

Could enemies target undersea cables that connect the world?

By DEB RIECHMANN
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Russian ships are skulking around underwater communications cables, causing the U.S. and its allies to worry the Kremlin might be taking information warfare to new depths.

Is Moscow interested in cutting or tapping the cables? Does it want the West to worry it might? Is there a more innocent explanation? Unsurprisingly, Russia isn't saying.

But whatever Moscow's intentions, U.S. and Western officials are increasingly troubled by their rival's interest in the 400 fiber-optic cables that carry most of world's calls, emails and texts, as well as \$10 trillion worth of daily financial transactions.

"We've seen activity in the Russian navy, and particularly undersea in their submarine activity, that we haven't seen since the '80s," Gen. Curtis Scaparrotti, commander of the U.S. European Command, told Congress this month.

Without undersea cables, a bank in Asian countries couldn't send money to Saudi Arabia to pay for oil. U.S. military leaders would struggle to communicate with troops fighting extremists in Afghanistan and the Middle East. A student in Europe wouldn't be able to Skype his parents in the United States.

All this information is transmitted along tiny glass fibers encased in undersea cables that, in some cases, are little bigger than a garden hose. All told, there are 620,000 miles of fiber-optic cable running under the sea, enough to loop around the earth nearly 25 times.

Most lines are owned by private telecommunications companies, including giants

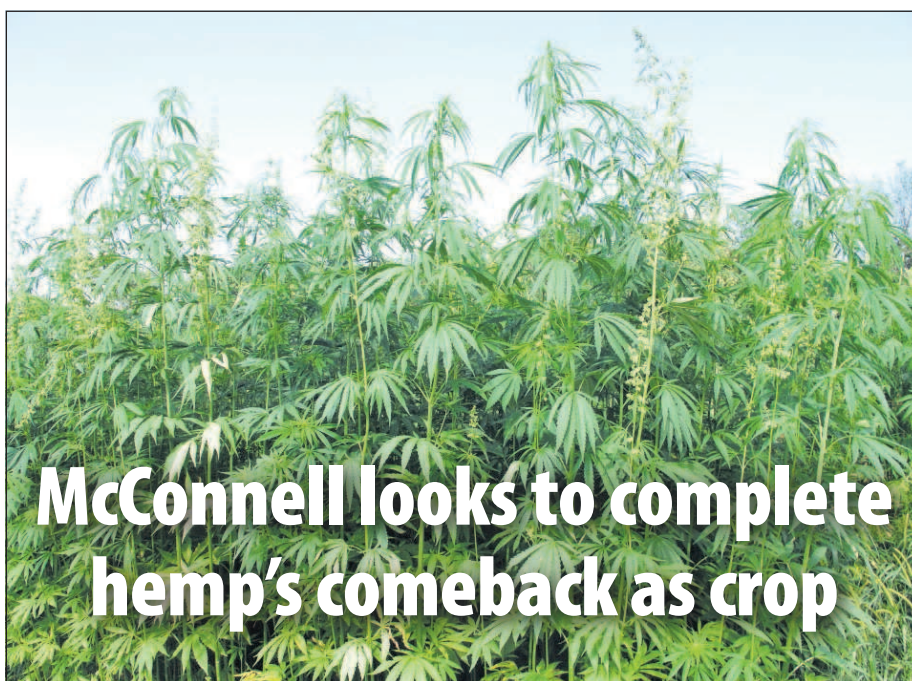
like Google and Microsoft. Their locations are easily identified on public maps, with swirling lines that look like spaghetti. While cutting one cable might have limited impact, severing several simultaneously or at choke points could cause a major outage.

The Russians "are doing their homework and, in the event of a crisis or conflict with them, they might do rotten things to us," said Michael Kofman, a Russian military expert at nonprofit research group CNA Corp.

It's not Moscow's war-fighting ships and submarines that are making NATO and U.S. officials uneasy. It's Russia's Main Directorate of Deep Sea Research, whose specialized surface ships, submarines, underwater drones and mini subs conduct reconnaissance, underwater salvage and other work.

One ship run by the directorate is the Yantar. It's a modest, 354-foot oceanographic vessel that holds a crew of about 60. It most recently was off South America's coast helping Argentina search for a lost submarine.

Parlamentskaya Gazeta, the Russian parliament's publication, last October said the Yantar has equipment "designed for deep-sea tracking" and "connecting to top-secret communication cables." The publication said that in September 2015, the Yantar was near Kings Bay, Georgia, home to a U.S. submarine base, "collecting information about the equipment on American submarines, including underwater sensors and the unified (U.S. military) information network." Rossiya, a Russian state TV network, has said the Yantar can not only connect to top-secret cables, but could cut them and "jam underwater sensors with a special system."



McConnell looks to complete hemp's comeback as crop

AP Photo/Bruce Schreiner, File

Hemp plants tower above the ground at a research farm in Lexington, Ky.

By BRUCE SCHREINER
Associated Press

FRANKFORT, Ky. — Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell wants a full pardon for hemp.

The Kentucky Republican this week previewed legislation seeking to free the plant from its ties to marijuana and let it take root as a legitimate crop.

Hemp — marijuana's non-intoxicating cousin — would be removed from the controlled substances list under the bill he's offering, McConnell said. The result would legalize hemp as an agricultural commodity.

"We're going to give it everything we've got to pull it off," the Senate's top leader told hemp advocates in his home state.

The crop has been grown on an experimental basis in a number of states in recent years, and Kentucky has been at the forefront of hemp's comeback. Kentucky agriculture officials have approved more than 12,000 acres to be grown in the state this year, and 57 Kentucky processors are helping turn the raw product into a multitude of products.

Growing hemp without a federal permit has long been banned owing to its classification as a controlled substance related to marijuana. Hemp and marijuana are the same species, but hemp has a negligible amount of THC, the psychoactive compound that gets marijuana users high.

Hemp got a limited reprieve with the 2014 federal Farm Bill. McConnell helped push for the provision that allows state agriculture departments to designate hemp projects for research and development.

Since then, 34 states have authorized hemp research, while actual production

occurred in 19 states last year, said Eric Steenstra, president of the advocacy group Vote Hemp. Hemp production totaled about 25,500 acres in 2017, more than double the 2016 output, he said.

Supporters said the bill would bring more certainty for farmers, agribusinesses and investors looking at the crop.

"The goal of this new bill, should it become law, is to simply remove the roadblocks altogether," McConnell said. "It would encourage innovation and development and support to domestic production of hemp."

The crop, which once thrived in Kentucky, was historically used for rope, clothing and mulch from the fiber, hemp milk and cooking oil from the seeds, and soap and lotions. Other uses include building materials, animal bedding and biofuels.

Hemp advocates, who have fought for years to restore the crop's legitimacy, praised McConnell for putting his political clout behind the effort.

"This is a huge development for the hemp industry," Steenstra said. "Sen. McConnell's support is critical to helping us move hemp from research and pilot programs to full commercial production."

Brian Furnish, an eighth-generation tobacco farmer in Kentucky, has taken the plunge into hemp production. His family will grow about 300 acres of hemp this year in Harrison County. He's also part owner of a company that turns hemp into food, fiber and dietary supplements.

Furnish said hemp has the potential to rival or surpass what tobacco production once meant to Kentucky.

"All we've got to do is the government get out of the way and let us grow," he told reporters.



Sen. McConnell

BRIEFLY

John L. Scott announces new M-F location

MILTON-FREEWATER — John L. Scott Real Estate announced it is opening new offices in Milton-Freewater at 18 S. Columbia St.

Owner Dennis Gisi of Walla Walla said it took some time to find a suitable location and continue be a part of Milton-Freewater community. He said the business will do some remodeling and upgrading to the building before he and his team of four employees — Gordy Snyder, Lewis Key, Andrea Moore, and Kerri Walker — completely move in.

"We have seen some strong growth since we purchased the business in 2013," Gisi said in the written announcement. "Sales reached approximately \$10 million in 2017, which represents a 45 percent average rate of growth year over year. We definitely are grateful for the support the community has given to us."

Umatilla County records show Gisi's development firm, 3 Rivers Oregon Properties, bought the Milton-Freewater building for \$65,000.

Jef Farley of Pendleton elected new chair of Oregon Real Estate Board

PENDLETON — Real estate broker James "Jef" Farley of Pendleton is the new chairperson of the Oregon Real Estate Board.

The Umatilla County Board of Realtors recently reported the state board elected Farley to the post at its October meeting. Farley is co-owner of Coldwell Banker Whitney and Associates, Pendleton.

Farley served as vice-chair in 2017. He specializes in residential and commercial real estate in Eastern Oregon and has been a full-time real estate professional since 1991.

The real estate board also elected Lawnae Hunter of Bend as its vice-chairperson. She is the principal broker and owner of Plus Property Management, Bend.



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