

Tillerson concedes Russia ties are sour, but holds out hope

WASHINGTON (AP) — The top American diplomat put the onus on Russia Tuesday to take steps to repair flagging relations with the United States, even as he conceded that congressional sanctions would pose a new obstacle. Holding out hope for warmer ties, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said he'd meet with his Russian counterpart within days.

In a wide-ranging assessment of his first six months in office, Tillerson also:

- Revealed the U.S. is looking at options to entice Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro to leave power peacefully.

- Insisted the U.S. doesn't blame China for North Korea's nuclear behavior despite the American pressure on Beijing. He said the U.S. is open to talks with Pyongyang.

- Argued that Iran's military must leave Syria for the U.S. to cooperate with Russia on ending the Syrian civil war.

- Named retired Gen. Anthony Zinni as special representative to try to resolve the Persian Gulf diplomatic crisis over Qatar.

But on Russia, Tillerson strained hardest to point to progress.

He was unable to show that the U.S. has fulfilled President Donald Trump's objective of a new, more cooperative relationship between the former Cold War foes, noting only modest efforts in Syria as a sign the nations share some common goals. While he said frustrated Americans want the U.S. to get along with the nuclear-armed power, he did not address the deep suspicions at home about the president's intentions. U.S. intelligence agencies have formally accused Moscow of meddling in the 2016 presidential election to help Trump.

Venezuelan opposition leaders jailed as crisis escalates

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Teams of heavily armed security agents seized two of Venezuela's top opposition leaders from their homes in the middle of the night Tuesday, dragging one into the street in his pajamas as President Nicolas Maduro's government defied U.S. sanctions and international condemnation of a plan to assume nearly unlimited powers.



An activist protests, dressed with a mask of Brazil's President Michel Temer, as he holds fake 100 Brazilian real notes and a sign that reads in Portuguese "I buy votes," at the arrivals area of the airport in Brasilia, Brazil, Tuesday. Temer faces a congressional vote on his future Wednesday, a showdown coming in a month dreaded by leaders of Latin America's largest nation.

AP Photo/Eraldo Peres

Leopoldo Lopez and Antonio Ledezma were being held at the Ramo Verde military prison south of the capital, accused by the government-allied Supreme Court of violating the terms of their house arrest by plotting to escape and releasing video statements criticizing Maduro.

Both men's allies denied the charges and vowed to continue to try to push the ruling party from power. But they gave little indication of how they planned to do that, and the capital was unusually quiet after months of sometimes violent protests. While the United States and some Latin American allies condemned the arrests, many other nations and international organizations were silent or limited themselves to expressions of concern.

Lopez's supporters released a video he taped last week saying he expected to be imprisoned again soon, and calling on Venezuelans to be firm in resisting Maduro.

"If you are looking at this video now, it's

precisely because that occurred, because they came and they illegally imprisoned me again unjustly, a prisoner of consciousness, a prisoner for my ideas, a prisoner for wanting a better Venezuela," the 46-year-old Lopez said.

Maduro appeared undeterred in his plans to seat a special assembly this week with powers to rewrite the country's constitution and override any other branch of the Venezuelan government. He has threatened to use those powers to go after his opponents and the arrests Tuesday appeared to show he was willing to proceed with full force.

Senate confirms Christopher Wray, Trump's FBI choice

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate on Tuesday overwhelmingly confirmed Christopher Wray to lead the FBI, replacing James Comey, who was abruptly fired by President Donald Trump amid the investigation into Russian meddling in last

year's presidential election.

The vote was 92-5 for Wray, a former high-ranking official in President George W. Bush's Justice Department who oversaw investigations into corporate fraud. Wray, 50, inherits the FBI at a particularly challenging time given Trump's ousting of Comey, who was admired within the bureau.

"This is a tough time to take this tough job," Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., said during a relatively low-key Senate debate of the nomination. "The previous FBI director, as we know, was fired because of the Russia investigation. The former acting attorney general was fired. And we've had a slew of other firings throughout the government over the last few months."

Wray won unanimous support from the Senate Judiciary Committee last month, with Republicans and Democrats praising his promise never to let politics get in the way of the bureau's mission.

Lawsuit: Fox coordinated with White House on false story

NEW YORK (AP) — A lawsuit filed Tuesday lays out an explosive tale of Trump allies, the White House and Fox News Channel conspiring to push a false story about Democratic leaks and an unsolved killing in order to distract attention from the Russia investigation that has been swirling around the president.

The lawsuit was filed against Fox by an investigator who had been looking into the killing of Seth Rich, a former Democratic National Committee staff member killed in 2016 in what police say was a botched robbery. The investigator alleges that Fox quoted him as saying things he never said and was willing to show President Donald Trump its story before it was posted online.

It's the second time in two days that Trump has been accused of being actively involved in pushing a public narrative to lower the heat of the Russia story. *The Washington Post* reported that the president had written a misleading statement for his son to give to *The New York Times* about Donald Trump Jr.'s meeting last summer with a Russian who promised dirt on Democrat Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign.

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