

NSA: Programs Disrupted Dozens Of Attacks

BY DONNA CASSATA AND CONNIE CASS
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The director of the National Security Agency said Wednesday that once-secret surveillance programs disrupted dozens of terrorist attacks, explicitly describing for Congress how the programs worked in collecting Americans' phone records and tapping into their Internet activity.

Vigorously defending the programs, Gen. Keith Alexander said the public needs to know how the programs operate amid growing concerns that government efforts to secure the nation are encroaching on Americans' privacy and civil liberties.

"I do think it's important that we get this right and I want the American people to know that we're trying to be transparent here, protect civil liberties and privacy but also the security of this country," Alexander told a Senate panel.

Alexander said he will provide additional information to the Senate Intelligence Committee in closed session on Thursday and hopes to have as many details as possible within a week. He said he wants the informa-

tion to be checked first by other agencies to ensure that the details are correct.

But he also warned that disclosures about the secret programs have eroded agency capabilities and, as a result, U.S. allies and Americans won't be as safe as they were two weeks ago.

"Some of these are still going to be classified and should be, because if we tell the terrorists every way that we're going to track them, they will get through and Americans will die," he said, adding that he would rather be criticized by people who think he's hiding something "than jeopardize the security of this country."

He was questioned at length by senators seeking information on exactly how much data the NSA collects and the legal backing for the activities. He did not give details on the terror plots he said had been disrupted.

Half a world away, Edward Snowden, the former contractor who fled to Hong Kong and leaked the documents, said he's not there to hide from justice and has faith in "the courts and people of Hong Kong to decide my fate."

"I am neither traitor nor hero. I'm an American," Snowden told the South China

Morning Post about his disclosures of top-secret surveillance programs that have rocked Washington.

Snowden said in the interview published Wednesday that he hasn't dared contact his family or his girlfriend since coming forward as the leaker of NSA documents. "I am worried about the pressure they are feeling from the FBI," he said.

The FBI visited his father's house in Pennsylvania on Monday.

Snowden resurfaced in the Chinese newspaper after dropping out of sight since Sunday. Snowden said he wanted to fight the U.S. government in Hong Kong's courts and would stay unless "asked to leave." Hong Kong is a Chinese autonomous region that maintains a Western-style legal system and freedom of speech.

U.S. law enforcement officials have said they are building a case against Snowden but have yet to bring charges. Hong Kong has an extradition treaty with the United States; there are exceptions in cases of political persecution or where there are concerns over cruel or humiliating treatment.

Syrian Rebel Fighters Raid Shiite Village

BEIRUT (AP) — Syrian rebels, including Sunni extremists, stormed a village and battled pro-regime militiamen, killing more than 60 Shiite fighters and civilians in an attack steeped in the sectarian hatreds that increasingly characterize the civil war, activists said Wednesday.

In the raid, which comes at a time when the West is worried that extremists are increasingly joining the rebellion, the victorious fighters raised black Sunni Islamist flags over the eastern village of Hatla. In amateur videos, the fighters — some wearing al-Qaida-style headbands — vented anti-Shiite slurs and fired in the air. "The homes of the infidel Shiites were burned," the voice behind the camera in one video shouted as smoke rose in the background from several houses.

In another video, the fighters pulled blankets off corpses to show them off, one with a wound to the head. A gunman talking to the camera gloated, saying, "This is your end, dogs." The videos appeared genuine and conformed with other Associated Press reporting on the events depicted.

The attack Tuesday on Hatla, in Syria's Deir el-Zour region near Iraq, underlined the increasingly sectarian nature of the conflict.

Derecho Brewing From Iowa To Mid-Atlantic

CHICAGO (AP) — An unusually massive line of storms packing hail, lightning and tree-topping winds was rolling through the Midwest on Wednesday and could affect more than one in five Americans from Iowa to Maryland.

Meteorologists were even about the possibility of a weather event called a derecho, which is a storm of strong straight-line winds spanning at least 240 miles. The storms are also likely to generate tornadoes and cause power outages that will be followed by oppressive heat, said Russell Schneider, director of the National Weather Service's Storm Prediction Center in Norman, Okla.

The weather service issued tornado warnings in several counties in Iowa, Illinois and Wisconsin.

"We're becoming increasingly concerned that a major severe weather event will unfold," Schneider said. "The main thing is for folks to monitor conditions and have a plan for what to do if threatening weather approaches."

For the first time this year, the center was using its highest alert level for parts of Iowa, Illinois, Indiana and Ohio. In Chicago, Wednesday night's White Sox game against the Toronto Blue Jays was postponed in anticipation of bad weather and airlines canceled more than 120 flights at O'Hare International Airport.

Border Security An Issue In Immigration Debate

WASHINGTON (AP) — Bickering across a deep divide, supporters of immigration legislation pushed back hard Wednesday against Republican demands for tougher border security measures before millions living illegally in the country could take the first steps toward U.S. citizenship.

Even uncontroversial changes were snared in the political crossfire that erupted on the first full day of debate on the measure, as the two sides failed to agree on terms for voting on seemingly non-controversial proposals such as granting tribal officials a place on a Border Oversight Task Force.

Public polling shows general support both for tougher border security and for allowing those living in the United States to gain citizenship after meeting certain legal, financial and other conditions. On an issue as contentious as immigration, that made the intersection of the two a fertile ground for dispute.

As drafted, the legislation "authorizes a permanent legalization program for illegal immigrants regardless of whether the Mexican border is ever secured," said Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas. The Senate's second-ranking leader also wants other measures implemented, including a biometric system to check everyone departing the country at a sea or airport, that Sen. Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said could take a quarter-century to take effect fully.

Trio Of Blazes Burn Out Of Control In Colorado

BY THOMAS PEIPERT
Associated Press

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. — Three Colorado wildfires fueled by hot temperatures, gusty winds and thick, bone-dry forests have together burned dozens of homes and led to the evacuation of more than 7,000 residents and nearly 1,000 inmates at medium-security prison.

Wildfires also were burning in New Mexico, Oregon and California, where a smokejumper was killed fighting one of dozens of lightning-sparked fires.

Crews were so busy battling wildfires across the West that the U.S. Forest Service announced Wednesday it is mobilizing a pair of Defense Department cargo planes to drop slurry on the blazes. Such action can't be taken unless all of the Forest Service's contracted tankers already are in use.

Near Colorado Springs, authorities released a list showing that a 12-square-mile wildfire in a heavily-wooded residential area has destroyed 92 homes and partially damaged five others — even as it continued to send up puffs of black smoke and likely consumed



CHRISTIAN MURDOCK/COLORADO SPRINGS GAZETTE/MCT
Andrew Dunlap and his father Dave Dunlap, in truck, watch as a wildfire burns behind their house in Colorado Springs, Colo., Tuesday.

more buildings.

The fire, one of several that broke out Tuesday along Colorado's Front Range, has forced thousands of evacuations in an area over 47 square miles. An unknown number of Colorado Springs residents also have been warned to be ready to evacuate, mostly because of a fear of flying embers spreading the fire into the

state's second-largest city. Sheriff's officials also evacuated part of neighboring Elbert County, including two camps with a total of about 1,250 kids and adults.

The smell of smoke and bits of ash floated in Denver, about 60 miles to the north, where the haze blocked the sun.

El Paso County Sheriff Terry Maketa said there were no re-

ports of anyone missing in the Black Forest Fire, but he was worried about those who chose to ignore evacuation orders and stay behind.

"One of my worst fears is that people took their chances and it may have cost them their life," he said.

The area is not far from last summer's Waldo Canyon Fire that destroyed 346 homes and killed two.

Denver Broncos guard Ben Garland's grandparents lost their home in the Waldo Canyon Fire and now live in a Black Forest neighborhood. They left their new home Tuesday, returned and were watching the fire Wednesday.

"It's tough. It was tough going through it the first time," Garland said. "I know the first time, we didn't take it as seriously. We just thought it'd pass over and the firefighters would take care of it. The second time, it was really scary and they packed up real quick and got ready to go."

The Forest Service said it was mobilizing two specially equipped Defense Department C-130s to help with wildfires in the West after all 12 of its air tankers were deployed.

Turkey

Gov't Open To Referendum To End Protests

BY ELENA BECATOROS
AND JAMEY KEATAN
Associated Press

ISTANBUL — Turkey's government on Wednesday offered a first concrete gesture aimed at ending nearly two weeks of street protests, proposing a referendum on a development project in Istanbul that triggered demonstrations that have become the biggest challenge to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's 10-year tenure.

Protesters expressed doubts about the offer, however, and continued to converge in Taksim Square's Gezi Park, epicenter of the anti-government protests that began in Istanbul 13 days ago and spread across the country. At times, police have broken up demonstrations using tear gas, water cannon and rubber bullets.

The protests erupted May 31 after a violent police crackdown on a peaceful sit-in by activists objecting to a development project that would replace Gezi Park with a replica Ottoman-era barracks. They then spread to dozens of cities, rallying tens of thousands of people each night.

In a skirmish late Wednesday

in Ankara, police used tear gas and water cannon to break up some 2,500 protesters who set up makeshift barricades on a road leading to government offices.

The referendum proposal came after Erdogan, who had been defiant and uncompromising in recent days, met with a group of 11 activists, including academics, students and artists, in Ankara. However, groups involved in the protests in Taksim and the park boycotted the meeting, saying they weren't invited and the attendees didn't represent them.

Greenpeace said it didn't participate because of an "environment of violence" in the country, while Taksim Solidarity, which has been coordinating much of the occupation of Gezi Park, said it had not been invited. The group reiterated its demands that Gezi remain a public park, that abusive senior officials be fired, and all detained protesters be released — not issues the referendum would address.

But the discussion was the first sign that Erdogan was looking for an exit from the show-down, and came hours after some European leaders expressed con-

cern about recent strong-armed Turkish police tactics and hopes that the prime minister would soften his stance.

Huseyin Celik, spokesman for Erdogan's Islamic-rooted Justice and Development party, announced it would consider holding a referendum over the development project. But he said any vote would exclude the planned demolition of a cultural center that the protesters also oppose, insisting it was in an earthquake-prone area and had to come down.

In a more defiant note, he said the ongoing sit-in in Gezi Park would not be allowed to continue "until doomsday" — a sign that authorities' patience is running out. But Celik also quoted Erdogan as saying that police would be investigated, and any found to have used excessive force against protesters would be punished.

Erdogan, who has claimed the protests were orchestrated by extremists and "terrorists," has become the centerpiece of the protesters' ire. So a referendum would be a political gamble that the government can mobilize its supporters, win the vote and the demonstrators would go home.

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Month and Year of Diagnosis: _____ Type of Cancer: _____

T-Shirt Size (circle): YM, YL, S, M, L, XL, 2XL, 3XL, 4XL

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Survivor Registration forms can also be completed on the Yankton Relay For Life website at www.relayforlife.org/yanktonSD (click on Survivors & Caregivers) by **June 14th** to ensure t-shirt size.

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