

France Summons U.S. Envoy Over NSA Spying



French President Francois Hollande (L) and former French President Jacques Chirac

PARIS (Reuters) – France summoned the U.S. ambassador on Wednesday to explain allegations by transparency lobby group WikiLeaks of what President Francois Hollande branded “unacceptable” spying on successive French leaders.

The latest revelations of espionage among Western allies come after it emerged the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA) had spied on Germany and that Germany’s own BND intelligence agency had cooperated with the NSA to spy on officials and companies elsewhere in Europe.

Hollande held an emergency meeting of his ministers and army commanders after revelations the NSA had spied on the last three French presidents. Government spokesman Stephane Le Foll said a senior French intelligence official would be dispatched to the United States to confirm the spying is over.

“France will not tolerate ac-

tions that threaten its security and the protection of its interests,” a statement from the president’s office said, adding it was not the first time that allegations of U.S. spying on French interests had surfaced.

“Commitments were made by the U.S. authorities. They need to be recalled and strictly respected.”

The French Foreign Ministry summoned the U.S. ambassador. After meeting Hollande, lawmakers told reporters the French leader had informed them he would speak with President Barack Obama later in the day.

A statement from the U.S. National Security Council said it was not targeting and would not target Hollande’s communications but did not say whether spying had taken place in the past.

“We have to verify this spying has finished,” Le Foll told reporters, adding that minis-

ters were told to be careful when speaking on their mobile phones.

“Between allies this is unacceptable and incomprehensible. France does not spy on its allies.”

While Paris and Washington have good ties in general, U.N. Security Council veto-holder France fiercely maintains its independence on foreign policy and over the last two years there have been moments of friction and irritation on both sides.

Hollande was disappointed by Obama’s last-minute decision not to strike Syrian government positions in 2013. U.S. officials have frequently, in private, lambasted France’s tough stance in talks over Iran’s nuclear program.

The revelations were first reported by French daily Liberation and on news website Mediapart, which said the NSA spied on presidents Jacques Chirac, Nicolas Sarkozy and Francois Hollande during the period of at least 2006 until May 2012.

Obama’s Push for Pacific Trade Pact Nears Finish

WASHINGTON (Reuters) – President Barack Obama’s bid to boost U.S. economic ties with Asia was poised for a win on Wednesday, when a six-week congressional battle will culminate in a decisive Senate vote on legislation needed to seal his hallmark Pacific Rim trade deal.

After two brushes with failure, some fancy legislative footwork and myriad backroom deals to keep the legislation alive, lawmakers are expected to grant Obama the power to negotiate trade deals and send them on a fast track through Congress.

Approval could push negotiations on the 12-nation Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) over the finish line in time to get it through Congress before year-end. TPP is a central part of Obama’s foreign policy pivot to Asia to counter the rising diplomatic and economic influence of China.

The deal, potentially a leg-

acy-defining achievement for Obama, would create a free-trade zone stretching from Japan to Chile, comprising 40 percent of the world economy and raising annual global economic output by nearly \$300 billion.

The Senate voted 60-37 on Tuesday to clear a procedural path for a final vote on passage of fast-track authority, which would let lawmakers set negotiating goals for trade deals, including TPP, but restrict them to yes-or-no votes on final agreements.

The fast-track legislation itself now only needs a majority of votes to pass, a hurdle it cleared easily more than a month ago on its first run through the Senate.

It was forced back to the Senate floor after a revolt by House of Representatives Democrats resulted in fast-track being split from a companion measure extending a program to help workers hurt by trade.

That bill now faces a separate vote in the Senate, as early as Wednesday, and another in the House. Republicans hope to pass that program this week and send both measures to Obama for approval, before going on a week-long break.

The bruising congressional battle has pitted Obama against many in his own party, including House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi, and prompted blood-letting among Republicans after party leaders lashed out at conservatives who refused to back the trade agenda.

10 Killed in Bomb Attack in Nigeria’s Yobe



A police officer stands at the scene of a bomb attack at a bus station in Maiduguri, northeast Nigeria, June 22, 2015.

ABUJA (Press TV) – At least 10 people have been killed in northeast Nigeria in a bombing attack carried out by a girl believed to be 12.

According to reports, the girl detonated her explosives at a market in the area of Wagir, in the Gujba district, south of Damaturu, the capital of Yobe State, on Tuesday.

At least 30 other people were reportedly injured in the deadly attack.

In a similar incident on Monday, two teenage female bombers detonated their explosives near a crowded mosque in the northeastern Nigerian city of Maiduguri, killing about 30 people.

Reports said that many were injured in the attacks.

No group has claimed responsibility for the bombings; however, the Takfiri Boko Haram group has

claimed responsibility for a number of deadly attacks and bombings in various parts of Nigeria during the past six years.

Boko Haram, which has pledged allegiance to the ISIL Takfiri group, which itself primarily operates inside Iraq and Syria, started its campaign of terror in Nigeria in 2009 and has recently expanded its terrorist activities to Nigeria’s neighboring countries as well.

Boko Haram militancy over the past years has claimed the lives of some 15,000 people and displaced around 1.5 million others.

The Nigerian military says the extremists have been confined to the Sambisa Forest in the northeastern part of the country.

Boko Haram means “Western education is forbidden.”

Four New MERS Cases Confirmed in South Korea



Medical workers are seen at a separated clinic center at Seoul’s Konkuk University Hospital, which has been set up to handle MERS cases, June 24, 2015.

SEOUL (Press TV) – South Korean health officials have confirmed four new cases of the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) infection as two major hospitals in the country suspend most of their services to patients in a bid to stop the further spread of the disease.

The new MERS cases involved two individuals who were in the same hospital ward as other patients with the potentially deadly virus, the South Korean Health Ministry said on Wednesday.

The other two were a nurse at Samsung Medical Center in the capital and a relative of a patient who was hospitalized for an unnamed disease in the eastern city of Pyeongtaek in early June.

Some 90 patients, visitors and medical staffers have contracted the virus at Samsung Hospital, which suspended most of its services on June 14 for a 10-day period to halt the spread of the

virus. The Konkuk University Medical Center, another major hospital in Seoul, also suspended most of its activities on Wednesday.

According to the Health Ministry, out of the 179 confirmed cases, 27 have died, 16 are in critical condition, and 67 recovered and have been released from hospital.

The outbreak of MERS in South Korea, the largest outside of Saudi Arabia, began on May 20 when a 68-year-old man was diagnosed with the disease after returning from a trip to the Arab country.

MERS was first identified in Saudi Arabia in 2012. The disease is part of the corona virus family of viruses, which includes the common cold. It can cause such symptoms as fever, breathing problems, pneumonia and kidney failure.

There is no known cure or vaccine available for MERS yet.



ATHENS (Reuters) – Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras flew to Brussels to meet Greece’s international creditors on Wednesday to try to bridge gaps on key elements of the proposals made by his left-wing government to shore up state finances in return for vital loans.

Athens had proposed increasing VAT, corporate tax and pension contributions in order to meet budget targets, but Tsipras told aides that creditors had not accepted the revenue-raising measures, a Greek government official said.

“This strange attitude can only mean one of two things: either they do not want an agreement or they are serving specific interests in Greece,” Tsipras said in a tweet.

Markets reacted nervously to the comments from Athens, but a European Union official close to the talks, who declined to be named, made clear talks were continuing.

“Nothing has broken down, negotiations are going on and the meeting with Tsipras will go ahead as planned.”

WASHINGTON (Press TV) – The US Department of Defense has released a book of instructions on the rules of war, detailing acceptable ways of killing the enemy and says that journalists also can be terrorists.

The “Department of Defense Law of War Manual” explains that shooting, exploding, bombing, stabbing, or cutting the enemy are acceptable ways of killing your enemy, but the use of poison or asphyxiating gases is not allowed.

Surprise attacks and killing retreating troops are also permitted in the Pentagon manual.

The 1,176-page book states that journalists can be labeled “unprivileged belligerents,” an obscure term that replaced “unlawful enemy combatant” that was first used during the administration of President George W. Bush.

“In general, journalists are civilians. However, journalists may be members of the armed forces, persons authorized to accompany the armed forces, or unprivileged belligerents,” the manual states.

WASHINGTON (Reuters) – Powerful thunderstorms packing heavy rain and high winds lashed the U.S. Middle Atlantic region late on Tuesday, killing one person, snarling travel and cutting off power to hundreds of thousands of customers.

The fast-moving band of storms stretching from Virginia to southern New Jersey dumped up to one inch (2.5 cm) of rain in less than an hour in some places, said Jim Hayes, a National Weather Service meteorologist in College Park, Maryland.

“The storms were intense but they were moving pretty quickly,” he said.

Police in Montgomery County, Maryland said a 79-year-old man died after his pickup truck hit a tree that had fallen across the roadway, about 30 miles (48 km) north of Washington D.C.

Private forecaster AccuWeather said the storms would reach into northern New England through the evening as a cold front interacted with hot and humid air.

Winds of up to 70 miles per hour (113 kph) were recorded in southern New Jersey, and the line of storms stretched westward into West Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee.