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## Yearender: Snowden's revolt jolts Western alliance, strains Russia-U.S. ties

By Liu Hongxia

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It might be the snowiest winter for Edward Snowden.

Facing "unchanged" espionage charges back in his home country, Snowden, who was stranded in the transit zone of a Moscow airport for nearly six weeks before receiving temporary asylum, almost broke trust between the United States and its European allies like Germany.

No one, even Snowden himself, can say for sure why the 30-year-old analyst leaked, as U.S. National Security Agency (NSA) Chief Keith Alexander said in November, up to 200,000 classified documents to the media.

Yet, the repercussions were substantial, and apparently to sustain.

### TOUGH YEAR FOR UNCLE SAM

Since the first publication in June by The Guardian newspaper, millions of Americans, most of whom for the first time, found themselves exposed to a mass intelligence program code-named PRISM.

More classified information, involving the participation of major U.S. telecommunications

companies, was revealed after Snowden arrived at Moscow's Sheremetyevo International Airport.

The United States was quick enough to bring three felony charges against Snowden, namely conveying classified information to an unauthorized party, disclosing communications intelligence information, and theft of government property.

Meanwhile, the U.S. civil society, as well as political groups, were divided on whether Snowden was a traitor of the nation or hero for individual rights.

The heated discussion, along with globally lengthy media coverage, has piled excessive pressure on U.S. President Barack Obama's administration, though it repeatedly attributed the massive tapping to anti-terrorism efforts, Russian experts say.

"Snowden's case made the entire world think whether the NSA and other secret services have crossed the line -- whether one more terrorist neutralized is worth the discomfort of a million law-abiding citizens," said Nikolai Fedotov, chief analyst in the Moscow-based InfoWatch Data Loss Prevention and Protection Corporation.

In a German parliament session in November, furious Chancellor Angela Merkel demanded clarification from Washington on alleged tapping of her private mobile phones over the last decade, and warned that the transatlantic free trade agreement between the United States and the European Union is currently, without doubt, being put to the test by the revelations that have been aired against Washington about the gathering of millions of bits of data.

Vladimir Yevseyev, director of the Center of Social and Political Research in the Russian Academy of Science, said: "We observe two communities aboard Western ship: one on the U.S. ship, where the crew is unhappy with the captain's omnipresence in their lives."

"The other one is on European ship, whose crew has been equally irritated with the Big Brother's surveillance," he told Xinhua.

The U.S. spying in Latin America also ruffled feathers. Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff canceled a planned visit to Washington in October and slammed the United States at an annual UN General Assembly meeting.

## **UNEXPECTED GIFT FOR MOSCOW**

Among the reasons for not repatriating Snowden was that no extradition treaty exists between Moscow and Washington, although Russia has been calling for years to sign one.

Meanwhile, even if the two countries have such a treaty, Moscow can still not extradite Snowden, Russian experts say.

"Usually, professional moles, if uncovered, are exchanged on the parity basis," said Vladimir Zharikhin, a member of the National Strategy Council.

"But Snowden is by no means a mole. Legally speaking, he is not a subject for extradition even if the readmission treaty exists," he added.

Moscow was obviously aware of that, by repeating those claims it demonstrated to the world that Russia could be a responsible global leader that is not afraid to annoy the United States, the expert said.

Russia's authority in world affairs has increased tremendously following the Snowden affair.

"Snowden later has helped Russian diplomacy in Syrian and Iranian problems. Russia has become a real counterweight to the U.S. hegemony," said Sergei Markov, director of Institute for Political Research, calling Snowden an unexpected gift for Moscow.

### **USED UP MATERIAL?**

Asylum for Snowden has boosted Russia's international profile. However, Moscow did not intend to worsen ties with the United States, with President Vladimir Putin barring Snowden from harming U.S. interests as the precondition for asylum.

Markov believed that Moscow wanted to get rid of Snowden, speculating that "Moscow and Washington may even have worked out some secret plan."

That logic makes sense as Snowden has reportedly asked for asylum in Brazil as his legal stay in Russia expires on July 31, 2014.

Experts said Snowden's move testified to Russia's compliance with the promise not to allow harm to his home country and showed Snowden's resolution to carry on his fight against the government, indicating that he "is not welcomed"

"He is a used up material and his value depreciates day by day unless he finds a new, reliable harbor," said Yevseyev of the Russian Academy of Science.

The long winter in Russia might be the last one for the 30-year-old American. (Xinhua employee Igor Serebryany also contributed to this story.)