

U.S. Seeks Alliance To Back Syria Opposition

BEIRUT (AP) — The United States proposed an international coalition to support Syria's opposition Sunday after Russia and China blocked a U.N. attempt to end nearly 11 months of bloodshed, raising fears that violence will escalate. Rebel soldiers said force was now the only way to oust President Bashar Assad, while the regime vowed to press its military crackdown.

The threat of both sides turning to greater force after Russia and China vetoed a U.N. Security Council resolution raises the potential for Syria's turmoil to move into even a more dangerous new phase that could degenerate into outright civil war.

The uprising inspired by other Arab Spring revolts began in March with peaceful protests against Assad's regime, sparking a fierce crackdown by government forces. Soldiers who defected to join the uprising later began to protect protesters from attacks. In recent months, the rebel soldiers, known as the Free Syrian Army, have grown bolder, attacking regime troops and trying to establish control in pro-opposition areas. That has brought a heavier government response.

More than 5,400 people have been killed since March, according to the U.N., and now regime opponents fear that Assad will be emboldened by the feeling he is protected by his top ally Moscow and unleash even greater violence to crush protesters. If the opposition turns overtly to armed resistance, the result could be a dramatic increase in bloodshed.

At least 30 civilians were killed Sunday, including five children and a woman who was hit by a bullet while standing on her balcony as troops fired on protesters in a Damascus suburb, according to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an activist group.

Egypt Ignores U.S. Threat To Cut Aid

CAIRO (AP) — Ignoring a U.S. threat to cut off aid, Egypt on Sunday referred 19 Americans and 24 other employees of nonprofit groups to trial before a criminal court on accusations they illegally used foreign funds to foment unrest in the country.

Egypt's military rulers had already deeply strained ties with Washington with their crackdown on U.S.-funded groups promoting democracy and human rights and accused of stirring up violence in the aftermath of the uprising a year ago that ousted Hosni Mubarak. The decision to send 43 workers from the various groups to trials marks a sharp escalation in the dispute.

Egypt and the United States have been close allies for more than three decades, but the campaign against the organizations has angered Washington, and jeopardized the \$1.5 billion in aid Egypt is set to receive from the U.S. this year.

On Saturday, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton warned Egypt that failure to resolve the dispute may lead to the loss of American aid. The Egyptian minister, Mohammed Amr, responded Sunday by saying the government cannot interfere in the work of the judiciary.

"We are doing our best to contain this but ... we cannot actually exercise any influence on the investigating judges right now when it comes to the investigation," Amr told reporters at a security conference in Munich, Germany. A few hours later, word of the referral to trials came.

Noriega Suffers Possible Stroke, In Hospital

PANAMA CITY (AP) — Former Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega, who was toppled by a 1989 American invasion and later convicted of drug running, was transferred from prison to a hospital on Sunday, possibly because of a stroke, police said.

The 77-year-old Noriega has high blood pressure and apparently suffered a brain hemorrhage, Panamanian National Police said in statement. He was taken from the El Renacer prison where he was serving out his sentence to Hospital Santo Tomas in Panama City.

One of his three daughters, Sandra, was seen entering the hospital, which was guarded by police agents.

In December, Panamanian authorities said Noriega was suffering from mobility due to a previous stroke.

Noriega, who ruled Panama from 1983 to 1989, spent about 20 years in U.S. and French prisons on drug-trafficking and money-laundering convictions, before returning to Panama on Dec. 11, 2011. Shortly after returning home under heavy security, he was seen publicly in a wheelchair being helped by prison authorities.

Yemen Leader Protest Gets Heated In NYC

NEW YORK (AP) — A protest of the embattled president of Yemen outside the New York hotel where he's staying got heated when demonstrators saw him leave the building.

The dozen protesters had been kept across the street from the Ritz-Carlton hotel Sunday afternoon. They had been waving flags and yelling in opposition to President Ali Abdullah Saleh. He is visiting the United States for medical treatment.

Saleh exited the hotel and waved and smiled sardonically toward the protesters. One of them attempted to charge across the street, but was restrained by authorities. Someone also threw a shoe in Saleh's direction.

Saleh got into his car. His motorcade then left.

GOP Race Turns To Colorado, Minnesota

BY SHANNON MCCAFFREY AND KASIE HUNT
Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Now it's on to Colorado, Minnesota and Maine.

With back-to-back victories fueling him, Republican presidential front-runner Mitt Romney is looking toward the next states that hold GOP nominating contests as main rival Newt Gingrich brushes aside any talk of abandoning his White House bid — all but ensuring the battle will stretch into the spring if not beyond.

Shortly after losing big to Romney here, the former House speaker emphatically renewed his vow to campaign into the party convention in Tampa this summer. His goal, he said, was to "find a series of victories which by the end of the Texas primary will leave us at parity" with Romney by early April.

Gingrich continued to shrug off Nevada's caucus results in an appearance on Sunday on NBC's Meet the Press.

"This is the state he won last time, and he won it this time," he said of Romney. "Our goal is to get to Super Tuesday where we're in much more favorable territory."

But first, Gingrich must make it through Colorado and Minnesota, which both hold caucuses Tuesday. Maine follows on Saturday

during a month that promises to be as plodding as January was rapid-fire in the presidential race. Romney will look to maintain his position of strength, if not build upon it, as his rivals continue working to derail him even as their options for doing so narrow with each victory he notches.

The former Massachusetts governor held a double-digit lead Sunday morning over his nearest pursuer as the totals mounted in Nevada, where fellow Mormons accounted for roughly a quarter of all caucus-goers. Gingrich and Texas Rep. Ron Paul vied for a distant second. Former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum trailed the field.

Santorum won the leadoff caucuses in Iowa and has trailed in the contests since then. He nonetheless insisted on Sunday that "our numbers are moving up continually."

"I think we're going to show improvement. This race is a long long way from being over," Santorum said on Fox News Sunday.

And on ABC's "This Week," Paul maintained the results show voters are still up for grabs.

"I get energized because I know there's a large number of people who are looking for another option," Paul said.

With votes from 83 percent of the precinct caucuses tallied, Romney had 48 percent, Gingrich 22 percent, Paul 19 percent and

Santorum 11 percent. Turnout was down significantly from 2008, when Romney also won the state's GOP caucuses.

Romney's victory capped a week that began with his double-digit win in the Florida primary. That contest was as intense as Nevada's caucuses were sedate — so quiet that they produced little television advertising, no candidate debates and only a modest investment of time by the contenders.

A total of 28 Republican National Convention delegates were at stake in caucuses held across the sprawling state. Romney won at least 10, Gingrich at least four, Paul at least three and Santorum at least two. Eight were still to be determined.

That gives Romney a total of 97, including endorsements from Republican National Committee members who will automatically attend the convention and can support any candidate they choose. Gingrich has 30, Santorum 16 and Paul seven. It will take 1,144 delegates to win the Republican nomination.

Preliminary results of a poll of Nevada Republicans entering their caucuses showed that nearly half said the most important consideration in their decision was a candidate's ability to defeat President Barack Obama this fall, a finding in line with other states.

Snow Traps Thousands In Bosnian Villages

BY AIDA CERKEZ
Associated Press

SARAJEVO, Bosnia-Herzegovina — Bosnia used helicopters on Sunday to evacuate the sick and deliver food to thousands of people left stranded by its heaviest snowfall ever, while Pope Benedict XVI donned an overcoat to bless the few pilgrims who braved Rome's unusually cold weather to visit St. Peter's Square.

"The snow is beautiful, but let's hope spring comes soon," the pope told the pilgrims, looking out over remnants of Rome's biggest snowstorm since 1986.

Across Eastern Europe, thousands of people continued to dig out from heavy snow that has fallen during a cold snap that struck more than a week ago and has killed hundreds of people.

In Ukraine, the hardest hit area, temperatures have fallen as low as minus 33 Fahrenheit (minus 36 Celsius). The government said Sunday the country's death toll now stands at 131, including many homeless people. About 2,300 other Ukrainians have sought treatment for frostbite or hypothermia.

At the other end of Europe, Britain had its first snowfall of the winter on Saturday — up to 6.3 inches (16 centimeters) — forcing London's Heathrow Airport — Europe's busiest — to cancel flights and stranding many drivers overnight on highways. Stansted, Birmingham and Luton airports suspended operations overnight as snow piled up on runways, but resumed operations Sunday.

Europe's deadly cold snap

More than 130 people have died as extreme cold continues to be pushed from Siberia to as far south as Rome.

UK On alert for severe cold through the weekend

France Snow fell as far south as the island of Corsica

Italy Passengers in two trains trapped for seven hours near Bologna

Bosnia Temperature dropped to -20 F (-29 C)

Serbia 11,000 people in rural areas cut off by snow

Slovakia Coldest temperature in 50 years

Ukraine 20 people died within 24 hours; overall death toll more than 100

Source: Reuters, BBC
Graphic: Judy Treible, Melina Yingling

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Still, Queen Elizabeth II and her husband Prince Philip managed to brave the cold and snow to attend a service at West Newton church on her Sandringham Estate in eastern England on Sunday.

The 85-year-old monarch marks 60 years on the throne on Monday, and her Diamond Jubilee anniversary will be marked by a series of regional, national and international events throughout 2012.

In Bosnia, more than 100 remote villages have been cut off by 6 1/2 feet (2 meters) of snow in the mountains. More than three feet (1 meter) fell in Sarajevo, the capital, where a state of emergency has been declared. Three helicopters cruised

over eastern Bosnia Sunday, delivering food and picking up people who needed evacuation.

Rescuers on the ground managed to get through to dozens of people who remained trapped in their cars on roads cut off by avalanches in eastern Bosnia. Near Kalinovik, they found several scared and freezing people hiding in their cars.

"There were 15, 20 cars trapped in snow for 20 hours. We barely managed to pull the people out and we are now flying them home with helicopters. It was hell," said rescue worker Darko Rojic.

Sarajevo has been paralyzed since Friday evening and authorities have ordered all schools closed. Residents have volun-

teered to remove snow and ice from the trams that are stuck along the city's tracks.

In neighboring Serbia, the government introduced emergency measures in the entire country Sunday to better help 70,000 people cut off by the snow. Interior Minister Ivica Dacic has said the move will pave the way for "better organization and coordination" of all emergency efforts.

In Montenegro, the north of the country remained cut off, although emergency crews have managed to clear some of the blocked roads.

The situation also had improved somewhat in Croatia, where bus traffic toward the coast resumed, even as snow slowed traffic throughout the country. In the coastal town of Split, where authorities declared emergency measures, dozens of people sought medical help for injuries sustained on ice and snow. Snow is extremely rare in Split, which is on the Adriatic coast.

Snow also has fallen on Spain's Balearic islands in the Mediterranean.

In Rome, Pope Benedict XVI managed to keep his Sunday appointment at the window of his studio overlooking St. Peter's Square, still covered with snow from the day before. Bundled up in a white overcoat, the pope blessed an unusually small crowd of pilgrims.

Meanwhile, Rome's mayor is being criticized for the lack of snow plows and salters. But the city counters that it can't spend millions of euros (dollars) on equipment that might not be used in decades.

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