VOA NEWS

June 19, 2019

This is VOA news. I'm Marissa Melton.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo says the U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf is not for war but to deter Iranian aggression.

AP's Ed Donahue has this report.

Iran insisted it doesn't want war. At Central Command headquarters, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo says troops are in the region to deter aggression from Iran.

"President Trump does not want war, and we will continue to communicate that message."

Pompeo says the U.S. needs to be ready for any possible scenario.

"... making sure that we have the capability to respond if Iran makes a bad decision."

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer says the U.S. policy in the Middle East is erratic.

"One day he says he is gonna obliterate them and the next day he says he wants to talk to them."

South Carolina Republican Senator Lindsey Graham says the president isn't the problem.

"... we're trying to get Iran to stop attacking ships and pipelines and turning the Mideast upside down."

Ed Donahue, Washington.

President Trump has announced via Twitter that Acting U.S. Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan has pulled himself out of a confirmation process.

AP's Sagar Meghani has that report.

Shanahan's been running the Pentagon since Jim Mattis resigned in January. President Trump announced recently he nominated Shanahan for the permanent job but today tweeted Shanahan is withdrawing.

Shanahan himself says he is resigning his previous post as deputy defense secretary as well. In a written statement, he says a deeply personal family situation is being dredged up and moving ahead with his confirmation would hurt his kids.

Shanahan's nomination had never been formally sent to the Senate.

The president says Army Secretary Mark Esper will become the Pentagon's acting chief.

Sagar Meghani, Washington.

The Taliban says the United States has promised during negotiations to withdraw all troops from Afghanistan. The announcement comes as a crucial round of peace talks between the two adversaries is expected to take place in Qatar in the next few days.

This is VOA news.

Hong Kong's chief executive Carrie Lam offered an apology Tuesday for the political crisis and unrest sparked by a controversial extradition bill. The bill would have allowed extradition to mainland China.

Lam says work on the bill was over until it expires in July next year, and she pledged to stay and finish the remainder of her term.

"I personally have to shoulder much of the responsibility."

An apology was not enough for some of those still protesting. Members of the Civil Human Rights Front in Hong Kong say they are angry that Lam is refusing to step down.

"After millions of Hong Kong people continue to join the rally protest, nearly hundred of them have been sent to hospital. Some of them have been arrested. And we are not sure when we will face sort of prosecution."

Opposition to the bill has driven repeated mass protests in Hong Kong this month. Organizers said two million people turned out on Sunday.

Chinese President Xi Jinping called for cooperation in a phone call with U.S. President Donald Trump on Tuesday. This comes as Trump says he will hold trade talks with Xi next week at a summit of nations in Japan.

AP correspondent Shelley Adler reports.

In an escalating trade dispute with Beijing, President Trump has already imposed 25 percent tariffs on $250 billion in Chinese imports. The goal is to pressure Beijing to stop stealing American technology.

Trump tweeted today that U.S. and China negotiating teams will beet before his meeting with the Chinese leader at the Group of 20 nations in Japan.

U.S. businesses are pushing for Trump not to expand his tariffs to ($)300 billion in goods from China or at least spare those imports that are extremely important to their customers.

Shelley Adler, Washington.

President Xi will also make a state visit to North Korea this week. It's the first such visit by a Chinese president in 14 years.

And President Trump says he will start deporting "millions of illegal aliens," in his words, from the United States next week. His announcement of raids on immigrant families seems to have caught the country's immigration officials by surprise.

A Trump administration officials said the one million migrants who've been issued final deportation orders but are still living in the country will be targeted first.

But the most U.S. has ever deported in a single year is 435,000 and that was in 2013.

Some immigration officials say that raids are not imminent. They say they were not aware that Trump is going to disclose sensitive law enforcement actions on Twitter, which is unusual.

I'm Marissa Melton. You're listening to VOA news.