VOA NEWS

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This is VOA news. I'm David Byrd.

The United States and Iran have different versions of just what happened when an American drone was shot down by Iranian forces over the Gulf of Oman.

AP Washington correspondent Sagar Meghani reports from the Pentagon.

Where was the drone flying? "It was over international waters, clearly over international waters."

The U.S. military is rejecting Iran's version. "Iranian reports that this aircraft was shot down over Iran are categorically false."

Retired Colonel David Maxwell, though, says it may well have been as the president initially described it a mistake, telling the AP the Iranians may have thought the drone was in fact in their own airspace.

"... they might not have the technical means to really determine a location and somebody made a decision to shoot this down."

Maxwell, a special forces veteran, says errors do happen. This one, though, could have severe consequences.

Sagar Meghani, at the Pentagon.

Meanwhile, congressional Democrats say they are worried that the Trump administration might stumble into a war with Iran even though it says it does not want one.

Speaking after a briefing at the White House, Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer said situations like the one with Iran have a way of getting out of hand. The New York Democratic said congressional approval would be needed for financing any conflict.

"... congressional approval must be required before funding any conflict in Iran. One of the best ways to avoid bumbling into a war, a war that nobody wants, is to have a robust open debate and for Congress to have a real say. We learned that lesson in the run-up to Iraq."

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, meanwhile, said the Trump administration should engage with U.S. allies and do everything in our power to deescalate.

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The Saudi-led military coalition fighting in Yemen said early Friday it had struck targets around the port city of Hodeidah belonging to the Iran-aligned Houthis. The coalition strike came after the Houthis fired a missile at a utility plant in southern Saudi Arabia.

The coalition said in a statement carried by Saudi state media that its targets included booby-trapped boats that the Houthis had prepared for terrorist acts and to threaten international shipping.

The Houthis, who ousted the Saudi-backed internationally recognized government from power in 2014, have stepped up missile and drone attacks on Saudi cities in the past two weeks. Last week, a rebel missile hit an international airport in Saudi Arabia wounding 26 people.

A Turkish court sentenced 151 people including 17 senior military officers to life in prison Thursday over a 2016 coup attempt against President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Local media reported that 33 defendants were acquitted of charges at Thursday's trial.

Turkish media said a court in Ankara sentenced 128 people to aggravated life sentences and 23 others to normal life sentences for their participation in a 2016 coup attempt that left more than 200 people dead.

The Turkish government alleges that U.S.-based cleric Fethullah Gülen was partly responsible for the coup attempt. Gülen has denied any involvement.

American Paul Whelan appears in a Moscow courtroom Thursday to face espionage charges.

As AP's Ed Donahue reports, he appealed to President Donald Trump for help.

Whelan was arrested in a hotel room in Moscow at the end of December and charged with espionage. The former Marine called on President Trump to intervene.

"Mr. President, we cannot keep America great unless we aggressively protect and defend American citizens wherever they are in the world."

Whelan says he is a victim of political kidnapping.

"I am innocent of the one and only charge against me -- a crime that never occurred. My life has been threatened, my rights denied."

Whelan's lawyer says his client was handed a flash drive that had classified information on it that he didn't know about.

The espionage charge carries up to 20 years in prison in Russia.

I'm Ed Donahue.

Fervent Brexit campaigner Boris Johnson and Foreign Minister Jeremy Hunt emerged Thursday as the only two candidates left in the race to become British prime minister. The flamboyant Johnson is the odds-on favorite to win next month.

Whoever wins will have to find a solution to the Brexit turmoil, which eluded Theresa May for three years and ultimately led to her downfall.

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