

## CRUZ BARRAGED BY CRITICISM FOR PLAN TO PATROL MUSLIM NEIGHBORHOODS

**NEW YORK:** US Republican presidential candidate Ted Cruz was barraged by criticism Wednesday one day after proposing that police "patrol and secure Muslim neighborhoods before they become radicalized." Included among critics was President Barack Obama, who called the Texas senator's idea "contrary to who we are." "Any approach that would single (Muslims) out or target them for discrimination is not only wrong and un-American, but it also would be counterproductive," Obama told reporters in Argentina, which he visited after a historic trip to Cuba.

"I just left a country that engages in that kind of neighborhood surveillance, which, by the way, the father of Senator Cruz escaped for America, the land of the free," he said. Cruz issued his proposal Tuesday in response to bomb attacks in Brussels that left at least 31 dead in a plot claimed by the Islamic State group. The ultra-conservative senator's rival, Republican frontrunner Donald Trump who has advocated the use of torture against terrorism suspects-backed Cruz's proposal, calling it "a good idea."

Meanwhile Democratic presidential frontrunner Hillary Clinton denounced Cruz's proposal as "dangerous" and "counter-productive." "It's hard to imagine a more incendiary, foolish statement," she said in California, where she was campaigning. "One thing we know that does not work is offensive, inflammatory rhetoric that demonizes all Muslims," she added, calling Muslims a "first line of defense" against terrorism. John Kasich, the Republican presidential candidate running in third place, also denounced Cruz's remarks. "The last thing we need is more polarization," he said.

### 1,000 Muslim NY police

New York Police Department Commissioner Bill Bratton was among the proposal's most vocal critics. "He doesn't know the Hell what he is talking about," Bratton told CBS News, saying the city's police force includes nearly 1,000 Muslims. "Ironically, when he is running around here, we probably have a few Muslim officers guiding him." There is little love lost between New Yorkers and Cruz, who was in the city Wednesday speaking to supporters. —AFP

## BRAZIL'S ODEBRECHT MAY HAVE DAMAGING SECRETS TO TELL

**BRASOLIA:** The corruption scandal threatening to bring down Brazil's government may only just be getting started: construction giant Odebrecht, one of the main players, is now promising to tell its dirty secrets. Odebrecht announced Tuesday it would "definitively cooperate" with the authorities, two years into an investigation that identified it as the ringleader in a cartel of contractors that colluded to overbill state oil company Petrobras by billions of dollars. Although prosecutors were quick to insist they have not struck any deal with the company, Brasilia is bracing itself for more explosive revelations in a scandal that has already upended politics and left President Dilma Rousseff hanging by a thread.

Prosecutors say Odebrecht, one of Latin America's biggest construction groups, paid huge bribes to Petrobras execs and politicians to grease the wheels of the corruption machine, handing over cash at secretive hotel meetings and keeping track of it with a separate book-keeping system. Former chief executive Marcelo Odebrecht was sentenced to nearly 20 years in prison this month. In all, 34 lawmakers are under investigation, and two former presidents face charges, including Rousseff's powerful predecessor and mentor, Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. According to Brazilian media reports, Odebrecht's former boss, the family patriarch Emilio Odebrecht, had threatened that if Marcelo, his successor and son, went down in the scandal, he would take others with him. "If they arrest Marcelo, they'll have to build three more cells—one for me, one for Lula and one for Dilma," he reportedly told acquaintances. Marcelo Odebrecht was in fact arrested last June. But he held his tongue, unlike many of those arrested in the case. Then came his sentencing on March 8 — a crushing 19 years and four months followed by new raids Tuesday that took out Odebrecht's "parallel accounting system" and ended with federal police arresting or temporarily detaining dozens of suspects. That double whammy appears to have convinced the company to cooperate.—AFP



**TUCSON, Arizona:** In this photo, Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump speaks during a campaign rally in Tucson, Arizona.—AP

## FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE: WHY THE KREMLIN SUPPORTS TRUMP

### STATE TV LAUDS TRUMP, CASTS HIM AS BRAVE MAVERICK

**MOSCOW:** Donald Trump is a brave pro-Putin political maverick who would end US foreign wars and perhaps lift sanctions on Moscow. Hillary Clinton, however, is a warmonger beholden to the military-industrial complex. Russian state TV, which hews closely to the Kremlin's world view, leaves little doubt about who Moscow supports in November's US presidential election: "The Donald."

Vladimir Putin's spokesman took brief exception this month to a Trump attack video which showed Putin laughing at the prospect of Clinton defending America. But officials and analysts say the Kremlin still sees Trump as the best candidate by a mile. Putin has hailed Trump as "very talented". The head of the Russian parliament's foreign affairs committee said he'd be a worthy winner of the 2015 "man of the year" title in the United States.

And Dmitry Kiselyov, presenter of Russia's main weekly TV news show "Vesti Nedeli," claimed this month that the Republican party elite had struck a secret deal with the Democrats to derail Trump, in part because of his sympathy for Russia. "Trump doesn't suit the Republican party," Kiselyov told viewers. "They usually divide up the state budget (among themselves) by frightening people about Russia. But Trump is ready to find a common language with Putin. That's why they don't need Trump and even regard him as dangerous." Kiselyov has been one of the chief proponents of state television's strongly anti-American tone, once saying Moscow could turn the United States into radioactive ash.

Some experts say Trump appeals to Moscow because Putin believes a Trump presidency would be isolationist and leave Russia with a free hand. "The Kremlin can't believe its luck," said Konstantin von Eggert, an independent Moscow-based

political analyst who believes the Obama administration has not been forceful in countering Russia. "President Obama and (Secretary of State) John Kerry were a dream team for them, but now they have an even better option; someone who thinks that America should have nothing to do with the rest of the world."

RT, the Kremlin's English-language TV channel formerly known as Russia Today, says it does not back any US candidates. But it has described Trump as "idiosyncratic and raw," and suggested he represents the popular will of US voters, which a sinister US establishment is trying to subvert. "Can America's elections be truly called democratic if the political establishment aligns itself against the popular will?" lamented Peter Lavelle, the American host of RT's flagship talk "CrossTalk" show. "As things stand now millions of voters could be disenfranchised."

### 'Thank god for Trump'

Trump has received advice from Lieutenant General Michael Flynn, a former US military intelligence chief who advocates better ties with Russia, and who shared a dinner table in Moscow with Putin in December to celebrate RT's 10th anniversary. Trump has won friends in Moscow with statements praising Putin as a strong leader that he could probably get along with. His support for Russian air strikes in Syria was welcomed. In January, after a British judge ruled that Putin had "probably" authorized the murder of former KGB agent Alexander Litvinenko in London, Trump said he saw "no evidence" the Russian president was guilty. "First of all, he says he didn't do it. Many people say it wasn't him. So who knows who did it?" Trump said.

This week, Trump said the United States should reduce funding for NATO. A

Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman said his comments showed the alliance was in crisis. "For the last two years all we heard from Western newspapers and TV was very critical of Russia," Victoria Zhuravleva, a Moscow-based expert on US-Russia relations said. "So when you hear something that is not so critical and even more friendly towards your country it's like: 'Thank God, There's one person we can talk to: Donald Trump'" Trump and Putin were similar, she said: "They are both open-minded, pragmatic, and say what they think."

### 'The old brigand'

The mutual appreciation between Trump and Putin has invited comparisons to the Russian leader's friendship with another billionaire-turned-politician, Italy's Silvio Berlusconi, who outraged Ukrainians and irked EU leaders last year by visiting Russian-annexed Crimea with Putin. They toured a Crimean winery and drank a priceless 240-year-old bottle from its cellar. By contrast, Hillary Clinton, who is well known to the Kremlin because of her 2009-2013 stint as US Secretary of State, is clearly not to Moscow's taste. "We really don't want Hillary," said one Russian official, who spoke anonymously because of the subject's sensitivity. "She's no friend of Russia's."

State media coverage has focused on what it has cast as her wacky promise to declassify UFO files and on the pressure she has faced for using her personal email account for government business and over her response to the fatal 2012 attack on the US diplomatic compound in Benghazi, Libya. Pro-Kremlin bloggers, corralled by a Putin supporter who used to represent the ruling party in parliament, are enthused by the prospect of agitating on behalf of Trump.—Reuters