VOA NEWS

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This is VOA news. I'm David Byrd.

The Trump administration is again defying a congressional subpoena as the battle over special counsel Robert Mueller's Russia report continues.

AP's Sagar Meghani reports from the White House.

The White House has told former counsel Don McGahn not to give documents about his cooperation in the probe to a House panel, arguing they are subject to executive privilege.

It's the second time in two days the administration's refused to comply with the House Judiciary Committee deadline for turning over materials in the probe.

Senate GOP chief Mitch McConnell says Democrats need to accept the investigation's done.

"It's finally over," saying "case closed."

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi disagrees. "That's just not a fact. The case is not closed," saying lawmakers would be relinquished if they did not conduct oversight of the president as the constitution mandates.

Sagar Meghani, at the White House.

U.S. Vice President Mike Pence has announced the lifting of sanctions on the former head of Venezuela's intelligence service and said a U.S. Navy hospital ship will head to the region to help refugees.

In a speech at the State Department Tuesday, Pence announced that the U.S. Treasury Department had removed sanctions on General Manuel Figuera, who headed the SEBIN intelligence agency but has switched his allegiance from President Nicholás Maduro to National Assembly leader Juan Guaidó.

The vice president also confirmed the Pentagon is dispatching the USNS Comfort to the region in June.

"I am announcing that, at President Trump's direction, the United States Navy will deploy the USNS Comfort to the Caribbean, Central America, and South America this June."

Comfort will stay in the region for five months to offer medical care to Venezuelan refugees and others.

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U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo met with Iraq's Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi Tuesday after abruptly canceling a trip to Berlin because of what were called international security issues.

Pompeo said he wanted to assure the Iraqi prime minister the United States stands ready to protect Iraqi sovereignty.

The visit came after the United States announced it was speeding up the arrival of a naval aircraft carrier strike group to the Arabian Sea and deploying a bomber taskforce in response to a potential Iranian threat.

Acting Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan said the moves are part of protecting U.S. interests.

"We're very mindful of the environment and we have credible reporting, so what you see is us getting in the right posture for that dynamic environment."

The Trump administration has been working to apply what it calls a "maximum pressure campaign" against Iran to try to get the country to change its behavior, including its sponsorship of terror groups and what the White House alleges is a ballistic missile program that threatens the United States.

Meanwhile, the official Iranian news agency reports Tehran will announce partial withdrawal from the six-nation nuclear deal on Wednesday. The announcement will come exactly one year after President Donald Trump said he was pulling out of the agreement, calling it one of the worst deals ever put together.

Iran's President Hassan Rouhani will make a speech and will send letters to the remaining signatories -- Britain, China, France, Germany, and Russia -- outlining exactly which parts of the deal he is abandoning.

The 2015 agreement obligated Iran to reduce its uranium enrichment program in exchange for sanctions relief.

The U.S. reimposed sanctions on Iran when Trump tore up the deal.

China has confirmed its top trade negotiator will travel to the United States to conduct a new round of trade talks later this week.

As AP's Joe McDonald reports, Liu He is traveling even after President Donald Trump threatened higher tariffs on billions of dollars of Chinese goods.

The announcement puts to rest concerns that Vice Premier Liu He might skip the talks as a way of expressing frustration with Trump's surprise announcement. This suggests that President Xi Jinping's government puts the need to end this dispute that have battered Chinese exporters ahead of any need to show toughness in the face of U.S. pressure."

And two Reuters journalists who were arrested for violating Myanmar's colonial-era Official Secrets Act were released Tuesday after spending more than 500 days in prison.

Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo were among the thousands of prisoners pardoned as part of an annual amnesty.

The two reporters were covering a massacre of ten Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State by Myanmar's security forces and Buddhist civilians when they were arrested.

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