

British Intelligence Operation to Kidnap Snowden? Number One MI-6 Officer Working Undercover in Moscow Embassy

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Britain's spy-infested embassy in Moscow has taken the lead among the «FIVE EYES» signals intelligence allies to locate the whereabouts of National Security Agency whistleblower Edward Snowden in Russia. In fact, the British government is more avid in its desire to locate and possibly rendition Snowden to the United Kingdom or United States than is either the U.S. or the other governments of the FIVE EYES signals intelligence (SIGINT) partnership, which also includes Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

Britain's desire to bag Snowden has more to do with the alleged damage his revelations caused British electronic surveillance operations around the world than any desire to ingratiate Britain's Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) and Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) with their American counterparts, the NSA and CIA, respectively.

The government of Prime Minister David Cameron has made it clear that it views Snowden, as well as those who have assisted him in the publication of NSA's and GCHQ's most closely-guarded espionage secrets as «terrorists».

Britain's apoplectic reaction to Snowden's disclosures was on display during testimony before the British Parliament when Britain's top three intelligence chiefs — John Sawers of MI-6; Andrew Parker of MI-5; and Iain Lobben of the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), the British counterpart of NSA — accused Snowden and those who published his leaked documents of aiding Al Qaeda... Former British Defense Secretary Liam Fox, presently a Conservative MP, went even further, accusing those who publish the leaked NSA and GCHQ secrets, including The Guardian staff, of being terrorists. Fox asked Britain's Director of Public Prosecutions to investigate whether The Guardian, its editor Alan Rusbridger, its former reporter Glenn Greenwald, and Greenwald's partner David Miranda were in breach of British anti-terrorism laws.

Miranda was detained by British authorities on August 18 as he was transiting through Heathrow airport en route from Berlin to Rio de Janeiro. British authorities claimed it seized from Miranda's computer equipment 58,000 digital documents appropriated by Snowden while he was working as an NSA contractor in Hawaii.

In July, the presidential plane carrying Bolivian President Evo Morales from an energy summit in Moscow back to La Paz was forced to land in Vienna after the FIVE EYES partners of the United States and Britain, as well as the NINE EYES and FOURTEEN EYES «Third Parties» of France, Spain, Italy, and Portugal all closed their airspace to Morales's plane. The SIGINT allies mistakenly believed that Morales was taking Snowden to Bolivia from Moscow.

The Spanish ambassador to Austria even searched Morales's plane looking for Snowden. This operation had the full support of the British embassy in Moscow which had earlier conducted a surveillance operation of the transit lounge of Sheremetyevo airport, as well as the Moscow embassies of Bolivia, Venezuela, and Ecuador.

Ever since he was granted temporary political asylum by Russia after being held in transit limbo at Moscow's Sheremetyevo International Airport after his arrival from Hong Kong, Snowden's location in Russia has been a closely-guarded secret. Snowden is believed to have the protection of a combination of private security guards and agents of the Russian Federal Security Bureau (FSB). There have been reports that Snowden is running low on cash even though he was recently hired by a Russian information technology company.

In October, Snowden met with four other American national whistleblowers — Ray McGovern, formerly of the CIA; Colleen Rowley, formerly with the FBI; former NSA official Tom Drake, and former Justice Department prosecutor Jesselyn Radack — met with Snowden at an undisclosed location in Moscow. The four Americans traveled to Moscow to present Snowden with the Sam Adams Award for Integrity and Intelligence.

After the receipt by Snowden of the award, British MI-6 case officers assigned to the British embassy at Smolenskaya Naberezhnaya 10 in Moscow began using NSA and GCHQ «contact chaining» intelligence gathered from surveillance of Facebook and other social networking systems to identify Snowden's location. The contact chaining began with the Facebook, Twitter, as well as phone call metadata, information derived from the four American visitors to Moscow. In turn, their contacts in Moscow were identified, thus expanding the chain used to determine Snowden's location and daily schedule.

Thanks to Snowden's disclosure of documents on contact chaining, it is now known that SID Management Directive (SMD) 424 (SIGINT Development — Communications Metadata Analysis), signed on November 29, 2010, permits NSA and its partners, including GCHQ, to permit contact chaining, and other analysis, from and through any selector, irrespective of nationality or location, in order to follow or discover valid foreign intelligence targets».

The new directive permits GCHQ and NSA to share contact chaining intelligence against foreign targets, including «U.S. communicants» as long as there is a «foreign intelligence (FI) justification». In Snowden's case, a foreign intelligence justification was recognized and approved.

Contact chaining using Facebook, Twitter, email address books, and other sources is then used to develop «large-scale graph analysis on very large sets of communications metadata without having to check foreignness of every node or address in the graph». Such nodes and addresses would include, in Snowden's case, every person with whom he has come into contact digitally and, in turn, every node or address that those nodes or addresses have come into contact with, and so forth.

As with its embassies in Berlin and other capitals, the roof of the British embassy in Moscow is rife with antennas and other eavesdropping equipment, including a dome that clearly hides a satellite communications antenna. One rooftop green radome, housing a satellite dish, keeps the embassy's MI-6 agents, working under diplomatic as security officers, maintenance men, and British Council employees, as well as GCHQ signals intelligence operators, in constant contact with MI-5 headquarters at Vauxhall Station in London; GCHQ

in Cheltenham, England; NSA headquarters in Fort Meade, Maryland, the CIA in Langley, Virginia, and the massive NSA surveillance station in Menwith Hill, England. Local British embassy SIGINT assets have been trained on the communications of Snowden and his Russian support personnel and foreign visitors, including the four American whistleblowers and German Green Party legislator Hans-Christian Ströbele.

The operation to locate Snowden is one of the highest priority operations for the embassy, even eclipsing the recent «thaw» in relations between the British and Russian security and intelligence services. The operation is known to involve the number one MI-6 officer at the embassy, whose diplomatic cover is «director of regional security».

Capturing Snowden through a kidnapping, known as «rendition,» is more problematic for the British. However, Russian security services, including the FSB, are devoting much of their attention to the Winter Olympics, which begin on February 7, 2014 in Sochi. The tactic of MI-6 may be to wait for a lapse in the security provided by FSB to Snowden to arrange for an operation to capture him and spirit him out of Russia during a time when Moscow and the rest of Russia will be playing host to tens of thousands of foreign visitors to the Olympics.

Adhering to diplomatic «niceties» will not dissuade the British spy contingent in Moscow from trying to capture and rendition Snowden. Unlike the Cold War and Finland's sole egress border for Western spies, there are now many routes to spirit someone out of Russia, including through the Baltic States, Belarus, and Ukraine.

The first NSA whistleblower, Perry Fellwock, who used the pseudonym Winslow Peck after revealing NSA surveillance operations in 1972, recently came out of obscurity and semi-retirement to comment on the recent revelations from Snowden. Fellwock told Gawker.com that the NSA and its FIVE EYES partners are independent of their governments, «an entity unto itself». This entity will stop at nothing to capture Edward Snowden regardless of international law and diplomatic protocols.

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