

South American Diplomats Criticize U.S. Spying

Hi again. Welcome back to As It Is. I'm Kelly Jean Kelly.

Today we are going to Surf City, California. Riding the waves on surfboards has become a way of life there.

"Just getting out away from it all, get in the water and it is all blue and clean, and it just takes away all your problems."

But first, we go to South America. American Secretary of State John Kerry was in Colombia and Brazil this week talking with other diplomats. He made the visit to improve relations between the United States and Latin America. But South American leaders are expressing concerns about American spy programs. Those programs are reported to target communications across South America. Christopher Cruise has more.

Barack Obama's administration has said the American government wants to work with many South American countries. Here is Secretary of State John Kerry in Colombia this week, visiting a sports program for soldiers and police wounded by landmines.

"We will do everything possible that we can do to try to be helpful, to support this program and other programs and ultimately to try to help bring peace in Colombia."

But tensions have increased between the United States and South America recently. Many South American officials are angry about reports that the United States government has examined emails and phone calls across Latin America.

Last week, foreign ministers from Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, Uruguay, and Venezuela expressed their anger to the United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon. Venezuela's Elias Jaua spoke for the group.

He called the spy programs illegal. And, he said the programs threatened the trust and security of the international community.

Colombian president Juan Manuel Santos says he wants more information about American intelligence gathering. Brazil's president Dilma Rousseff says her country does not agree at all with the intervention.

Carl Meachem is the director of the Americas Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. He says Brazilians' concerns grow out of the Cold War era. At that time, the United States supported repressive governments in Latin America.

"What they attach this whole issue of surveillance to is the United States acting as a big brother. And they would say, 'On the one hand, you have the president of the United States that wants to reach out and be nice and develop a closer relationship,' but on the hand, they would say that, 'If you're trying to develop a closer relationship with us, why are you spying on us?'"

Mr. Meacham says the real issue is that the United States was caught spying. American computer specialist Edward Snowden told the press about the surveillance programs last May. But Mr. Meacham says America is not doing anything different than other countries, including Brazil.

“Compared to a lot of the countries that are being highlighted—Chinese, the Russians, countries where Mr. Snowden has taken asylum—these are countries that have far worse records with democracy and human rights than the United States.”

Mr. Meacham says he believes the tension and bad feelings will pass.

State Department spokeswoman Marie Harf said this week that the American government will continue discussing the surveillance programs with foreign partners. But, she said, surveillance issues should not become more important than the work America and its partners are doing.

Here we are in Huntington Beach, California—also known as Surf City.

Surfers have been riding the waves at Huntington Beach for almost 100 years. In the 1950s, musicians like the Beach Boys and Jan and Dean helped make the sport especially popular.

Movies also helped, like the 1959 film “Gidget.” The movie told about a teenage girl’s introduction to surf culture.

“If I had one of those boards, I could be a surfer too. I would come down and surf any time I wanted to, just like the guys.”

The International Surfing Museum in Huntington Beach works to keep the history of surfing. It tells the story of Hawaiians George Freeth and Duke Kahanamoku, who brought surfing to California in the early 1900s. It also shows modern surfing champions, such as Kelly Slater.

The surf boards have changed over time. They are shorter and faster today.

One former competitor says the sport has also changed. Australian Pete Townend says today’s professionals can earn big prizes and marketing agreements. Pete Townend was the world professional surfing champion in 1976.

“There are a lot of young surfers today making a million dollars a year. That is pretty good money to just go surfing in perfect waves with beautiful girls all around, right?”

The U.S. Open of Surfing was held recently in Huntington Beach. It brought together top surfers from as far away as Japan and Brazil. Spokeswoman Jennifer Lau says surfing is a worldwide sport today.

“Surfing is something that is appealing and it is a spiritual thing. You either have what we call the stoke, or you do not, and it is really what keeps you alive.”

She says “the stoke” is the feeling you get when you are riding a great wave.

And that’s As It Is. I’m Kelly Jean Kelly.

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