

# President Wanted to Get Rid of ‘Real Nut Job’: Probe Into Trump’s Firing of FBI Chief Widens



*President Donald Trump shakes hands with James Comey, former director of the FBI, during an Inaugural Law Enforcement Officers and First Responders Reception.*

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- The former FBI director James Comey is reportedly to testify in public during the U.S. inquiry into alleged Russian interference as a series of damaging revelations pile further pressure on the embattled president Donald Trump.

Comey, who was sacked by Trump on May 9 in the midst of an investigation into the president’s alleged links to Russia, is to give evidence in an open hearing of the Senate intelligence committee at some point after U.S. Memorial Day on May 29, the committee announced on Friday.

The announcement came as the Washington Post reported that a White House official had been identified as a

“significant person of interest” by the law enforcement investigation into links between Russia and the Trump election campaign.

The New York Times, quoting a U.S. official, reported that Trump told Russian officials in the Oval Office this month that firing Comey had relieved “great pressure” on him, as he labeled the former FBI chief a “real nut job”. The president’s spokesman did not deny the report, but said Comey had made it harder for the U.S. to engage with Russia.

Trump, who arrived in Saudi Arabia on Saturday for an official visit, has called media coverage of his alleged links to Russia, and his apparent subsequent

efforts to stifle the FBI investigation, as “the single greatest witch hunt of a politician in American history”.

The president’s administration has been dogged by claims of being too close to the Russian government since their alleged interference in the 2016 election. It has been claimed that Trump himself revealed highly confidential intelligence to Russian officials in the Oval Office.

Confirming Comey’s appearance, the committee chairman, Senator Richard Burr, said: “The committee looks forward to receiving testimony from the former director on his role in the development of the intelligence community assessment on Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. elections and I am hopeful that he will clarify for the American people recent events that have been broadly reported in the media.”

Senator Mark Warner, the vice-chairman, said he hoped the testimony “will help answer some of the questions that have arisen since director Comey was so suddenly dismissed by the president”.

On Wednesday, the New York Times reported that Trump had urged Comey to drop his investigation into former national security adviser Michael Flynn. The report also revealed the fact that Comey had written memos describing his interactions with Trump, which he believed were inappropriate.

## Sectarian Fighting Kills Dozens in Central Africa

ABIDJAN (Reuters) -- Fighting this week between rival Christian and Muslim militias in the Central African Republic town of Bria killed at least 22 people, including 17 civilians, and forced some 10,000 others to flee, the country’s United Nations mission said Saturday.

The clashes come amid a week of intense violence between mainly Muslim fighters from the former Seleka rebel coalition that overthrew President Francois Bozize in 2013 and anti-balaka Christian militias who oppose them.

“The fighting between armed groups in Bria and elsewhere in eastern CAR must stop,” Diane Corner, the deputy head of the peacekeeping mission, MINUSCA, said in a statement.

“These appalling acts of violence committed by armed groups over the last week have killed scores of innocent Central African men, women and children, deprived families of their homes and citizens of their livelihoods,” she said.

The rival factions fought over the northeastern town of Bria’s airstrip

Friday and looting forced humanitarian workers to seek refuge inside the MINUSCA base there.

In addition to the dead, some 36 people were injured in the clashes, the UN mission said.

UN soldiers have also reinforced their positions in the towns of Bangassou and Alindao, which have been hit by violence this week as well.

Red Cross workers said Wednesday they recovered 115 bodies in Bangassou, a diamond mining hub, after several days of fighting there.

## Duterte Under Pressure to Stand Up to China



*This handout photograph released on May 19, 2017, shows Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte delivering a speech in Davao City on the southern island of Mindanao.*

MANILA (Reuters) -- A Philippines Supreme Court judge called Saturday for Manila to file an international arbitration case and a complaint with the United Nations over what the country’s leader said was a threat of war made by Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Supreme Court Associate Justice Antonio Carpio, a staunch critic of Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte’s business-focused rapprochement with China, said the use or threat of force to settle disputes between states is outlawed under the UN Charter and if the president did nothing to protest that, he was “selling us out”.

Duterte Friday said his Chinese counterpart had warned him there would be war if Manila tried to enforce an arbitration ruling and drill for oil in a disputed part of the South China Sea. China has not responded to Duterte’s latest comment.

He was referring to the 2016 ruling by an arbitral tribunal in The Hague granting the Philippines sovereign rights to access offshore oil and gas fields in its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), including the Reed Bank, in the South China Sea.

Carpio, who was part of the Philippine legal team that made the case in The Hague, said Xi’s threat was a “gross violation” of the United Nations Charter, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia to which China and the Philippines are parties.

“The Philippines’ recourse is to bring China’s threat of war to another UNCLOS arbitral tribunal,” he said.

“The president cannot simply do nothing, or worse acquiesce to China’s action, for inaction is the opposite of

protecting Philippine EEZ.”

The Philippines, he said, should strengthen alliances, particularly with defense treaty partner the United States.

He also criticized Duterte for dealing with China bilaterally and “his habit of presenting a picture of hopelessness so people would agree to his own solutions like the full embrace of China.”

Duterte has orchestrated a staggering reversal of Philippine foreign policy towards China, choosing not to confront Beijing over the South China Sea, but to tap it for billions of dollars of loans and investments for infrastructure, the backbone of his economic agenda.

Duterte disclosed Xi’s alleged threat in a speech Friday as he hit back at domestic critics, Carpio among them, who said he has gone soft on Beijing by refusing to push it to comply with The Hague ruling. He discussed it with Xi when they met in Beijing Monday.

Presidential Spokesman Ernesto Abella said Saturday a “frank discussion” had taken place with China on possible oil explorations in the South China Sea and “both parties agreed to pursue a more peaceful resolution to the matter that satisfies both our sovereign and economic rights.”

Abella defended Duterte and said his two-track approach to dealing with China focused on economic growth without compromising Philippine sovereignty.

## Macron Gov’t to Press Ahead With Military Plans



*French President Emmanuel Macron, center, flanked by Defense Minister Sylvie Goulard, left, and Foreign Minister Jean-Yves le Drian delivers a speech to the troops of Operation Barkhane, France's largest overseas military operation, in Gao, northern Mali, May 19, 2017.*

PARIS (Dispatches) -- France’s new Armed Forces Minister Sylvie Goulard has vowed to press ahead with European military projects and work more closely with Germany, a move she said was vital to deter countries tempted to look inwards.

Goulard, a European expert, took the control of the renamed defense ministry last week, a surprise decision by President Emmanuel Macron that further emphasized his European push and desire to work towards greater military integration.

“I am attached to making European defense projects move forward,” she said in a her first message to military and civilian personnel released Saturday.

“Some elements already exist, but others still need to be conceived and developed to better ensure

our security in these times of interdependence. To achieve this effort, work with Germany will be decisive.”

Goulard also said she wanted to ensure that Franco-British security and military cooperation did not suffer from London’s decision to leave the European Union.

An advocate of closer EU integration, Macron backs a “multi-speed” Europe, an idea that has earned growing support in Germany and other EU countries since Britain voted to leave the bloc.

In the past, France has tended to be seen by allies as an intransigent, go-it-alone power because of its military interventions in arenas like Libya, the Middle East and the Sahel.

## Germany, Ukraine to Get Back to Minsk Talks



*German Chancellor Angela Merkel, left, and Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko address a press conference in Berlin, August 24, 2015.*

BERLIN (Reuters) -- German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko agreed Saturday to try to improve the security situation in eastern Ukraine and return to implementing the Minsk ceasefire deal after an upsurge in violence there. A ceasefire agreement signed in February 2015 in Minsk that aims to end the conflict between Ukrainian government forces and pro-Russian separatists has failed to end artillery fighting. Each side accuses the other of violating the truce.

Before holding two-way talks outside Berlin, Merkel said that after a lull over Easter, an increase in breaches of the ceasefire was “unfortunately” evident.

“Today our main theme will be how to improve the security situation. The security situation ... is the main precondition for making further political progress,” she said.

Poroshenko also expressed support for the process.

“We must act decisively to return the Minsk process to a constructive course and we do not see an alternative to the Minsk process,” he said.

Merkel and former French President Francois Hollande had worked hard to find a political solution to the conflict and were in regular contact with Poroshenko and Russian President Vladimir Putin in a four-way group called the Normandy format.

Merkel said that new French President Emmanuel Macron had made clear during talks this week that he was committed to continuing that process.

“We will continue with the Minsk process and the Normandy format will exist. We will very quickly look for possibilities for the four presidents, or three presidents and one chancellor, to be in contact with each other,” said Merkel.

Fighting between pro-Russian rebels and government forces first broke out in April 2014 after a pro-European uprising in Kiev ousted Ukraine’s Moscow-backed president. About 10,000 people have been killed in the three-year conflict.

The European Union imposed sanctions on Russia after Moscow annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014 and then backed separatist rebels in the east.

## News in Brief

ABUJA, Nigeria (AP) -- The 82 Nigerian schoolgirls recently released after more than three years in Boko Haram captivity reunited with their families for the first time Saturday, as anxious parents looked for signs of how deeply the extremists had changed their daughters’ lives.

Images from the scene showed brightly dressed families rushing through the crowd and embracing outdoors. One small group sank to their knees, with a woman raising her hands as if praising in church. Others were in tears. The families were reunited in the capital, Abuja, where the girls were taken by Nigerian authorities after their release early this month.

BERLIN (AP) -- Thunderstorms have created havoc across Germany leading to the derailment of a train with seven people injured, flight cancellations at Hamburg’s airport and a mudslide on a highway in the eastern part of the country.

The German news agency dpa reported Saturday that a regional train derailed near Stadtroda in eastern Germany after the tracks were covered by a mudslide late Friday. Seven people were slightly injured and the tracks remained closed Saturday. Some 140 passengers had to spend the night on cots after 29 flights were canceled at Hamburg due to thunderstorms and lightning.

BEIJING (AFP) -- China has denied U.S. allegations that two Chinese fighter jets acted unprofessionally in intercepting an American military plane earlier this week, saying that its aircraft were acting in accordance with the law.

“Related remarks from the U.S. side are inconsistent with fact,” the Chinese Ministry of Defense said in a statement posted to its website late Friday. “On May 17, a U.S. reconnaissance aircraft was carrying out an operation in airspace over the Chinese Yellow Sea (the northern part of the East China Sea), and Chinese aircraft acted to identify and investigate in accordance with the law,” the statement said, calling the action “professional” and “safe”.

UNITED NATIONS (Dispatches) -- North Korea will rapidly strengthen its nuclear strike capability as long as the United States maintains its “hostile policy” toward the country, the country’s deputy UN ambassador said.

Kim In-ryong told a news conference that if the Trump administration wants peace on the Korean Peninsula, it should replace the Armistice Agreement that ended the 1950-53 Korean War with a peace accord and halt its anti-North Korea policy, “the root cause of all problems.” Kim also dismissed allegations that the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea - the country’s official name - was behind the recent wave of global cyberattacks as “ridiculous.”

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) -- A search for survivors of a ferry that caught fire in the Java Sea, killing five people, has been suspended for the night, an Indonesian search and rescue official said Saturday. The national search and rescue agency’s operations director, Ivan Ahmad Riski, said 193 people have been rescued. The number of missing was unclear.