VOA NEWS

February 12, 2019

VOA news. I'm Christopher Cruise reporting.

Members of a congressional negotiating committee met Monday to revive talks over funding for border security. The funding is central to legislation to prevent key parts of the government from shutting down again on Saturday.

President Trump has said if opposition Democrats don't give him the money he wants to begin building a wall between the U.S. and Mexico, he could declare a national emergency and bypass Congress altogether.

Trump is in the border city of El Paso, Texas, to speak to supporters. He says a wall would keep people from illegally entering the United States from Mexico.

Acting U.S. Defense Secretary Pat Shanahan said Monday the Islamic State terrorist groups remains a global presence. He spoke as U.S.-backed fighters worked to clear the last enclave the militants hold in eastern Syria.

He said although the U.S. presence in Syria has been decimated, local Syrian security forces are needed to ensure stability.

The acting U.S. secretary of defense made the unannounced visit Monday to Afghanistan. The visit coming as the U.S. continues peace negotiations with the Taliban to end nearly two decades of war there.

VOA Pentagon correspondent Carla Babb reports.

Acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan told reporters before his unannounced stop in Kabul the United States is not discussing any size troop withdrawal.

"I have not been directed to step down our forces in Afghanistan. The direction and this is in close coordination with Secretary Pompeo and Ambassador Bolton is to support Ambassador Khalilzad in these peace negotiations."

Last week during the State of the Union address, President Donald Trump slammed U.S. involvement in prolonged conflicts.

This is VOA news.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo says the United States will continue investigating the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. He said, "America is not covering up for a murder."

Khashoggi was a *Washington Post* columnist who wrote critically about Saudi [Crince] Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

He was last seen in October entering the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. His remains have still not been found.

Hundreds of thousands of Iranians, many chanting "Death to America," marched in cities across the country Monday on the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution.

Ballistic missiles and other heavy weapons were proudly displayed in central Tehran while marchers burned American and Israeli flags.

More than 50 tons of U.S. and Colombian humanitarian aid for Venezuela remains in Colombia with no clear path on how to get the food and medicine into Venezuela. That's because the disputed Venezuelan President Nicholás Maduro has ordered soldiers to stop the aid from crossing the border.

Maduro has said the U.S. help is part of a plot to overthrow his government.

VOA correspondent Cristina Caicedo Smit reports.

U.S. Ambassador to Colombia Kevin Whitaker welcomed the food supplies, emphasizing the United States had helped Venezuelans with more than $140 million. He says more help is expected.

"This is a down payment. This is just the beginning. It's important. It's significant. It will be distributed to Venezuelans in Venezuela."

Ambassador Whitaker also ???suing Colombian President Iván Duque for the transportation of this first load of help into the Venezuelan border.

After a rebuke, a new congresswoman is apologizing for offensive tweets about Israel in Congress.

Associated Press correspondent Warren Levinson reports.

Minnesota Democrat Ilhan Omar, who offended Jews with a tweet that charged congressional support for Israel is brought by lobbyists, has apologized.

In the new tweet, Omar says anti-Semitism is real and she is grateful to colleagues who are educating her on the painful history of anti-Semitic tropes.

The statement came after Omar, one of the fist Muslim women in Congress, was rebuked by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi for spreading offensive stereotypes. At the same time, Omar says the role of lobbyists in politics is problematic whether it's AIPAC, the NRA or the fossil fuel industry. "We have to address it," she tweets.

Thousands of people took to the streets of the Haitian capital, Port-au-Prince, and other cities nationwide again Monday, calling for the president to resign.

Inflation and corruption are the main sources of the anger expressed by protesters for which they hold the president and prime minister responsible.

You can find more on these and other late breaking and developing stories, from around the world, around the clock, at voanews.com and on the VOA news mobile app. I'm Christopher Cruise, VOA news.