

world

US man with gun cache charged for threatening to shoot up hotel



Weapons and ammunition allegedly seized from Rodolfo Montoya (AP)

Los Angeles, United States

A US man with a large home Arsenal was charged Thursday for allegedly threatening to open fire at a Los Angeles hotel, as the United States reels from recent mass shootings.

The suspect, 37-year-old Long Beach Marriott employee Rodolfo Montoya, allegedly told a co-worker that he was angry and planned to open fire at work on anyone who crossed his path.

Police found an assortment of weapons, including an AR-15 rifle, which Montoya was not authorized to have in the state of California. The weapon has been commonly used to commit a number of US gun massacres.

Authorities additionally found other firearms, hun-

dreds of rounds of ammunition and tactical gear.

“Suspect Montoya had clear plans, intent and the means to carry out an act of violence that may have resulted in a mass casualty incident,” Long Beach Police Chief Robert Luna told reporters at a news conference after the arrest.

According to an initial investigation, Montoya, who was a cook, was upset over recent workplace activity having to do with human resources.

His colleague took the threat seriously and told a manager who alerted the police.

Montoya was arrested Tuesday at his home.

Luna told the hotel manager that he “saved many lives, not only of your employees but any customers that may have been at the Marriott when this guy decided to show up.”

Syrian forces surround Turkish post: monitor



Turkish military vehicles passing through Maaret al-Numan in Syria's northern province of Idlib, heading back to Turkey after a reported two day mission into Syria.

Beirut, Lebanon

Syrian government forces surrounded a Turkish military observation post yesterday after overrunning nearby villages following their capture of a key northwestern town from jihadists, a war monitor said.

The town of Morek, where the Turkish troops have been cut off, lies in the north of Hama province, part of a jihadist-ruled region centred on neighbouring Idlib province that has been under government assault since late April.

“Regime forces have surrounded the Turkish observation post in Morek after capturing other towns and villages in this pocket,” the Syr-

The Idlib region, which sits on the Turkish border, is now the last major stronghold of opposition to the Russia-backed government of President Bashar al-Assad

ian Observatory for Human Rights said.

The rebels had withdrawn from the area ahead of the army’s entry into the strategic Idlib province town of Khan Sheikhun on Wednesday.

Government forces overran the rest of the pocket, including the town of Kafr Zita without resistance.

The observation post in

Morek is one of 12 the Turkish army set up along the front line between government forces and the jihadists and their rebel allies last year.

Ankara vowed on Tuesday that it would not abandon any of the posts and warned Damascus “not to play with fire”.

“We will do whatever is necessary to ensure the security of our soldiers and observation posts,” Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu told reporters in Ankara.

The troops’ mission was to oversee the establishment of a buffer zone agreed by Ankara and Moscow in September.

But the jihadists failed to pull back from the zone as agreed and in April, government and Russian forces resumed intense bombardment of the region.

22 missing after Indonesia ferry fire  
Jakarta, Indonesia

Nearly two dozen people are missing from the carcass of a ferry that went up in flames off Indonesia’s Java island, a port official said yesterday.

The boat was en route from Indonesia’s second-biggest city Surabaya to Balikpapan on Borneo island with some 277 people aboard when it caught fire Thursday evening, according to the official.

Television images showed plumes of black smoke coming out of the boat, as search teams hunted for at least 22 missing passengers.

“There were 277 people on board and so far 255 have been rescued alive,” Syachrul Nugroho, a spokesman for Surabaya’s Tanjung Perak port, said.

“Twenty-two people are still unaccounted for... but we don’t know if they’re still on the boat.”

The cause of the accident was not immediately clear.

Nugroho said it appeared that a fire broke out and the ferry’s power went down, cutting off water pumps.

“The crew couldn’t extinguish the fire because the water pumps weren’t working so passengers started to abandon the ship,” he added.

Passenger ferries are a common means of transport in Indonesia, an archipelago of some 17,000 islands, despite poor safety standards.

Russia launches floating nuclear reactor in Arctic

Moscow, Russia

Russia will launch the world’s first floating nuclear reactor and send it on an epic journey across the Arctic, despite environmentalists warning of serious risks to the region.

Loaded with nuclear fuel, the Akademik Lomonosov will leave the Arctic port of Murmansk to begin its 5,000 kilometre (3,000-mile) voyage to northeastern Siberia.

Nuclear agency Rosatom says the reactor is a simpler alternative to building a conventional plant on ground that is frozen all year round, and it intends to

sell such reactors abroad.

But environmental groups have long warned of the dangers of the project, dubbing it a potential “Chernobyl on ice” and a “nuclear Titanic.”

A deadly explosion this month at a military testing site in Russia’s far north, causing a radioactive surge, has prompted further concerns.

The reactor’s trip is expected to last between four and six weeks, depending on the weather conditions and the amount of ice on the way.

Work began on the 144-metre (472-foot) Akademik Lomonosov in Saint Petersburg in 2006.

When it arrives in Pevek, a town of 5,000 in the Siberian region of Chukotka, it will replace a local nuclear plant and a closed coal plant.

It is due to go into operation by the end of year, mainly serving the region’s oil platforms as Russia develops the exploitation of hydrocarbons in the Arctic.

Radioactive waste

Rashid Alimov, the head of the energy sector of Greenpeace Russia, said environmental groups had been critical of the idea of a floating reactor since the 1990s.

“Any nuclear power plant produces radioactive waste and can have an accident, but Akademik Lomonosov is additionally vulnerable to storms,” he said.

The float is towed by other vessels, making a collision during a storm more likely, he said.

Because Rosatom plans to store spent fuel onboard, Alimov said “any accident involving this fuel might have a serious impact on the fragile environment of the Arctic.”

He added that there is “no in-

frastructure for a nuclear clean up” in the region.

Global warming and melting ice has made the Northeast Passage -- which connects the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific along Russia’s northern coast -- more accessible.

When AFP visited the Akademik Lomonosov in May 2018, it was a shabby brown colour. It has since been repainted in the red, white and blue of the Russian flag.

The vessel weighs 21,000 tons and has two reactors with a capacity of 35 megawatts each,

close to that of those used by nuclear icebreakers.

It has a crew of 69 and travels at a speed of 3.5 to 4.5 knots.

Alimov said the project was a missed opportunity as Chukotka, a region larger than Texas populated by only 50,000 people, “has a huge potential for the development of wind energy.”

“A floating nuclear power plant is a too risky and too expensive way of producing electricity,” he said.

The nuclear industry, seeking to reinvent itself in a gloomy market, is developing smaller, cheaper reactors to attract new customers.

They follow the examples of submarines, icebreakers and aircraft carriers, which have long used nuclear power, and are intended for isolated areas with little infrastructure.

Floating power unit (FPU) Akademik Lomonosov is being towed to Atomflot moorage of the Russian northern port city of Murmansk

