

Brazil Target of Massive NSA Spying Operation

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Global Research, July 10, 2013

[World Socialist Web Site](#)

Region: [Latin America & Caribbean](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#)

New documents provided by the former National Security Agency (NSA) contractor Edward Snowden have exposed a massive US spying operation targeting millions of Brazilian citizens as well as companies and government institutions. The NSA has also targeted the Brazilian embassy in Washington and the country's mission to the United Nations in New York.

The scale of the secret espionage was spelled out in an article published July 7 in the Rio de Janeiro daily *O Globo*, co-written by its own staff and Glen Greenwald, the *Guardian* journalist who interviewed Snowden and has published a number of articles based on documents provided by the ex-NSA contractor.

The report touched off a wave of official protests and investigations by the Brazilian government headed by President Dilma Rousseff of the Workers Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores—PT). The government demanded explanations from the US State Department and the American ambassador in Brasilia.

At the same time, it announced a criminal investigation by the Federal Police and the National Telecommunications Agency (known by its Portuguese acronym ANATEL) into the spying. One of its objectives will be to determine whether Brazilian companies collaborated with the operations of the US intelligence agency.

According to the documents cited in the *O Globo* story, access to Brazilian networks was provided by a US telecommunications company that maintains partnerships with companies in Brazil. The newspaper said it was not clear from the documents whether the Brazilian firms were aware of how their ties to the US company were being exploited by the NSA.

The report stressed that Brazil was made a “prime target” by the NSA, on the level of Pakistan, Iran, China and Russia. While US officials have defended the agency’s secret domestic and international spying programs as necessary measures in the “global war on terrorism,” there has never been any suggestion that Brazil is a source of terrorist threats. Rather, the country has likely been given such attention because of its growing economic weight and the challenge it poses to US imperialism’s attempts to exert its hegemony in Latin America and elsewhere.

President Rousseff, while declaring herself “indignant” over the report, added that her government would proceed “without precipitation” or “prejudgment.” She declared, “We have to have dialogue.”

She said her government would promote legislation to secure “first, human rights, the right to privacy of every person and every citizen, and secondly, but not in that order, it is

simultaneous, to guarantee the sovereignty of Brazil.”

Brazilian Communications Minister Paulo Bernardo said that the country was faced with “evidence that the Internet is being transformed into a mechanism for global espionage, and that we can fall into a situation of states monitoring the lives of citizens morning, noon and night, and nobody talking about it.” He said that Brazil would pursue discussions on changing the governance of the Internet, which is exclusively in US hands.

Brazilian Foreign Minister Antonio Patriota declared the government’s “deep concern at the report that electronic and telephone communications of Brazilian citizens are being the object of espionage by the organs of American intelligence.” He said that Brasilia would seek action by the United Nations to “impede abuses and protect the privacy” of telephone and Internet communications.

At the same time, Patriota described as “encouraging” the declared willingness of US officials to engage in discussions on the issue.

It is certain that such sentiments are not shared among wide layers of the Brazilian population. The reality is that the US State Department refused to comment in any fashion on the spying program.

The US ambassador to Brazil, Thomas Shannon, insisted that the *O Globo* story “presented an incorrect image of our program,” but failed to respond to its central thesis, that American intelligence had spied on millions of Brazilians, intercepting billions of their communications. The office of the US Director of National Intelligence likewise refused to comment, claiming the issue would be dealt with through “diplomatic channels” and that “the United States gathers foreign intelligence of the type gathered by all nations.”

The issue is of particular sensitivity in Brazil, which was ruled for two decades by a military dictatorship that came to power in a 1964 CIA-backed coup. Under the military regime, phone-tapping and other forms of domestic surveillance were ubiquitous.

Despite the verbal protests and proposals for legislation, Brazil’s PT government clearly wants no direct confrontation with Washington. Most tellingly, Foreign Minister Patriota made it clear that Brasilia has no intention of reversing its position of summarily rejecting the appeal for asylum by Edward Snowden, the source of the information on the US spying on Brazilians.

Nor, for that matter, was there any threat from Rousseff’s government of terminating US-Brazilian agreements covering intelligence and military collaboration.

A follow-up story published in *O Globo* Monday revealed that the NSA and the CIA had been allowed to run a surveillance station in Brasilia to collect intelligence from satellites of other countries at least until 2002. The date is significant in that it marked the coming to office for the first time of the PT under then-President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

An NSA document apparently obtained by Snowden named “Primary Fornstat Collection Operations” exposed the existence of the station. There was no indication that the document established the closure of the spy base.

The indications that the PT government has not only continued to collaborate with US intelligence operations in the country, but also to share in the information that they gather,

have yet to be probed by the Brazilian media.

It was revealed in the course of the demonstrations that brought millions of people into the streets last month that the Rousseff government had organized a spying operation by the Federal Police on social media as part of an attempt to suppress the mass protest movement.

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