

Germany: Ally and Accomplice in America's "War on Terror"

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Global Research, November 15, 2013

[Suddeutsche Zeitung](#)

Region: [Europe, USA](#)

Theme: [Terrorism](#)

The U.S. knows no limits. And Germany looks on—even asking where it can help

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Tapping Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel's phone would seem like an outrageous breach of trust—except that there have been so many other, deadlier and lesser-known, breaches of trust wrought by the U.S. in Germany in recent years.

Where to begin? There's the worldwide secret drone war—a massive break with international law. Then there's the large and growing shadow army of private spies. And, finally, the asylum seekers, whose knowledge is unwittingly used to drop bombs in their home countries.

The worst part? Germany doesn't even seem to mind.

Since both U.S. and German agencies have answered questions with the same unconvincing reassurances (that their only knowledge of any problem comes from the morning newspaper), a team from Norddeutscher Rundfunk (NDR, the German public radio and television broadcaster) and Süddeutsche Zeitung (SZ, Germany's leading broadsheet newspaper) has spent the past few months investigating these topics, trying to shine some light on Germany's dark secrets.

A history of complacency

Every nation has its threshold of pain. You'd image eavesdropping on Merkel would be one. Since the snooping targeted German domestic and foreign affairs, it's out-right espionage. But Germany seems determined to ignore this threshold of pain—a long tradition in this country.

In the 1980s an American spy leaked more than 13,000 secret documents from the Stasi, East Germany's much-feared state security agency. The highest quality secrets at the highest level of confidentiality, including more than 4,000 pages of "National Sigint Requirements List" (NSRL). Therein laid a top-secret U.S. government wish list of the countries it would've liked to spy on. Many pages were supposedly dedicated to locations within West Germany.

"Supposedly" because following this case quickly gets difficult. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the end of the East German government, the documents landed in West Germany. For the German agencies, this could've been a unique opportunity to find out what spying

the U.S. was up to on German soil.

Instead German Chancellor Helmut Kohl's administration decided not to even look at the documents and simply passed them along to their American friends. No copies could be made. The material—went the reasoning—belonged to the Americans. Was this pure chutzpa? Criminologists call it something else: covering your tracks.

By contrast, the attitude of today's German government seems almost aggressive: They say they have demanded answers about the Merkel phone tapping scandal and the U.S. spying, both from Washington and elsewhere, to no avail.

German agencies and politicians have obviously gotten used to American intelligence and military right here in their own backyard: tapping, code cracking, recruiting informants, observing suspects, kidnapping and abducting foreign enemies. The Germans have known all that for years.

Military, money and might

Some 43,000 American soldiers are stationed in Germany, operating a total of about 40 military bases, and reportedly storing nuclear weapons on the German airbase in Büchel, southwest Germany. The U.S. spent \$3 billion in Germany in 2012. Only in Afghanistan—where there's a war to finance—does the U.S. spend more money annually. There's no war in Germany. But where the U.S. army and intelligence agencies once protected the West during the Cold War, they now lead a worldwide secret war—a massive breach of international law.

American soldiers—on bases in Ramstein and Stuttgart—are conducting a bloody drone war in Africa from within Germany. First they practice with their 57 drones getting ready for the real thing. When they receive intelligence on potential targets and suspected terrorists, they deliver that information to U.S. intelligence officers, also based in Germany. And these soldiers are responsible when innocent civilians in Africa die as a result. Moral issues aside, the fact remains: without these bases in Germany, the U.S.'s 'war on terror' would not be the well-oiled machine it is now. Germany acts as the headquarters for secret wars in Africa, the European hub for CIA operations and the training ground for drone attacks worldwide. And Germany's location is indispensable.

An American intelligence hub is concentrated in the Rhein-Main area around Frankfurt. That's where the U.S. agents operating on behalf of the CIA, NSA, Secret Service, Homeland Security and other services are based. But it's no longer the old, familiar story of dubious characters playing their dirty games in Germany. Now there are new players on the scene, even more sinister than before. These people are mathematicians, game theorists, statisticians, and data management experts of all kinds. These people don't have to bug apartments or hide microphones in offices—they simply listen in on everything. They work for companies that get secret orders to do the dirty work: spying, analyzing, kidnapping and even torture.

One in five employees of the monstrous U.S. intelligence apparatus is no longer a state employee. Now they work as "private contractors" technically employed by private companies. Whistleblower Edward Snowden was employed with one of them, until recently.

Spies for hire

This eerie shadow army grows larger every year, especially in Germany. All told, Germany has granted 207 American companies special permits to conduct sensitive tasks for the U.S. government on German soil. The intelligence work billed for just in the past five years totals some \$90.1 million. Most of the contracts are with the largely unknown SOS International. The American company, founded by an Armenian immigrant and started as a small translation office, now rakes in tens of millions of dollars for its operations in Germany. Their employees are called “Intelligence Analyst”, “Signal Intelligence Analyst” and “Counter Intelligence Operations Planner” in the official database of U.S. government contractors. Simpler put: spies for hire.

The exact number of private agents in Germany is hard to determine, but it’s clear from the documents that it’s at least in the hundreds. Unlike the official CIA and NSA employees, these loaner spies are not registered with the German authorities.

That begs two questions: Who keeps these private agents in check? And, who would keep them in check, seeing as no one’s really watching the government-registered spies, either?

It’s clear that the federal government lost track a long time ago. And the government doesn’t really want to take back the reins. It’s no wonder the U.S. embassy doubles as a nest of spies. And the listening post in the middle of the U.S. embassy in Berlin, from which Merkel’s phone was allegedly tapped, should have been shocking. But a good host doesn’t ask questions—and ignores thresholds of pain.

Access, asylum and drone attacks

The arm of the U.S. agencies reaches even farther: the Secret Service and Homeland Security increasingly reserve the right to dictate who can and cannot get on planes at German airports. Sometimes they even arrest suspects themselves. Would a German officer ever do that in the U.S.? Unthinkable.

And German intelligence agencies don’t get in the way of their U.S. colleagues’ operations. To the contrary, they fully support them. According to one former Pentagon employee, German authorities systematically provide the U.S. with information from asylum seekers applying to come to Germany. That information is then used by the U.S. to plan drone attacks.

Even the smallest detail can be a key piece of the puzzle, when it comes to whether a suspected terrorist should be killed or not by a predator drone attack.

The German government left a comprehensive letter of inquiry submitted by NDR and SZ mostly unanswered. An in-depth answer to the questions would reveal details about methods, the government says, “jeopardizing the future ability and performance” of the intelligence agencies.

Some of the contractors don’t even work for the NSA or CIA, but rather the German federal ministries. These private companies—some of whom were involved in grave human rights violations—are allowed access to data of the highest levels of German authorities.

And we’re to believe they don’t give this intelligence on to their principal employer, the U.S. government—who supplies them with multimillion-dollar contracts?

It would be naïve of the German government to believe that, says a former senior NSA

agent.

Naïve? Well, actually, that fits.

(photo by AFP)

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