VOA NEWS

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From Washington, this is VOA news. Hello, I'm Steve Miller.

Carles Puigdemont, the president of Spain's Catalonia region, on Saturday described the federal government's decision to invoke Article 155 of the Constitution as the worst attack to Catalan people since the Franco dictatorship.

"The Spanish government has illegally self-proclaimed the representatives of the will of the Catalans.

Without going through the polls, with little support and against the will of the majority, the government of Mariano Rajoy wants to appoint a directory to remotely control the life of Catalonia from Madrid."

Spain announced the unprecedented plan to sack Catalonia's separatist leaders, install its own people in their place and call a new local election, using previously untapped constitutional powers to take control of the prosperous region that is threatening to secede.

Puigdemont responded by making a veiled independence threat, telling lawmakers to come up with a plan to counter Spain's attempt at the "liquidation of our self-government and the democratic will of the Catalans."

Authorities in Niger say at least a dozen paramilitary police have been killed in an attack similar to the one that killed four U.S. Green Berets and four Nigerien troops on October 4.

Saturday's attack took place in the same area, according to officials. The raid took place in the town of Ayorou, about 200 kilometers northwest of the capital, Niamey.

Reports said the attackers were heavily armed with guns and rocket launchers. They arrived in five vehicles to launch their ambush on the individual's base. The attackers then left when Nigerien military reinforcements arrived.

This is VOA news.

Iraqi Defense Ministry spokesman Dawlat Waziri said a suicide blast Saturday outside the Afghan military academy in Kabul killed at least 15 cadets and wounded several others. Maya Bush has that story.

The Taliban insurgency has claimed responsibly for the minibus bombing, saying the attack was part of its Mansoori insurgent operations underway against Afghan forces and their foreign backers.

The attack came a day after an Islamic State suicide bomber stormed a crowded Shi'ite Muslim mosque in the city, killing 50 worshipers and wounding dozens more.

On Friday, a suicide bomber killed 33 people at a mosque in the central province of Ghor. That attack killed a pro-government former Afghan jihadi commander and members of his group who were offering prayers at the mosque.

A string of militant bombings and battlefield raids across Afghanistan this week has killed more than 200 people, mostly members of Afghan security forces.

Maya Bush, VOA news.

U.S. President Donald Trump has issued a statement praising the Syrian Democratic Forces for recapturing the city of Raqqa from Islamic State control. Marissa Melton reports.

Trump wrote in a statement Saturday that the defeat of ISIS, or Islamic State, in the group's self-proclaimed capital city represents a "critical breakthrough" in the worldwide campaign to eliminate the terrorist organization.

Trump said in the statement the next move is to "transition into a new phase in which we will support local security forces, de-escalate violence across Syria and advance the conditions for lasting peace."

While the recapture Tuesday of Raqqa is a significant blow to the Islamic State terror group, images emerging from the city show the enormous cost exacted after four months of grueling battle to oust IS militants, with most of the buildings reduced to rubble and tens of thousands of its residents displaced.

Marissa Melton, VOA news.

Muslim leaders in the Washington area have condemned the recent terrorist attack in Mogadishu that killed nearly 400 people. Imams and diplomats expressed shock and horror at Friday prayers.

Prayers come as the Somali government officially declared a sharp increase in the death toll from a truck bomb, putting the final tally at 358 people killed, 228 injured and 56 missing.

Somali government officials have declared war against al-Shabaab militants they accuse of being behind the blast, the deadliest terrorist attack in Somalia's history, a responsibility the militants have not claimed thus far.

After widespread shock and condemnation, the head of the World Health Organization said he is "rethinking" his appointment of Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe as a "goodwill ambassador." He made that statement via Twitter.

The 93-year-old Mugabe is the world's oldest head of state and also faces U.S. sanctions over his government's human rights abuses.

From Washington, I'm Steve Miller.

That's the latest world news from VOA.