

European Agencies, NSA Collaborate on Mass Spying Against European Population

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New leaked documents by former National Security Agency (NSA) contractor Edward Snowden reported in the *Guardian* disclose the close partnership between the European intelligence services and the NSA in mass surveillance of internet and phone traffic over the past five years. They give a glimpse of how a pan-European spying system has emerged, directed at the entire European and world population.

The programs revealed by the *Guardian* demonstrate why European governments downplayed the initial revelations of Internet monitoring by US and British intelligence agencies in June. A major diplomatic crisis erupted two weeks ago, however, when it emerged that the US was also spying on German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

US Director of National Intelligence James Clapper candidly admitted intelligence services monitor thousands of government and opposition politicians in “allied” countries.

In the escalating international scandal over the NSA, European governments are not acting in any way as defenders of democratic rights. While they object to mass surveillance of their communications by the NSA, they work with the NSA to spy on global Internet traffic and create for themselves the surveillance infrastructure of police states in Europe.

The documents published by the *Guardian* show that French, Spanish, Swedish, Dutch and German intelligence services are cooperating in a pan-European surveillance system comparable to the NSA’s global spying network. These agencies carry out direct taps into fibre-optic cables and the development of covert relationships with national telecommunications companies, as the NSA has developed with Google or Facebook.

At the centre of the spying network is the UK’s Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ). The UK’s intelligence agency is positioned in a privileged situation due to its location as the gateway of transatlantic cables from the US to Europe, its special relation with the NSA, and its permissive spying environment created by successive Labour and Tory governments’ legislation.

In 2008 the “Tempora” system was developed by the GCHQ, which systematically monitors all outgoing and incoming communications via its access to the fibre-optic cables through which all UK Internet traffic passes. Leaked documents show that some 600 million calls are monitored each day by tapping more than 200 fibre-optic cables.

In the same year GCHQ officials expressed admiration for Germany’s Federal Intelligence Service (BND) for its technological capabilities, stating that they had “huge technological

potential and good access to the heart of the internet—they are already seeing some bearers [term used for the fibre-optic cables] running at 40Gbps and 100Gbps.” Gbps (gigabit per second) refers to the speed at which data runs through fibre-optic cables.

British officials reportedly admire the BND because they were not able to monitor as many cables as their German counterparts. In 2012 they were still only able to monitor 10 Gbps cables and looked forward to developing the ability to tap new 100 Gbps fibre-optic cables.

The UK’s intelligence agency helped the BND bypass German laws that restricted its ability to use its technology. The report states, “We have been assisting the BND (along with SIS [Secret Intelligence Service] and Security Service) in making the case for reform or reinterpretation of the very restrictive interception legislation in Germany.”

GCHQ also praises France’s General Directorate for External Security (DGSE) and its relationship with an unnamed telecommunications company. “DGSE are a highly motivated, technically competent partner, who has shown great willingness to engage on IP [internet protocol] issues, and to work with GCHQ on a ‘cooperate and share’ basis.”

British intelligence also trained DGSE technicians. The document states, “We have made contact with the DGSE’s main industry partner, who has some innovative approaches to some internet challenges, raising the potential for GCHQ to make use of this company in the protocol development arena.” In 2009, both agencies collaborated in breaking online encryption methods.

The GCHQ also collaborated with the Spanish National Intelligence Centre (CNI), which carries out mass internet surveillance thanks to its ties with an unnamed British telecommunications company, giving them “fresh opportunities and uncovering some surprising results.” Under Spanish law, mass trawl of communications on an indiscriminate basis is illegal.

The CNI, like the GCHQ, is also in a strategic location to intercept and monitor calls. The Columbus III transatlantic underwater telecommunications cable, which connects Sicily with the state of Florida and passes through Conil in Cádiz, is used by millions of people each day.

The reports states, “The commercial partner has provided the CNI some equipment whilst keeping us informed, enabling us to invite the CNI across for IP-focused discussions this autumn [2008].” It concluded that GCHQ “have found a very capable counterpart in CNI, particularly in the field of Covert Internet Ops.”

In the same year, the GCHQ praised the new legislation passed by the Swedish parliament, allowing the National Defence Radio Establishment (Försvarets Radioanstalt—FRA) to monitor all e-mail and telephone communications that enter, leave or even pass through Sweden. The new law, which resembled the Bush administration’s wire-tapping programme in place since 2001, does not require a warrant to carry out the surveillance. (See: “[Swedish government adopts invasive wire-tapping measures](#)”)

“GCHQ has already provided a lot of advice and guidance on these issues and we are standing by to assist the FRA further once they have developed a plan for taking the work forwards,” states the report.

GCHQ also maintains strong relations with the two main Dutch intelligence agencies, but

“[t]he Dutch have some legislative issues that they need to work through before their legal environment would allow them to operate in the way that GCHQ does. We are providing legal advice on how we have tackled some of these issues to Dutch lawyers.”

All the European intelligence agencies are complicit in NSA spying, providing the US agency with great quantities of metadata—the origin of calls, to whom the calls are made, time and duration of the calls, and places the calls are made.

Terrorism expert Jean-Charles Brisard told *El País*, “The Europeans have capabilities which are very similar to the Americans to intercept, but on the other hand they don’t have the same resources to process this information. That is why they pass on this raw material so that it can be deciphered.”

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