VOA NEWS

March 28, 2018

From Washington, this is VOA news. I'm Jonathan Jones reporting.

America's top defense official chastised Russia for dangerous and reckless behavior, saying it was "pretty obvious" that Russia was behind the use of a military-grade nerve agent used on [a Russian spy] a former Russian spy and his daughter in Britain.

U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis spoke with reporters Tuesday at the Pentagon. He was asked to describe the incident that has since touched off a diplomatic backlash against Russia. He said, "Attempted murder of a man and his daughter. How's that for starters?"

The White House said as of Tuesday, more than 25 countries had expelled 150 Russian intelligence officers "hiding under diplomatic cover" and Washington hoped more nations would follow its lead.

NATO announced it's expelling seven Russian diplomats and denying accreditation to three others as part of a "broad, strong and coordinated" international response to the nerve agent attack.

This is NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg. "I have today withdrawn the accreditation of seven staff at the Russian Mission to NATO. I will also deny the pending accreditation request for three others. And the North Atlantic Council has reduced the maximum size of the Russian Mission to NATO by ten people in line with my decision."

The families of those who died at a massive shopping mall fire Sunday in the Siberian city of Kemerovo are criticizing President Vladimir Putin for failing to meet with them when he visited the scene.

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A high-level North Korean delegation has reportedly made a brief visit to Beijing, fueling speculation that the reclusive country's dictator, Kim Jong Un, met with Chinese officials in the capital.

The lawyer for opposition senator Miguna Miguna, who holds dual Kenyan and Canadian citizenship, says his client was detained by police at the Nairobi airport during an attempt to force him onto a plane to Canada.

"The court had directed that the government departments and relevant government authorities should give Miguna a safe passage into the country."

Miguna's lawyers filed suit Tuesday against the government, seeking to have the opposition figure granted free access to his native country.

A Supreme Court justice ordered Miguna's immediate release and set a court appearance for Wednesday morning.

Calls are growing to reinstate France's state of emergency and crack down further against suspected Muslim extremists after last week's terror attack that left four dead in southern France and as the country prepares to bury the victims.

For VOA, correspondent Lisa Bryant has more on the debate and the investigation from Paris.

The political fallout is growing as center and far-right politicians call for restoring a state of emergency in France, which ended last November.

France has been hit by 20 terrorist attacks since 2014 that have killed 245 people. Some opposition politicians accuse the Macron government of being naive and soft on terrorism. On the other side, rights groups have lambasted the government's anti-terrorism legislation that replaced the state of emergency.

Lisa Bryant, for VOA news, Paris.

The FBI said on Tuesday that a man arrested on charges of sending a string of suspicious packages to military and intelligence installations in the Washington, D.C. area has no known connection to terrorism.

Suspect identified as 43-year-old Thanh Cong Phan, he was taken into custody at his house in Everett, Washington, late Monday.

Phan's motive has not been determined, but the FBI said there was no connection to terrorism.

In a statement, the FBI said the packages contained "potential destructive devices" and appeared to have been sent by the same person from the Seattle area.

More than a half dozen packages were shipped to several bases, including Fort McNair in the nation's capital and Fort Belvoir in northern Virginia - both of them Army bases.

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That's the latest world news from VOA.