VOA NEWS

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From Washington, this is VOA news. I'm Jonathan Jones reporting.

State media in Turkey say Turkish ground forces have crossed the border into a Syrian Kurdish enclave where fighting there continues.

Reuters correspondent Scarlett Cvitanovich reports.

Turkish ground forces pushed into Syria's Afrin province on Sunday as the country vowed to crush the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia. That group supported by the United States but seen as a terrorist organization by Turkey says it will repulse the Turks and their allies after fierce clashes.

The Turkish military claims to have hit over 150 targets so far, killing six civilians and three YPG fighters, but are accused by the YPG of striking civilian districts and a camp for the displaced.

Turkish President Tayyip Erdoğan's spokesman tweeted that the operation labeled "Olive Branch" was going well.

The YPG said their people would not surrender and that they would protect their supporters in Afrin.

On Sunday, U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis told reporters on a plane headed for Southeast Asia that Turkey alerted the United States before striking the U.S.-allied Kurdish militia in northern Syria.

He says "They warned us before they launched the aircraft that they were going to do it."

But the YPG is a key U.S. partner in the war against the Islamic State and makes up a large portion of the Syrian Democratic Forces, a coalition that has forced the Islamic State from virtually its entire so-called caliphate.

Afghan government forces ended an overnight siege Sunday at Kabul's Intercontinental Hotel that left at least 18 people dead, including 14 foreign nationals.

The attack began late Saturday in the Afghan capital.

This is VOA news.

Vice President Mike Pence is in Jordan, just one of the countries he'll be visiting during his planned four-day long trip to the Middle East.

Pence spoke to American troops there about the budget stalemate in Congress that has forced the federal government to shut down.

"I'm sure you're all aware of what's going on in Washington DC. Despite bipartisan support for a budget resolution, a minority in the Senate has decided to play politics with military pay, which you deserve better."

"You and your family shouldn't have to worry for one minute about whether you're going to get paid as you serve in the uniform of the United States."

Earlier, Pence met with Jordan's King Abdullah, who expressed his concern about the U.S. decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

The U.N. human rights office is calling on all parties in Honduras to refrain from violence amid heightened tensions over the country's disputed presidential election.

Correspondent Lisa Schlein reports for VOA from the agency's headquarters in Geneva.

U.N. appeals for restraint by the Honduran government and opposition forces have fallen on deaf ears. Its warnings of the potential risk of deaths and injuries during violent protests have materialized.

One protester reportedly has been killed and another wounded during clashes between riot police and demonstrators Saturday. The opposition has announced widespread nationwide protests between January 20 and January 27. That is when Juan Orlando Hernández is to be sworn in for a second term as president of Honduras.

The U.N. human rights office says it is afraid of what might happen over the coming week. Spokeswoman Liz Throssell tells VOA her agency is calling on all sides to keep the protests peaceful.

Lisa Schlein, for VOA news, Geneva.

The top Senate leaders traded barbs and blames Sunday for the partial U.S. government shutdown but they did not appear to be in an immediate end in sight to the now two-day-long stalemate between Republican and Democratic lawmakers over federal spending and immigration issues.

Federal agencies are preparing to idle employees and halt major portions of their operations if no agreement is reached Sunday or in the early hours of Monday.

The U.S. government has been partially shut down on several occasions before in lawmaking and funding disputes over the years, most recently in 2013 for 16 days in a partisan deadlock over health care policy.

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That's the latest world news from VOA.