

BRIEFLY

U.S. bombers fly over South Korea after North's second ICBM test

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — The United States flew two supersonic bombers over the Korean Peninsula on Sunday in a show of force against North Korea following the country's latest intercontinental ballistic missile test. The U.S. also said it conducted a successful test of a missile defense system located in Alaska.

The B-1 bombers were escorted by South Korean fighter jets as they performed a low pass over an air base near the South Korean capital of Seoul before returning to Andersen Air Force Base in Guam, the U.S. Pacific Air Forces said in a statement.

It said the mission was a response to North Korea's two ICBM tests this month. Analysts say flight data from the North's second test, conducted Friday night, showed that a broader part of the mainland United States, including Los Angeles and Chicago, is now in range of Pyongyang's weapons.

Vice President Mike Pence said Sunday during a visit to Estonia that the U.S. and its allies plan to increase pressure on North Korea to end its nuclear program.

"The continued provocations by the rogue regime in North Korea are unacceptable and the United States of America is going to continue to marshal the support of nations across the region and across the world to further isolate North Korea economically and diplomatically," Pence said. "But the era of strategic patience is over. The president of the United States is leading a coalition of nations to bring pressure to bear until that time that North Korea will permanently abandon its nuclear and ballistic missile program."

Russia urges U.S. to fix ties as it cuts diplomatic staff

MOSCOW (AP) — Amid a major diplomatic retaliation unseen since the Cold War era, Russia urged the United States on Monday to show the "political will" to repair ties.

President Vladimir Putin's move to cut hundreds of U.S. diplomatic personnel in Russia underlines his readiness to raise the ante in the face of new sanctions approved by the U.S. Congress. The Russian leader warned that he has more tricks up his sleeve to hurt the U.S., but he voiced hope that he wouldn't need to use them.

Vice President Mike Pence, visiting neighboring Estonia, said he hoped for "better days and better relations with Russia."

Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, said it will take time for the U.S. to recover from what he called "political schizophrenia," but he added that Russia wants constructive cooperation with Washington.

"We are interested in a steady development of our ties and are sorry to note that we are still far from that," he said.

Peskov's statement followed televised comments Sunday by Putin, who said the U.S. would have to cut 755 of its embassy and consular staff in Russia, a massive reduction he described as a response to new U.S. sanctions.

The Russian Foreign Ministry first announced the cuts Friday, when it said that the U.S. should reduce its presence to 455 employees, the number that Russia has in the United States. It also declared the closure of a U.S. recreational retreat on the outskirts of Moscow and warehouse facilities.

Moscow's action is the long-expected tit-for-tat response to former U.S. President Barack Obama's move to expel 35 Russian diplomats and shut down two Russian recreational retreats in the U.S. following allegations of Russian meddling in the 2016 presidential election.

Venezuela defiant as U.S. moves to sanction president

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Venezuela's socialist government on Monday claimed a popular mandate to dramatically recast the country's political system even as condemnations of the process poured in from governments around the world and the opposition at home.

The United States added President Nicolas Maduro to a steadily growing list of high-ranking Venezuelan officials targeted by financial sanctions, escalating a tactic that has so far failed to alter the Venezuelan government's behavior. The Trump administration backed away from earlier threats to sanction Venezuela's oil industry — a move that could undermine Maduro's government but raise U.S. gas prices and deepen Venezuela's humanitarian crisis.

Electoral authorities said more than 8 million people voted Sunday to create a constitutional assembly ending Maduro's ruling party with virtually unlimited powers — a figure widely disputed by independent analysts.

The official result would mean the ruling party won more support than it had in any national election since 2013, despite a cratering economy, spiraling inflation, shortages of medicine and malnutrition. Opinion polls showed 85 percent of Venezuelans disapproved of the constitutional assembly and similar numbers disapprove of Maduro's overall performance.

Independent analysts and opposition leaders estimated the real turnout at less than half the government's claim in a vote watched by government-allied observers but no internationally recognized poll monitors.

Trump awards Medal of Honor to Army medic 48 years later

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — An Army medic who "ran into danger" to save wounded soldiers during a Vietnam War battle despite his own serious wounds on Monday became the first Medal of Honor recipient under President Donald Trump, 48 years after the selfless acts for which James McCloughan is now nationally recognized.

McCloughan mouthed "thank you" as Trump placed the distinctive blue ribbon holding the medal around the neck of the former Army private first class. As the president and commander in chief shook McCloughan's hand, Trump said "very proud of you" before he pulled the retired soldier into an embrace.

"I know I speak for every person here when I say that we are in awe of your actions and your bravery," Trump said, describing McCloughan's actions for a rapt audience that included numerous senior White House and administration officials. Among them were Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin and retired Marine Gen. John Kelly, sworn in earlier Monday as the new White House chief of staff.

McCloughan said in a brief statement on the White House driveway after the ceremony that it was "humbling" to receive the medal. Now 71, he pledged to do his best to represent the men who fought alongside him "as the caretaker of this symbol of courage and action beyond the call of duty."

Drafted into the Army, McCloughan was a 23-year-old private first class and medic who in 1969 found himself in the middle



AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais

President Donald Trump bestows the nation's highest military honor, the Medal of Honor, to retired Army medic James McCloughan during a ceremony in the East Room of the White House in Washington, Monday. McCloughan is credited with saving the lives of members of his platoon nearly 50 years ago in the Battle of Nui Yon Hill in Vietnam.

of the raging Battle of Nui Yon Hill. McCloughan willingly entered the "kill zone" to rescue injured comrades despite his serious wounds from shrapnel from a rocket-propelled grenade.

In announcing the honor last month, the White House said McCloughan "voluntarily risked his life on nine separate occasions to rescue wounded and disoriented comrades. He suffered wounds from shrapnel and small arms fire on three separate occasions, but refused medical evacuation to stay with his unit, and continued to brave enemy fire to rescue, treat, and defend wounded Americans."

"He ran into danger," Trump said.

McCloughan, who lives in South Haven, Michigan, told The Associated Press in an interview last month that the battle was "the worst two days of my life."

He described the shrapnel as "a real bad sting" and recalled, "I was tending to two guys and dragging them at the same time into a trench line." He said he looked down to see himself covered with blood from wounds so bad that they prompted a captain to suggest he leave the battlefield to seek treatment.

"He knew me enough to know that I wasn't going," McCloughan said.

The combat medic stuck around until the battle ended, coming to the aid of his men and fighting the enemy, even knocking out an enemy RPG position with a grenade at one point. In all, the Pentagon credits McCloughan with saving the lives of 10 members of his company.

The Medal of Honor is given to Armed Forces members who distinguish themselves by going above and beyond the call of duty

in battle.

McCloughan left the Army in 1970 and spent the next several decades teaching psychology and sociology and coaching football, baseball and wrestling at South Haven High School. He retired in 2008.

In 2016, Defense Secretary Ash Carter recommended McCloughan for the Medal of Honor. But since the medal must be awarded within five years of the recipient's actions, Congress needed to pass a bill waiving the time limit. President Barack Obama signed the measure in late 2016, but he didn't get the opportunity to recognize McCloughan with the medal before his term ended this year.

"President Donald Trump will be putting that on me for the first time in his experience of doing such a thing," McCloughan said. "That's pretty special."



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