

WORLD IN BRIEF

Associated Press

Bomb kills 3 US soldiers in Afghanistan

KABUL, Afghanistan — A roadside bomb killed three American soldiers in eastern Afghanistan today, the U.S. military said, in what appeared to be the deadliest attack on U.S. forces in Afghanistan in the last 17 months.

The military said that three other service members were wounded when the bomb went off near the city of Ghazni. An American contractor was also wounded. None of the casualties were immediately identified.

Lt. Ubon Mendie, a military spokesman, said the wounded were evacuated and are receiving medical care.

The Taliban claimed the attack, saying a U.S. tank was completely destroyed.

It appeared to be the deadliest attack on American forces since June 2017, when an Afghan army soldier shot and killed three U.S. soldiers in an insider attack in the Achin district of the eastern Nangarhar province. The Taliban claimed that attack.

The Taliban carry out near-daily attacks on Afghan forces, and in August the insurgents overran parts of Ghazni, leading to days of intense fighting before they were driven out. Ghazni was the only one of Afghanistan's 34 provinces where parliamentary elections could not be held in October. Voting there has been postponed for a year.

The U.S. and NATO formally concluded their combat mission in Afghanistan in 2014, but still provide close support to Afghan forces and carry out counterterrorism operations. Some 15,000 American forces are currently serving in Afghanistan.

Kremlin warns of hostilities in Ukraine

KIEV, Ukraine — The Kremlin warned today that a simmering war in eastern Ukraine could boil over after Russia seized three Ukrainian ships and Kiev responded by declaring martial law in parts of the country. Russia paraded the captured seamen on television, a move that Ukraine called criminal.

Ukraine considers the 24 captured men to be prisoners of war and says some have been seriously injured, while Russia says they are individuals who have violated its border.

Russia and Ukraine have blamed each other for Sunday's confrontation in the Kerch Strait, which links the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. The clash has raised the specter of renewing a full-blown conflict in eastern Ukraine and saw Russia strongly criticized at the United Nations by the United States and its allies.

The Ukrainian parliament adopted a motion Monday by the president to impose martial law for 30 days. That is something Ukraine avoided doing even when Russia annexed its nearby Crimean peninsula in 2014 or sent in clandestine troops and weapons to insurgents in war-torn eastern Ukraine.

Ukrainian troops have been fighting Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine since 2014, a conflict that has left over 10,000 dead, but fighting has eased since a truce in 2015.

Mueller accuses Manafort of breaking plea agreement

WASHINGTON — The special counsel in the Russia investigation is accusing former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort of violating his plea agreement by repeatedly lying to federal investigators, an extraordinary allegation that could expose him to a lengthy prison sentence — and potentially more criminal charges.

The torpedoing of

Manafort's plea deal, disclosed in a court filing Monday, also results in special counsel Robert Mueller's team losing a cooperating witness from the top of Donald Trump's presidential campaign who was present for several key episodes under investigation. That includes a Trump Tower meeting involving Donald Trump Jr. and a Russian lawyer he was told had derogatory information on Democrat Hillary Clinton.

The move signals a return to the acrimonious relationship Manafort has had with the special counsel's office since his indictment last year. Before his plea agreement, Manafort aggressively challenged the special counsel's legitimacy

in court, went through a bitter trial and landed himself in jail after prosecutors discovered he had attempted to tamper with witnesses in his case.

Manafort, who remains jailed, had been meeting with the special counsel's office since he pleaded guilty in September to conspiracy against the United States and conspiracy to obstruct justice. He cut that deal to head off a second trial after being convicted last summer of eight felony counts related to millions of dollars he hid from the IRS in offshore accounts.

Both cases stemmed from his Ukrainian political work and undisclosed lobbying work he admitted to carrying out in the U.S.

NASA craft lands on Mars

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — A NASA spacecraft designed to drill down into Mars' interior landed on the planet Monday after a perilous, supersonic plunge through its red skies, setting off jubilation among scientists who had waited in white-knuckle suspense for confirmation to arrive across 100 million miles of space.

Flight controllers at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California, leaped out of their chairs, screaming, dancing and hugging, upon learning that InSight had arrived on Mars, the graveyard for a multitude of previous missions.

"Touchdown confirmed!" a

flight controller called out just before 3 p.m. EST, instantly dispelling the anxiety that had gripped the control room as the spacecraft made its six-minute descent.

Because of the distance between Earth and Mars, it took eight minutes for confirmation to arrive, relayed by a pair of tiny satellites that had been trailing InSight throughout the six-month, 300-million-mile journey.

The two satellites not only transmitted the good news in almost real time, they also sent back InSight's first snapshot of Mars just 4½ minutes after landing.

The picture was speckled with dirt because the dust cover was still on the lander's camera,

but the terrain around the spacecraft looked smooth and sandy with just one sizable rock visible — pretty much what scientists had hoped for. Better photos are expected in the days ahead, after the dust covers come off.

It was NASA's — indeed, humanity's — eighth successful landing at Mars since the 1976 Viking probes, and the first in six years. NASA's Curiosity rover, which arrived in 2012, is still on the move on Mars.

InSight, a \$1 billion international project, includes a German mechanical mole that will burrow down 16 feet to measure Mars' internal heat. The lander also has a French seismometer for measuring quakes, if they exist on our smaller, geologically calmer neighbor.

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