

Trump says he does not mind if Philippines cuts military pact

Reuters | Washington

US President Donald Trump said on Wednesday he did not mind Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte's decision to end a decades-old military agreement with the United States, a position at odds with that of his defense secretary who viewed the move with dismay.

Duterte on Tuesday announced termination of the two-decade-old Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA). US Defense Secretary Mark Esper called the decision "unfortunate" as Washington and its allies press China to abide by "international rules" in Asia.

The US embassy in Manila called it "a serious step with significant implications." Duterte's decision, sparked by the revocation of a US visa held by a former police chief who led Duterte's bloody war on drugs, takes legal effect in 180 days and US officials have expressed hope it can be reversed or delayed.

"I don't really mind if they



U.S. President Donald Trump

would like to do that, it will save a lot of money," Trump told reporters at the White House when asked about Duterte's move and whether anything could be done to get him to reconsider. "My views are different from others," he added.

Trump said the United States had helped the Philippines defeat Islamic State militants. He said he had "a very good" rela-

tionship with Duterte and added: "we'll see what happens."

Duterte's decision could complicate US military interests in the broader Asia-Pacific region as China's ambitions rise. Some Filipino senators quickly sought to block the move, arguing Duterte had no right to unilaterally scrap international pacts the country's senate had ratified.



Trump has frequently expressed a desire to bring US military forces home from decades-long deployments abroad and has strong-armed some allies into paying more for the right to US defense

Esper referred to the period before Duterte's decision takes effect when speaking to reporters on Tuesday.

"One hundred and eighty days. We've got to work through it, and we'll just take a deep breath and take it one day at a time ... I don't get too excited about these things. We've got a process we have to work through."

US, Taliban have negotiated 7-day reduction in violence

Reuters

US Defence Secretary Mark Esper said yesterday that the United States and the Taliban had negotiated a proposal for a seven-day reduction in violence.

Sources had told Reuters that a US-Taliban peace deal could be signed this month if the Taliban significantly reduces violence, which could lead to an eventual withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan.

"The United States and the Taliban have negotiated a proposal for a seven-day reduction in violence," Esper told reporters during a news conference in Brussels at NATO headquarters.

"I'm here today consulting with allies about this proposal, and we've had a series of productive bilateral and collective meetings about the path forward," he added.

The tentative timeline shared with Reuters by sources came a day after Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said there had been a possible breakthrough in US-Taliban talks in Qatar.

The talks had been deadlocked in part over a US demand that the insurgents agree



US Defense Secretary Mark Esper

to sharply reduce violence as part of any American troop withdrawal accord.

There are about 13,000 US troops as well as thousands of other NATO personnel in Afghanistan, 18 years after a US-led coalition invaded the country following the Sept. 11, 2001, al Qaeda attacks on the United States.

"It will be a continual evaluative process as we go forward - if we go forward," Esper added.

UK Treasury chief quits as Johnson shakes up Cabinet

AP | London

UK Treasury chief Sajid Javid unexpectedly resigned yesterday after resisting a reduction in his power, as Prime Minister Boris Johnson sought to tighten his grip on the government with a Cabinet shake-up.

Javid had been widely expected to keep his job — the second most powerful in the government — as Johnson fired some Cabinet members and promoted more junior ministers to top jobs.

He smiled as he entered the prime minister's 10 Downing St. office yesterday morning to meet Johnson along with other ministers who were being promoted or kept in place. But a spokesman confirmed soon after that Javid had quit.

Britain's Press Association news agency reported that Javid had resigned after being told to fire all his aides and replace them with staff appointed by the prime minister's office.

The government quickly replaced him with Rishi Sunak. He was previously a deputy to Javid at the Treasury and is regarded as a dependable Johnson loyalist.

Javid's resignation follows reports he had clashed with Johnson's powerful adviser, Dominic Cummings, a self-styled political disruptor who is mistrusted by many lawmakers and officials.

"Dominic Cummings has clearly won the battle to take absolute control of the Treasury and install his stooge" at the helm, said John McDonnell, finance spokesman for the opposition Labour Party.

Javid had been due to deliver his annual budget in less than a month — a crucial financial plan as the government tries to boost Britain's economy in the wake of the country's departure from the European Union last month.

Johnson's government faces the challenge of negotiating a new relationship with the 27-na-



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson during the weekly Prime Minister's Questions inside the House of Commons in London



British lawmaker Rishi Sunak, and Chancellor of the Exchequer leaves 10 Downing Street

tion European Union by the end of this year. Johnson also has ambitious infrastructure plans including a 100 billion-pound (\$130 billion) high-speed railway connecting London to central and northern England, and has vowed to boost poorer regions outside the economic hub of London and southeast

England.

Paul Dales, chief U.K. economist at Capital Economic, said Javid had appeared reluctant to increase public borrowing to fund higher spending.

He said Javid's departure should "allow the government to push through even bigger increases in public investment and perhaps resuscitate tax cuts that previously looked dead in the water."

The resignation was a curve ball in a Cabinet shake-up that was intended to tighten Johnson's grip on government after winning a big parliamentary majority in December's election. That victory allowed Johnson to take Britain out of the European Union last month, delivering on his key election promise.

Now his Conservative administration faces the even bigger challenge of negotiating a new trading relationship with the EU while also seeking trade deals with the United States and other countries.

Britain and the EU are aiming to have a deal covering trade, se-

curity and other areas in place by the time a post-Brexit transition period ends on Dec. 31.

So far, the two sides are far apart in their demands. And even with a deal, the U.K. faces a huge adjustment when decades of seamless trade and travel with the EU end at the start of 2021.

Johnson had intended to keep the most senior ministers in their jobs. His office said Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, Home Secretary Priti Patel, Justice Secretary Robert Buckland and Cabinet Office Minister Michael Gove were all staying in post.

Several high-profile women in Johnson's government, including Business Secretary Andrea Leadsom, Environment Secretary Theresa Villiers and Housing Minister Esther McVey, all said they had been fired.

Johnson also sacked Northern Ireland Secretary Julian Smith — another surprise move. Smith had been widely praised for helping to end political deadlock that left Northern Ireland without a regional government and assembly for three years.

Three Indian-origin MPs get berths



London

UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Thursday made major changes in his Cabinet, giving berths to three MPs of the Indian-origin. Boris Johnson appointed Rishi Sunak as UK's new Chancellor of the Exchequer, replacing Sajid Javid who quit over differences with the Prime Minister. Rishi Sunak, who is married to Akshata, the daughter of Infosys co-founder N.R. Narayana Murthy, was Chief Secretary to the Treasury since July 2019.

In the Cabinet reshuffle, Home Secretary Priti Patel retained her post, while International Development Secretary Alok Sharma has been appointed Business Secretary and Minister for the upcoming climate conference COP26, in Glasgow. Those who were dropped from the Cabinet include Northern Ireland Secretary Julian Smith, Business Secretary Andrea Leadsom, Housing Minister Esther McVey and Environment Secretary Theresa Villiers.

Attorney General Geoffrey Cox has been asked to resign, while incumbent Chancellor Sajid Javid, the first Asian to become a Cabinet Minister, quit after he was asked to fire all his advisors, the BBC reported. "The Prime Minister said he had to fire all his special advisers and replace them with Number 10 special advisers to make it one team. The Chancellor said no self-respecting minister would accept those terms," BBC quoted a source close to Javid as saying.

After pressure from the British and Irish governments, the main Irish nationalist and British unionist power-sharing parties returned to work last month.

As well as reworking his Cabinet, Johnson appointed a new leader for the UN climate change conference that Britain is due to host later this year. The summit, known as the 26th Conference of the Parties, or COP26, is scheduled to be held in Glasgow in

November.

Planning for that has got off to a rocky start, with Johnson last week firing Claire O'Neill, a former British government minister appointed last year to head up the event.

The government said Thursday that Alok Sharma, previously in charge of international development, would become business secretary and also take charge of COP26.