

US formally accuses Russia of meddling in election

Vows response; Moscow rubbishes charges

AFP, Washington

US officials formally accused the Russian government Friday of trying to "interfere" with the American presidential election, and vowed to respond at an undisclosed time and place.

The assertion against Russia comes with relations already frayed over Nato defenses and stalled efforts to end the bloody civil war in Syria.

A joint statement from the Department of Homeland Security and Office of the Director of National Intelligence was the first official accusation by Washington against Moscow in the spate of cyber attacks, although many analysts had said the hacks appeared to be from Russia.

A US administration official said Washington would respond to the cyber attacks, without offering details.

"We will take action to protect our interests, including in cyberspace, and we will do so at a time and place of our choosing," the official said.

"The public should not assume that they will necessarily know what actions have been taken or what actions we will take."

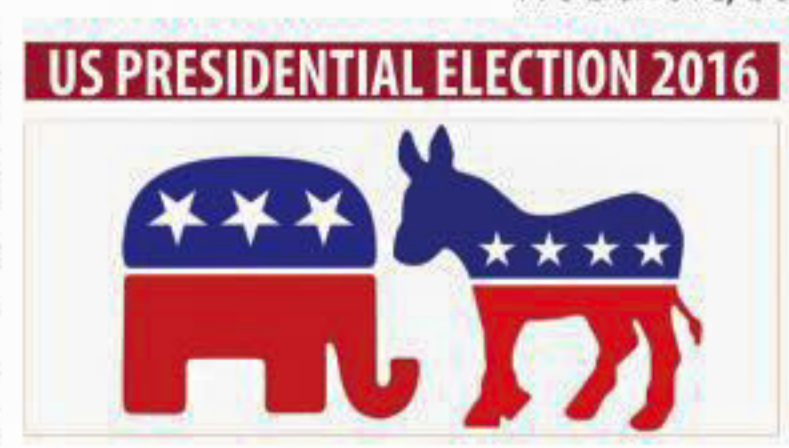
The official statement said the US intelligence community "is confident that the Russian government directed the recent compromises of emails from US persons and institutions, including from US political organizations."

"We believe, based on the scope and sensitivity of these efforts, that only Russia's senior-most officials could have authorized these activities," it added.

The statement, however, stopped short of accusing Russia in the recent cyber attacks on state election databases.

The Kremlin labeled the allegations as "rubbish."

"Every day (President Vladimir) Putin's website gets attacked by several tens of thousand of hackers," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Russian news agency Interfax. "A lot of these attacks are traced to the territory of the USA, but we do not blame the White House or Langley each time."



Yemeni rescue workers carry a victim on a stretcher amid the rubble of a destroyed building following reported airstrikes by Saudi-led coalition air-planes on the capital Sanaa, yesterday. Story on page 16.

NEWS IN brief

Hurricane Matthew weakens

Makes landfall in south Carolina, kills 5; Haiti death toll nears 900

AFP, Charleston

Hurricane Matthew slammed into South Carolina yesterday, packing a diminished yet still powerful punch after killing almost 900 people in Haiti and causing major flooding and widespread power outages as it skirted Florida and Georgia.

Now weakened, the most powerful Atlantic storm since 2007 left flooding and wind damage in Florida before moving slowly north to soak coastal Georgia and the Carolinas. Wind speeds had dropped by nearly half from their peak about a week ago to 75 miles per hour (120 kph), reducing it to a Category 1 hurricane, the weakest on the Saffir-Simpson scale of 1 to 5.

Matthew, which topped out as a ferocious Category 5 storm more than a week ago, made landfall near McClellanville, a village 30 miles north of Charleston that was devastated by a Category 4 hurricane in 1989.

The National Hurricane Service said Matthew was over Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, on Saturday afternoon, and warned of potentially life-threatening flooding in Georgia and North Carolina even as the storm slowed as it drove inland.

At least five deaths in Florida were attributed to the

storm, which knocked out power to almost 1.6 million households and businesses in the US Southeast.

The toll in the United States was far less devastating than in Haiti, where at least 877 people died earlier, a death tally that ticked up as information trickled in from remote areas.

Matthew howled through Haiti's western peninsula on Tuesday with 145 mph (233 kph) winds and torrential rain. Some 61,500 people were in shelters, officials said, after the storm hurled the sea onto coastal villages.

The Mesa Verde, a US Navy amphibious transport dock ship, was en route to Haiti to support relief efforts with heavy-lift helicopters, bulldozers, fresh-water delivery vehicles and two operating rooms. The US government was also airlifting emergency supplies, according to the United States Agency for International Development.

Aid group Doctors Without Borders was flying personnel to Haiti by helicopter. The Haitian government warned a deadly outbreak of cholera could worsen, confirming dozens of new cases of the water-borne disease since the storm, 13 of them fatal.

Though gradually weakening, Matthew was forecast to remain a hurricane until it begins moving away today, the NHC said.



People gather for aid in Haiti on Friday.

'East-West tensions more dangerous than Cold War'

Moscow 'deploys nuke-capable missiles on Nato doorsteps'

AFP, Berlin

The mounting tensions between the United States and Russia have created a situation that is "more dangerous" than the Cold War, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier said in an interview published yesterday.

"It's a fallacy to think that this is like the Cold War. The current times are different and more dangerous," Steinmeier told the mass-circulation Bild newspaper.

Wolfgang Ischinger, who served as OSCE mediator for Ukraine, told the newspaper that there was "considerable danger of a military confrontation."

"This danger has not been as strong in decades and the confidence between West and East has never been so low," he said.

The warning came as Lithuania yesterday said that Russia was again deploying nuclear-capable Iskander missiles into its Kaliningrad outpost bordering two Nato members.

Lithuanian Foreign Minister Linas Linkevicius said modified Iskander missiles had a range of up to 700 kilometres (440 miles) which means they could reach German capital Berlin from the Russian exclave, which is sandwiched between Poland and Lithuania.

Moscow also sent Iskanders to Kaliningrad in 2015 as part of a series of mammoth military drills amid heightened tensions with the West over Ukraine.

Tensions between Russia and the West have escalated to their worst level since the Cold War in recent years after Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine and launched a military campaign in Syria.

Since the start of the Ukraine crisis in 2014, Russia has flexed its muscles with a series of war games involving tens of thousands of troops in areas bordering Nato Baltic states.

Nato responded by agreeing to deploy four battalions in Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia as of next year to bolster its eastern flank.



Obama casts early ballot in 2016 polls

AFP, Chicago

President Barack Obama on Friday cast his ballot for the Nov. 8 election during a trip to his hometown of Chicago. In 2012, Obama was the first president to vote early. At the time he was running for his second term in the White House.

US formally eases Myanmar sanctions

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama on Friday formally eased sanctions on Myanmar, fulfilling a pledge made to the country's de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi in September. The order reinstates preferential tariffs for Myanmar that were suspended more than two decades ago amid human rights abuses by the ruling junta, as well as some visa bans.

One in 5 in Japan face 'death from overwork'

AFP, Tokyo

A fifth of the Japanese workforce faces the risk of death from overwork, according to a new government survey into the country's notoriously strenuous working culture. Hundreds of deaths related to overwork -- from strokes, heart attacks and suicide -- are reported every year in Japan, along with a host of serious health problems, sparking lawsuits and calls to tackle the problem.



Kashmiri mourners hold the body of a 12-year-old boy as they are fired on with teargas by Indian police during his funeral procession in downtown Srinagar, yesterday. Residents said the boy was sprayed with pellets in the lawn outside his home, but police say he was part of anti-India protests that took place Friday. At least 90 people, most of them young protesters, have been killed and more than 12,000 injured in clashes with Indian security forces since June this year.

EU citizens can stay in UK after Brexit

AFP, London

All EU citizens currently living in Britain will be able to stay after Brexit, a newspaper reported yesterday citing unnamed cabinet ministers, despite the government's refusal to publicly guarantee their status.

Official research suggests that more than 80 percent of the 3.6 million EU citizens living in Britain would be eligible for residency by the time Britain is expected to leave the European Union in 2019, the Daily Telegraph reported.

Under plans being drawn up by the interior ministry, the remainder would be offered some kind of amnesty involving the right to permanently stay in Britain, it said.

Conservative Prime Minister Theresa May has said she "fully expects" to be able to guarantee the rights of EU citizens to stay in Britain, but said it was dependent on the rights accorded to Britons living elsewhere in the EU.

Earlier this week, International Trade Secretary Liam Fox repeated her position, and said that their fate was part of Britain's negotiating hand.

"To give that away before we get into the negotiation would be to hand over one of our main cards in that negotiation and doesn't necessarily make sense at this point," he told a fringe meeting at the Conservative party conference.

After a referendum campaign fought on the issue of control over EU migration, the conference was dominated by tough talk on immigration, including proposals to make firms declare foreign workers, which were widely condemned.

Attacks foiled in Germany, Turkey

AFP, Berlin

Police yesterday found several hundred grams of "explosive materials" in the east German apartment of a Syrian man suspected of planning a bomb attack, and arrested three people connected to him.

The suspect who remains at large, 22-year-old Syrian Jaber Albakr, could have had "an Islamist motive" sources close to the police told AFP.

Police issued a search warrant for Albakr after officers received information from domestic intelligence services, a police spokesman said, saying he was born in Syria in January 1994.

Two of those arrested were seized close to the city's railway station while the other was taken into custody in the city centre. A package belonging to one of those arrested was undergoing analysis, police added.

Germany has been on edge after suffering two attacks claimed by the Islamic State group (IS) in July -- an axe rampage on a train in Wuerzburg that injured five and a suicide bombing in Ansbach that left 15 wounded.

The attacks in July rattled Germans' sense of security and fuelled concerns over the country's record influx of migrants and refugees last year.

German police said previously they had identified 523 people who posed a security threat to the country, around half of whom were known to be currently in Germany.

Meanwhile, in Turkey, two people suspected of planning a car bomb attack on the Turkish capital Ankara yesterday blew themselves up after being confronted by police, averting what the justice minister called a "huge disaster".

Russia vetoes defying West

US urges war crimes probe as regime presses ahead with assault

AFP, United Nations

Russia yesterday vetoed a United Nations draft resolution demanding an end to the bombing of Syria's war-battered city of Aleppo, despite an appeal from France to save the city from destruction.

It was the fifth time that Moscow used its veto to block UN action to end the five-year war in Syria, which has claimed 300,000 lives.

The draft text presented by France won 11 votes in favor in the 15-member Security Council, but there were two votes against -- including Russia -- and two abstentions, notably from veto-holder China.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault urged the council to take immediate action to save Aleppo from being destroyed by the Russia-backed Syrian bombing campaign.

As the vote got under way, the Syrian regime pressed its assault on rebel-held areas of Aleppo, where 125,000 people are living under siege and fac-

UN RESOLUTION TO SAVE ALEPPO



not make any mention of halting the bombing campaign. That move also failed to pass.

Russia and Venezuela voted against the French text, while China and Angola abstained.

The Syrian and Russian bombing campaign has escalated since the Russian-backed Syrian army launched an offensive to retake the city on September 22.

US Secretary of State John Kerry made clear his anger at the Syrian army's Russian-backed onslaught in the battleground districts, saying that its bombing of civilians could amount to a war crime.

Its ally Damascus has made significant advances in its renewed two-week-old offensive in Aleppo, seizing territory to the north and pushing back the front line in the city center which had remained largely static since the rebels captured eastern districts in 2012.

But it has come at a heavy human cost. Since the regime offensive began, at least 290 people -- mostly civilians -- have been killed in rebel-held areas, 57 them children, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported. And 50 civilians including nine children have been killed in rebel shelling on regime-held areas of the city, it added.

Despite Nobel, Colombia peace process in danger

AFP, Bogota

Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos's Nobel Peace Prize gives the country's troubled peace process a major boost, but saving a deal voters recently rejected still won't be easy, analysts say.

The prize closed out a roller-coaster week for Santos, who suffered a major defeat Sunday when Colombians narrowly voted against his signature achievement as president, a peace deal with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Farc).

Santos, who has staked his legacy on ending the country's half-century conflict, has sought to battle back by opening talks with the deal's top opponent, his predecessor and former boss, Alvaro Uribe.

He scored a small victory in the wake of the Nobel announcement, when government and Farc negotiators said they had agreed to discuss changes to the deal and continue a bilateral ceasefire.

But Santos will still have to pull off a difficult balancing act. Uribe, the right-wing hardliner leading opposition to the deal, claims the rejected agreement would have given the rebels impunity for their crimes and put Colombia on the path of "Castro-Chavismo" -- a reference to the far-left governments of Cuba and Venezuela.

Santos has warned the country is in a "very dangerous limbo" as it scrambles to salvage the peace process. In the referendum's aftermath, he had said the army would halt its ceasefire with the Farc at the end of the month if the impasse were not settled.

The ceasefire is currently worth little more than the paper it's printed on -- which is to say not much -- said Jorge Restrepo, head of the Conflict Analysis Resource Center in Bogota.

Now that the peace deal that established the ceasefire has failed, "it means the conflict starts again," he said.

