

Key dates in Trump, Comey relationship

Donald Trump and FBI director James Comey, who was fired by the president on Tuesday, have been on a collision course since last year when US intelligence discovered a Russian plot to interfere in the presidential election. Here are key dates in the saga:

- JULY 2016**
The FBI quietly opens an investigation into Russian interference in the US election, which would only be officially revealed eight months later
- OCTOBER 7, 2016**
US intelligence officials announce that top Russian officials are behind hacking and disinformation operations designed to disrupt the election
- NOVEMBER 8, 2016**
Trump wins the election in a shock upset over Democrat Hillary Clinton, under the shadow of Russian interference and Comey's controversial handling of an investigation into Clinton's private email server
- DECEMBER 10, 2016**
Democrats accuse Comey of withholding information about Russian election interference during the campaign to boost Trump
- JANUARY 6, 2017**
Comey and three other top intelligence officials brief Trump on their conclusion that Russian President Vladimir Putin was behind the bid to interfere with the election, in support of Trump
- MID-JANUARY 2017**
Trump asks Comey to stay in his post in the new administration
- FEBRUARY 14, 2017**
The FBI rejects a White House request to refute a New York



Times story alleging numerous contacts between Trump campaign officials and Russian intelligence

FEBRUARY 24, 2017
Trump blasts the FBI over news reports on the Russia case, tweeting: "The FBI is totally unable to stop the national security 'leakers' that have permeated our government for a long time"

MARCH 8, 2017
Comey says he plans to stay in his job for a full 10-year term, until 2023, quipping: "You are stuck with me for another six-and-a-half years"

MARCH 20, 2017
Comey confirms for the first time that the FBI is investigating Russian interference in the election -- including any links between individuals associated with the Trump campaign and the Russian government, and any possible coordination between the campaign and Russia's efforts.

He also flatly denies Trump's claim that former president Barack Obama ordered investigators to tap the phones at Trump's New York home.

MAY 9, 2017
Trump fires Comey.

SOURCE: AFP



South Korea President Moon Jae-in and his wife Kim Jung-sook wave to neighborhood residents as they arrive at the presidential Blue House in Seoul, South Korea, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

S Korea's Moon vows to address North Korea

REUTERS, Seoul

South Korea's new liberal President Moon Jae-in was sworn in yesterday and vowed to immediately tackle the difficult tasks of addressing North Korea's advancing nuclear ambitions and soothing tensions with the United States and China.

Moon said in his first speech as president he would begin efforts to defuse security tensions on the Korean peninsula and negotiate with Washington and Beijing to ease a row over a US missile defence system being deployed in the South.

In his first key appointments, Moon named two liberal veterans with ties to the "Sunshine Policy" of engagement with North Korea from the 2000s to the posts of prime minister and spy chief.

Moon named Suh Hoon, a career spy agency official and a veteran of inter-Korea ties, as the head of the National Intelligence Service. Suh was instrumental in setting up two previous summits between the North and South.

Veteran liberal politician Lee Nak-yon was

nominated to serve as prime minister. Now a regional governor, Lee was a political ally of the two former presidents who held the summits with the North in 2000 and 2007.

Lee's appointment requires parliamentary approval.

Moon was expected to fill the remaining cabinet and presidential staff appointments swiftly to bring an end to a power vacuum left by the removal of Park Geun-hye in March in a corruption scandal that rocked South Korea's business and political elite.

"I will urgently try to solve the security crisis," Moon said in the domed rotunda hall of the parliament building. "If needed, I will fly straight to Washington. I will go to Beijing and Tokyo and, if the conditions are right, to Pyongyang also."

Spy chief nominee Suh said Moon could go to Pyongyang if it was clear the visit would help resolve the North Korean nuclear crisis and ease military tension on the Korean peninsula.

North Korea is likely to welcome Moon's election but its state media made no mention of his victory yesterday.

DEVELOPMENTS

Moon aims to soothe tensions with US, China

Liberal politician Lee Nak-yon nominated to serve as PM

Religious tension grips Myanmar

Police fire shots to break up nationalist, Muslim scuffle in Yangon

AFP, Yangon

Police in Myanmar fired warning shots to break up scuffles between Buddhist nationalists and Muslims in Myanmar's biggest city in the early hours of yesterday after a crowd went hunting for "illegal" Rohingya.

The incident comes as nationalists from Myanmar's Buddhist majority have become increasingly vocal in their opposition to the country's hard-pressed Muslim minority.

Police in Yangon said they were forced to fire in the air to break up the confrontation between dozens of hardliners, including several monks, and local Muslims that left at least one man injured.

Late on Tuesday night a group of nationalists complained to police that several Rohingya, pejoratively known as "Bengalis," were illegally hiding in a house in Yangon's Mingalar Taung Nyunt township. Tempers started to fray when police who had gone to investigate refused to arrest the men, saying they were local, non-Rohingya Muslims who were allowed to be there.

"While they (the nationalists) were complaining to the police, Muslims from the area gathered and the groups started quarrelling," said one officer on condition of anonymity.

"Although police asked both sides to go back, they punched each other. So police fired shots in the air to disperse the groups."

FIGHT AGAINST IS

Turkey angered by US move to arm Syrian Kurds

AFP, Istanbul

Turkey yesterday slammed as unacceptable a US plan to arm Syrian Kurdish fighters whom Ankara considers terrorists, but the militia applauded a "historic" move that would hasten the extremists' defeat.

The issue risks further stoking tensions between Ankara and Washington less than a week before President Recep Tayyip Erdogan heads to Washington to meet his US counterpart Donald Trump in their first face-to-face encounter as heads of state.

The Kurdish Peoples' Protection Units (YPG) is seen by Washington as the best ally against Islamic State (IS) jihadists in Syria and the prime attacking force in any assault on their stronghold of Raqa.

But Ankara regards it as a terror group and the Syrian branch of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which since 1984 has waged an insurgency inside Turkey leaving tens of thousands dead.

The dispute poisoned ties between Turkey and the United States under the administration of former president Barack Obama but Ankara had hoped for smoother ties under Trump.

"The supply of arms to the YPG is unacceptable," Deputy Prime Minister Nurettin Canikli told A Haber television.

"Such a policy will benefit nobody," he said. "We expect that this mistake is to be rectified."

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu added that "every weapon that turns up in their hands is a threat directed toward Turkey".

In a surprise announcement, the Pentagon said Trump had authorised the arming of Kurdish fighters within the Syria Democratic Forces (SDF) "to ensure a clear victory over ISIS in Raqa."

ICJ stays ex-Indian naval officer's execution

AGENCIES

In a major breakthrough in the Government of India's efforts to save former Indian naval officer Kulbhushan Jadhav from the death sentence awarded to him by a Pakistan military court on charges of terrorism and spying for India's intelligence agency Research and Analysis Wing, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) at The Hague has stayed his execution. In a petition to the ICJ, India had accused Pakistan of gross violation of international laws.

Ordering the stay, ICJ President Justice Ronny Abraham directed Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to "act in such a way so as to enable the court to enforce any decision it takes on the Indian plea." This effectively stays Jadhav's execution until the court hears the matter and passes orders.

In the petition filed on May 8, a team of lawyers, led by senior advocate Harish Salve, listed out the details of the Jadhav case and the "egregious violations" of the Vienna convention that deals with Consular rela-

tions, including Pakistan's refusal to give any details of Jadhav's arrest and trial until after the death sentence was passed, failure to provide consular access to India despite 15 attempts, and suggesting access would be given only in exchange for information about Jadhav from India.

INDO-PAK TENSION



Kulbhushan Jadhav

External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj said she had informed Jadhav's mother of the order.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's defence minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif yesterday said India approaching the ICJ is a diversionary tactic, reported TOI.

India has rarely approached the ICJ in the past, given its hesitation to "internationalise" its bilateral relations, especially when it comes to Pakistan. However a senior official told The Hindu that the Jadhav case required the extreme measure, as "Pakistan had refused to follow any established norm or principle."

The ICJ is a part of the United Nations, and its judgments have binding force and are without appeal for the parties concerned.



Indonesian walks past farewell wreaths for Basuki Tjahaja Purnama also known as Ahok, Jakarta's first non-Muslim governor for half a century and its first ethnic Chinese leader, at cityhall in Jakarta, yesterday. Ahok was jailed for two years after being found guilty of blasphemy, in a shock decision that has stoked concerns over rising religious intolerance in the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation.

PHOTO: AFP

NEWS IN brief

Four UN peacekeepers killed in C Africa

AFP, Bangui

Three more UN peacekeepers have been found dead after an attack on a convoy in the Central African Republic, UN officials said Tuesday, bringing the death toll to four. The UN's MINUSCA mission said it was "deeply saddened to confirm that three of the four peacekeepers that were missing in action since yesterday's attack have been found dead."

Duterte rails against corrupt police

AFP, Manila

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte yesterday launched another tirade against corrupt police who are the frontline troops in his deadly drug war, after four more officers were accused of kidnapping and extortion. The arrest of the four from Manila's financial district of Makati was the latest in a series of scandals involving police.

Brazil's Lula faces corruption court

AFP, Curitiba

Brazil's former leftist president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, backed by hundreds of red-shirted supporters, was due in court yesterday for a corruption trial that could end his storied career. Lula, 71, is accused of receiving a seaside apartment as a bribe in a much wider corruption scheme.

7,000 migrants detained in Libya

AFP, Tripoli

Between 7,000 and 8,000 migrants mostly from sub-Saharan Africa are being held in Libyan detention centres after entering the country illegally, an official said on Tuesday. Abdulrazaq al-Shniti spoke at the opening of a new detention centre in Tajoura, Tripoli.

FAR RIGHT PLOT Germany to make reforms to army

REUTERS, Berlin

German Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen yesterday said she would respond to the discovery of far right sympathisers in the German army with reforms, including revising one of the force's post-Nazi era founding principles.

German police on Tuesday detained a second soldier suspected of involvement in what prosecutors believe was a plan by a military officer and a student, both in custody, to carry out an "extremist" attack and blame it on migrants.

Von der Leyen, under fire for her handling of the growing scandal, told reporters she would inform a special session of the parliamentary defence committee about the investigation into the case and far right sympathies within the military.

She said the ministry would clarify its "Traditionserlass," a policy last updated in 1982 that gives a differentiated view of how troops are to treat and view the legacy of the German military. Von der Leyen, whose post includes the role of commander in chief of Germany's armed forces, is a close ally of Chancellor Angela Merkel who is gearing up for a national election in five months' time.

US criticises Russia build-up near Baltics

REUTERS, Pabrade Training Area

US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said yesterday that a Russian missile deployment near the Baltic states was "destabilising", and officials suggested the United States could deploy a Patriot missile battery in the region for Nato exercises in the summer.

US allies are jittery ahead of war games by Russia and Belarus in September that could involve up to 100,000 troops and include nuclear weapons training -- the biggest such exercise since 2013.

The drills could see Russian troops near the borders of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

Russia has also deployed Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad, its enclave on the Baltic Sea. It said the deployment was part of routine drills, but US officials worry that it may represent a permanent upgrade.

Asked during a trip to Lithuania about

the deployment, Mattis told a news conference: "Any kind of build-up like that is simply destabilising."

The United States is ruling out any direct response to the Russian drills or the Iskander deployment.

But at the same time, US officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, raised the possibility that a Patriot missile battery could be deployed briefly to the Baltic region during Nato exercises in July that focus on air defence, known as Tobruk Legacy.

The officials stressed that the Patriots, if deployed, would be withdrawn when the exercises were over. That would most likely happen before the Russian drills began, they said.

Mattis declined to comment directly on the possible Patriot deployment to reporters after talks in Vilnius.

WAR GAMES BY RUSSIA

Washington could deploy Patriot missiles in the region
Mattis concerned by deployment of missiles in Kaliningrad

WAR ON TERROR IN AFGHANISTAN

Nato mulls sending more troops to fight militants

AFP, London

Nato Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said yesterday that military chiefs wanted a few thousand more troops from the alliance to be deployed in Afghanistan to help combat Islamist insurgents.

The troops were needed to train local forces, Stoltenberg told reporters following talks with British Prime Minister Theresa May at her Downing Street office in London.

"We have received a request from our military authorities to increase our military presence in Afghanistan with a few thousand troops," he said.

"We are now assessing that request. We will make decisions on the scale and the scope of the mission within weeks."

"But this is not about returning back to a combat operation in Afghanistan. It will be a train, assist and advise operation, because I strongly believe that the best answer we have against terrorism, the best weapon we have against terrorism, is to train local forces against terrorism and to stave ISIL (the Islamic State jihadist group) off."

There are currently around 13,000 Nato troops in Afghanistan training local forces. The issue will be high on the agenda at the Nato annual summit in Brussels on May 25.

US authorities have written to Nato allies and partners about the future of the 28-country alliance's presence in Afghanistan.

Stoltenberg said: "We will address our presence in Afghanistan at the leaders' meeting but we will also address what Nato can do to step up its efforts to fight terrorism, including providing support to the counter-ISIL coalition."