

Hello and welcome back. I'm Jim Tedder in Washington, with a program designed to help you learn and improve your American English. At the same time, you can stay up to date on some important issues that are taking place around the world. Today we look at the uneasy situation in Ukraine, and find out what a major world power has to say.

Then we hear about some influential American lawmakers who are trying to connect the politics and economics of Venezuela with the situation in Cuba.

Good or bad, it's our world, and we'll bring it to you ...As It Is.

First we turn to Ukraine. The situation there seems to change from day to day. This week, China repeated its call for calm in the area. This came after a disputed referendum in which a large majority of Crimean voters are said to have marked ballots in support of leaving Ukraine and joining Russia.

The issues of separatism and self-rule are very sensitive ones in China. Experts have been closely watching to see how China reacts to the referendum. VOA's Christopher Cruise has been watching the situation closely, and he joins us with some important information.

On Monday, the Chinese foreign ministry said the international community should help ease tensions in the area. Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei said China always respects each country's territorial claims.

China's official answer to the crisis in Ukraine has been very interesting for China watchers. They say Russia has failed to honor two of China's most important diplomatic values: non-interference in other countries' affairs, and protection of territorial rights. Observers note that Russia sent military forces to the area after Ukrainian lawmakers ousted the country's president. Later, the Russian government called for a referendum on Crimea's future.

China is an ally of Russia at the United Nations. It could have voted against a Security Council resolution that called the referendum in Crimea illegal. But China decided not to vote at all. The measure was not approved because Russia blocked it. But some experts say the decision not to vote showed a Chinese lack of support for the Russian government.

But observers in China dismiss such talk. Feng Shaolei is the director of the Center for Russian Studies at East China Normal University.

Feng Shaolei says the two countries agree on the causes of the crisis. And, he says, they have learned more about each other's position. Mr. Feng says China has been careful in its reaction to the crisis because it understands the complexities in the Crimea.

The idea of a popular vote to decide a country's territory is a very sensitive one in China. Separatism is an extremist ideology among Chinese officials. Such ideas could be considered a threat to the Chinese government's rule in areas like Xinjiang or Tibet.

China does not permit any political movements that support separatism within its borders. I'm Christopher Cruise.

## **Trouble for Venezuela and Cuba?**

Half way around the world, we also find unrest in the South American country of Venezuela. For the past month, thousands of people have protested what they say is a worsening quality of life. The Venezuelan government has reacted with violence.

Cuban American politicians in the United States, are among the loudest critics of the Venezuelan government. The politicians have denounced Venezuela's violent repressions of anti-government demonstrations. Cuban American members of Congress have led efforts to punish the Venezuelan leadership. And these lawmakers may also want to cause problems in Cuba.

The three are Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen from Florida, and two Senators: Marco Rubio, also of Florida, and Robert Menendez of New Jersey.

The proposed sanctions include banning visas and barring Venezuelan leaders from using any money or property held in the United States. The lawmakers say these measures will send a message condemning the use of force against anti-government protesters.

William LeoGrande is a specialist in Latin American politics at the American University in Washington, DC. He says the goal of the sanctions is to break up Venezuela's alliance with Cuba. One way is to end the flow of low-priced Venezuelan oil to Cuba.

"If the current government of Venezuela were to be overthrown, a conservative government would probably cut that assistance to Cuba and thereby destabilize the situation in Cuba. That, I think, is what conservative Cuban-Americans are after."

There is public anger in Venezuela about food shortages, high inflation and the high crime rate. This anger has fueled sometimes violent demonstrations in the country. Venezuela's leaders blame the United States for inciting and supporting such protests. But U.S. officials have denied any such involvement.

In a video on the Youtube website, Senator Rubio blamed Cuba for helping to organize Venezuela's use of force against protesters.

"He's protesting against the government of Venezuela, which are puppets of Havana, completely infiltrated by Cubans and agents from Havana. Not agents, openly, foreign military affairs officials."

Carl Meacham is the director of the Americas Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. He says this claim fails to truthfully describe the long alliance between Cuba and Venezuela. The countries grew closer during the presidency of Hugo Chavez, who died last year.

"So I think that even though that relationship is clear and that partnership is beneficial to both countries, I think the Venezuelans are in the driver's seat of the developments we are seeing."

Some members of the United States Congress want to take steps against Venezuela because of its ties to Cuba. But observers say wider support for sanctions is the result of a desire to find a peaceful end to the conflict in Venezuela and to avoid possible unrest in the area.

Before we move on, here is just a bit of American history. On this day in 1848, Wyatt Earp was born. He became one of this country's most famous lawmen. He was also a very large part of the old west, and will be known forever for his quickness with a pistol at the gunfight at the OK Corral in Tombstone, Arizona.

Today in San Juan Capistrano, California, folks will be squinting their eyes and craning their necks to look for the swallows, small beautiful birds, to return. They come back every year, and some stories say they have done so, since 1776.

And way down yonder in New Orleans, Louisiana, a book festival is underway to honor American writer Tennessee Williams. If you want to read a real classic, try to find "A Streetcar Named Desire" by Mr. Williams at your local library or book store.



That's all for now, but more Learning English programs are on the way. And there is world news at the beginning of the hour on VOA. I'm Jim Tedder in Washington. See you tomorrow!





