

Just tough Trump tweeting? U.S. ups Iran pressure

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's explosive twitter threat to Iran's leader comes as his administration is ratcheting up a pressure campaign on the Islamic republic that many suspect is aimed at regime change.

No one is predicting imminent war. But Trump's bellicose, all-caps challenge addressed to President Hassan Rouhani followed a speech by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in which he accused Iran's leadership of massive corruption and widespread rights abuses and urged Iranians to rise up in protest.

Both the tweet and the speech landed less than two weeks before the administration will begin re-imposing sanctions on Iran that had been lifted under the 2015 nuclear deal. In the meantime, the U.S. is stepping up Farsi-language outreach that is intended to support Iranians demonstrating against the policies of their government.

Trump's tweet doesn't appear to have been prompted by any notable shift in rhetoric from Iran.

It could have been an impulsive reaction to reports from Tehran quoting Rouhani as giving the U.S. an oft-repeated reminder that

conflict with Iran would be "the mother of all wars." Yet animosity directed at the Iranian leadership is an established part of the administration's broader foreign policy.

Iran publicly shrugged off Trump's late Sunday message — "NEVER EVER THREATEN THE UNITED STATES AGAIN OR YOU WILL SUFFER CONSEQUENCES THE LIKES OF WHICH FEW THROUGHOUT HISTORY HAVE EVER SUFFERED BEFORE."

Tweeted Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Monday: COLOR US UNIMPRESSED: The world heard even harsher bluster a few months ago. And Iranians have heard them — albeit more civilized ones for 40 yrs. We've been around for millennia & seen fall of empires, incl our own, which lasted more than the life of some countries. BE CAUTIOUS!"

Asked at the White House if he had concerns about provoking Iran, Trump said simply, "None at all."

Tehran is already aware of what is coming from the administration as consequences of Trump's May withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear accord take shape.

As Pompeo noted in his speech to Iranian-Americans and others in California on



This combination of two pictures shows U.S. President Donald Trump, left, on July 22 and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani on Feb. 6. In his latest salvo, Trump tweeted late on Sunday that hostile threats from Iran could bring dire consequences.

Sunday, the centerpiece will be the re-imposition of U.S. economic sanctions; the first batch will go back into force on Aug. 4 targeting the Iranian automotive sector and trade in gold and other metals. A more significant set of sanctions that will hit Iran's oil industry and central bank by punishing countries and companies that do business with them will resume on Nov. 4.

"Right now, the United States is undertaking a diplomatic and financial pressure campaign to cut off

the funds that the regime uses to enrich itself and support death and destruction," Pompeo said in his speech at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum in Simi Valley.

Pompeo also slammed Iran's political, judicial and military officials, accusing several by name of participating in rampant corruption, and called its religious leaders "hypocritical holy men" who amassed wealth while allowing their people to suffer. He said the government has "heartlessly

repressed its own people's human rights, dignity and fundamental freedoms," and he hailed the "proud Iranian people (for) not staying silent about their government's many abuses."

"The United States under President Trump will not stay silent either," he said.

He was right. True to form, Trump did not stay silent.

But the White House blamed Rouhani for inciting the war of words with his comment that "America must understand well

that peace with Iran is the mother of all peace and war with Iran is the mother of all wars."

"WE ARE NO LONGER A COUNTRY THAT WILL STAND FOR YOUR DEMENTED WORDS OF VIOLENCE & DEATH. BE CAUTIOUS!" Trump wrote.

Reaction from Congress, particularly Democrats, was swift and critical.

Democratic Sen. Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire, a member of the Foreign Relations Committee, acknowledged that Iran's terrorist activities in the Middle East pose a threat but suggested it wouldn't be solved through a tweet from Trump.

"Sadly, after pulling us out of the nuclear deal with Europe and Iran, there doesn't seem to be strategy for how to move forward to fight Iran's activities," she said.

Trump's National Security Council pushed back:

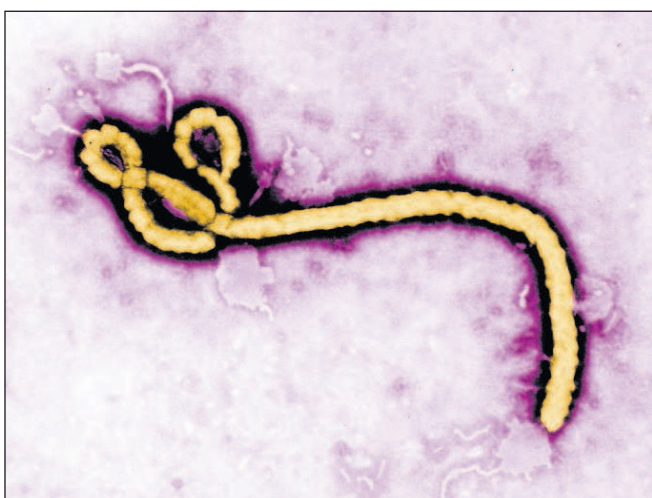
"Our differences are with the Iranian regime's actions and, in particular, with the actions of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, not the Iranian people. The Trump administration's Iran policy seeks to address the totality of these threats and malign activities and to bring about a change in the Iranian regime's behavior."

Doctors: Woman likely spread Ebola a year after first infection

LONDON (AP) — A Liberian woman who probably caught Ebola in 2014 may have infected three relatives a year after she first fell sick, doctors reported in a study published Monday.

There have been previous instances of men spreading Ebola to women via sexual transmission — the virus can survive in semen for more than a year — but the new case is the first time scientists have suggested that Ebola was spread from a woman after such a prolonged period.

The rare possibility of Ebola spreading long after infection highlights the importance of monitoring survivors, especially with the imminent end of the most recent flare-up of the disease in Congo. That country's latest outbreak,



A colorized transmission electron micrograph image. Frederick Murphy/CDC via AP, File

announced in May, has so far recorded 38 confirmed cases, including 14 deaths. It is due to be declared contained on Wednesday, which will mark 42 days, or two incubation periods, since the

last case was recorded. "The Ebola virus hides in places where it can escape the antibodies from a body's immune system, so there is a need for vigilance," said Dr. David Heymann, a professor

of infectious diseases at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, who was not linked to the new research.

The unusual cluster of cases in Liberia was identified after the woman's 15-year-old son was diagnosed with Ebola in November 2015. Scientists then tested the rest of his family: the woman, her husband and their three younger sons.

The 15-year-old died a few days later. The father and an 8-year-old boy were positive for Ebola, but both recovered. The couple's 5-year-old son wasn't infected.

Doctors found Ebola antibodies in the mother, her breast milk and her 2-month-old baby, suggesting a previous infection and the possibility she passed on protection to her infant son

through breastfeeding.

Dr. Emily Kainne Dokubo, who led the Ebola response in Liberia for the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said it was possible the woman infected her husband and two older sons with Ebola when they took care of her — the disease is normally spread through contact with an infected patient's blood or other bodily fluids.

BRIEFLY

12 audio files sent to prosecutors in Michael Cohen probe

NEW YORK (AP) — A dozen audio recordings seized by the FBI from President Donald Trump's former lawyer, Michael Cohen, were forwarded to federal prosecutors after lawyers dropped challenges on attorney-client privilege grounds, a former judge revealed Monday.

The recordings were among millions of files taken from Cohen in April as part of a criminal probe of his business practices.

Barbara Jones, a court-appointed lawyer and former Manhattan federal judge helping to decide which of the seized files are protected by privilege, said in a court filing that prosecutors received the recordings on Friday after attorneys for Trump, Cohen and the Trump Organization dropped privilege claims.

The same day, Trump attorney Rudy Giuliani said Cohen had recorded a conversation in which the president had discussed a potential payment to squash the story of a former Playboy model who said she had an affair with Trump.

In a weekend tweet, Trump called Cohen's practice of recording conversations "totally unheard of & perhaps illegal."

Attorney Lanny Davis, speaking on Cohen's behalf, has said what is on the tape will not harm Cohen.

Trump considers yanking critics' security clearances

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump is considering revoking the security clearances of six former top national security officials who have been critical of his administration, a move that opponents and experts say would be an unprecedented politicization of the clearance process.

White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said Monday that the president is "exploring the mechanisms" to strip clearance from former CIA Director John Brennan as well as five other former officials who have held some of the most sensitive positions in government: former FBI Director James Comey; James Clapper, the former

director of national intelligence; former CIA Director Michael Hayden; former national security adviser Susan Rice; and Andrew McCabe, who served as Trump's deputy FBI director until he was fired in March.

The leaders have served in both Democratic and Republican administrations, including Trump's.

Sanders accused the officials of having "politicized and in some cases monetized their public service and security clearances" by making "baseless accusations" that the Trump administration had improper contact with Russia or was influenced by Russia.

Sanders did not cite specific comments made by any of the officials. But the president has been seething over the backlash to his meeting last week with Russia's Vladimir Putin and the ongoing investigations into Russia's meddling in the 2016 election, whether his campaign aides were involved in the effort and whether he obstructed justice.

Senate confirms Robert Wilkie for Veterans Affairs secretary

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate on Monday confirmed Pentagon official Robert Wilkie to be secretary of Veterans Affairs, charged with delivering on President Donald Trump's campaign promises to fire bad VA employees and steer more patients to the private sector.

Wilkie won approval on a bipartisan vote of 86-9, securing the backing of many Democrats after insisting at his confirmation hearing that he will not privatize the government's second-largest department. It was a moment of respite from the sharp political divisions engulfing Trump's other nominees in the final months before congressional midterm elections.

Wilkie is Trump's third pick for the job in 18 months. The longtime public official says he "shake up complacency" at VA, which has struggled with long waits in providing medical treatment to millions of veterans.

In a statement released by the White House, Trump applauded the confirmation vote and said he looked forward to Wilkie's leadership.

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