VATICAN CITY (Reuters) - Former U.S. Cardinal Theodore McCarrick has been expelled from the Roman Catholic priesthood after he was found guilty of sexual crimes against minors and adults, the Vatican said on Saturday. Pope Francis has decided that the ruling, which followed an appeal by the man who was a power-broker as Archbishop of Washington, D.C. from 2001 to 2006, was now final. A Vatican statement said his crimes were made more serious by "the aggravating factor of the abuse of power". McCarrick, who in July became the first Roman Catholic prelate in nearly 100 years to lose the title of cardinal, has now become the highest profile church figure to be dismissed from the priesthood in modern times. The decision comes as the Church is still grappling with a decades-long sexual abuse crisis that has exposed how predator priests were moved from parish to parish instead of being defrocked or turned over to civilian authorities in countries across the globe.

MUNICH (Reuters) - A day after British Defense Minister Gavin Williamson accused Moscow of "trying to goad the West" in a bellicose speech, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov called him Britain's minister of war. Williamson, addressing the Munich Security Conference on Friday, accused Russia of "illegal activity" on land and at sea, and called on Moscow to reset its relationship with Western countries through dialogue. Lavrov addressed the meeting on Saturday and seized the opportunity to jibe back at Williamson when asked about the security situation of the Arctic. "We want to understand what kind of mandate NATO is going to have in the Arctic," he said. "If you listen to some people like the minister of war - oh, sorry the minister of defense - of the United Kingdom then you might get an impression that nobody except NATO have the right to be anywhere," he added to laughter. It was not the first time Lavrov and Williamson have clashed verbally. Last year, after Williamson told Russia to "go away and shut up", Lavrov retorted: "Maybe he lacks education."

KHARTOUM (Reuters) - A parliamentary committee tasked with amending Sudan's constitution to allow President Omar al-Bashir to run for another term said on Saturday it would indefinitely postpone a meeting to draft these changes, state news agency SUNA said. The move comes amid daily street protests since mid-December, initially sparked by rising food prices and cash shortages, against Bashir's nearly 30-year rule. SUNA cited "special emergency commitments" as the cause for the delay without providing further details. A majority of lawmakers had backed the proposed amendment two weeks before protests broke out and had tasked an emergency committee with drafting the changes ahead of the parliament's first session in April. Bashir, a former army officer, came to power after a military coup. He won elections in 2010 and 2015 after changes in the constitution following a peace agreement with southern rebels, who then seceded to form South Sudan. He is now facing unprecedented opposition to his rule, with street protests involving hundreds of people almost every day. Elections are expected to be held in the spring of 2020.

MOSCOW (AP) - A Moscow court has ordered a U.S. investment fund manager to be jailed for two months while facing fraud charges. Michael Calvey, founder and senior partner at Baring Vostok equity firm, was detained Friday morning along with two other fund managers. Prosecutors say Calvey is suspected of embezzling 2.5 billion rubles (\$37 million) from Vostochny Bank, where Baring Vostok has a controlling stake. But Calvey said during his court appearance Saturday that the charges against him are likely connected to an arbitration case that Baring Vostok initiated against some Vostochny Bank shareholders. Calvey has worked for years in Russia and invested heavily in the country's technology sector, including in the web search company Yandex.

TIRANA (Reuters) - Albanian opposition supporters broke a police cordon on Saturday after throwing petrol bombs and flares and began trying to smash the doors of the building that houses the office of Prime Minister Edi Rama, in a protest calling for him to step down. A security officer appealed for calm as some protesters tried to dismantle scaffolding that protects an illuminated canopy - a piece of artwork dear to Rama. Tear gas was thrown from above on the rioters, who were using metal rods to try to break the doors.

DAURA/YOLA, Nigeria (Reuters) - Nigeria's president and the leading opposition candidate urged people to remain calm after a national election scheduled for Saturday was postponed by a week just five hours before polls were due to open. However, the opposition candidate, former vice president Atiku Abubakar, later accused President Muhammadu Buhari of instigating the delay in order to "disenfranchise" the electorate. Early on Saturday morning, just as Nigerians began heading out to polling stations, the chairman of the electoral commission said it was no longer feasible to hold free and fair elections on Saturday due to logistical problems. The vote will now be held on Feb. 23, the chairman said. But the delay still threw the country into renewed political uncertainty. Electoral commission officials and Western diplomats said the problems concerned the inability to transport ballot papers and results sheets to some parts of the country, where 84 million voters have registered to vote. Buhari, in power since 2015, faces a tight election contest against the People's Democratic Party's Atiku.

Maduro: U.S. 'Stealing' Billions of Dollars From Venezuela



Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro attends a commemorative event to mark the Bicentennial of the Angostura Congress at the Municipal Palace in Ciudad Bolivar, Bolivar state on February 15, 2019.

CARACAS (Dispatches) - Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro says the United States has been "stealing" billions of dollars from the Latin American country through sanctions and offering "crumbs" in return as humanitarian aid.

Maduro made the remarks as Caracas continued to block the entry of a U.S. package of "humanitarian aid" at the border with Colombia following the Trump administration's move to freeze billions of dollars in Venezuelan oil revenues and overseas assets.

"It's a booby trap, they're putting on a show with rotten and contaminated food,"

said Maduro, speaking at an event in the southeastern city of Ciudad Bolivar.

"They've stolen \$30 billion and are offering four crumbs of rotten food," the president added, referring to the United States.

The U.S. administration's sanctions have so far targeted individuals and state oil company PDVSA, the Venezuelan government's main source of income.

Maduro accused Colombia and the U.S. of hatching "war plans" against his country and called on the military to prepare a "special plan" for countering such threats by reinforcing Venezuela's borders.

He has said the U.S. administration is using the Venezuela's humanitarian crisis as a cover-up for Washington's military plans in the country.

The political crisis deepened in the country on January 23, when opposition figure Juan Guaido, a lawmaker who leads the defunct National Assembly, proclaimed himself the "interim president" of Venezuela.

U.S. President Donald Trump was quick to officially recognize him as such and announce sanctions on Venezuela's oil exports.

Some major Western powers such as the UK, France, Spain, and Germany have also recognized Guaido as interim president, a move seen by Caracas and others as interference in its domestic affairs.

On Friday, Guaido gave pro-Maduro armed forces a two-week deadline to back his effort to become the interim president.

He has set the date for the entry of the U.S.-supplied package to the South American country while Maduro has already ordered the military to block it at the Colombian border.

Earlier this month, the 35-year-old opposition leader warned the Venezuelan military that blocking the shipment would be a "crime against humanity."

Maduro, who enjoys the critical support of the military, has accused Guaido of staging a U.S.-engineered coup against him, and has severed diplomatic relations with Washington.

China Scraps UK Chancellor's Visit Over Warship Plan

LONDON (Dispatches) - British Chancellor of the Exchequer Philip Hammond is not going to China this weekend for trade talks, following reports that Beijing scuppered advanced preparations for a meeting after the defense secretary, Gavin Williamson, threatened to deploy a warship in the Pacific.

Hammond was expected to meet the Chinese vice premier, Hu Chunhua, but Treasury sources said the trip was never confirmed, the Guardian reported.

It is believed that there is an internal row brewing between the Treasury and the defense department over Williamson's remarks, which the former chancellor George Osborne described as a throwback to an era of "gunboat diplomacy."

The Sun said China had been expected to lift its bans on British poultry and cosmetics not tested on animals, which could have opened up access to markets worth around 10 billion pounds over five years.

A Treasury spokeswoman stopped short of confirming that the trip, preparations for which were reportedly well advanced, had been cancelled. "The chancellor is not travelling to China at this time," she said. "No trip was ever announced or confirmed."

Hu reportedly scrapped the plans hours after Williamson announced that the aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth would be sent to the Pacific, where Beijing has been involved in a dispute over territorial claims in the South China Sea, for its first operational cruise, expected to be in 2021.

He said the UK was prepared to use lethal force to deter countries that flout international law, in an apparent reference to Chinese expansion.

Last September another British warship, HMS Albion, sailed near islands claimed by China in an effort to demonstrate that the UK does not recognize claims beyond the internationally agreed 12-mile limit. China described the action as provocative.

The Financial Times reported that British

officials said the Chinese ambassador had raised Williamson's apparent threat in a "scheduled call" with the Foreign Office. The paper said that Downing Street had not denied that Beijing had expressed its displeasure with the minister's speech.

A government official was reported to have branded Williamson's speech, in which he also claimed Brexit represented an opportunity for Britain to enhance its military threat, as "idiotic", while the defense secretary was also criticized by Osborne, now the Evening Standard editor, for sending mixed messages.

He told BBC Radio 4's Week in Westminster that the government appeared unable to decide whether China was an economic partner or a military threat.

"You've got the defense secretary engaging in gunboat diplomacy of a quite old-fashioned kind, at the same time as the chancellor of the exchequer and the foreign secretary are going around saying they want a close economic partnership with China."