

Scandal grows over NSA wiretapping of German Chancellor Merkel

By Alex Lantier
28 October 2013

The scandal over the wiretapping of German Chancellor Angela Merkel's cell phone by the US National Security Agency (NSA) escalated this weekend as numerous reports emerged documenting the pervasive character of US spying on Germany and other US allies in Europe. Berlin is sending a delegation of German intelligence officials to discuss these revelations with their US counterparts this week.

NSA documents obtained by the German news magazine *Der Spiegel* show that the NSA tapped Merkel's phone starting in 2002, when she was chair of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). The documents confirm that this surveillance continued for over a decade, at least until US President Barack Obama's visit to Berlin in June 2013.

A report in the German tabloid *Bild* reveals, moreover, that Obama was informed of the spying on Merkel by NSA chief Gen. Keith Alexander in 2010. The spying nonetheless continued for three years.

This shows that the assurances Obama personally offered to Merkel in a phone call last Wednesday were lies. He reportedly said he knew nothing of the monitoring and would have stopped it if he had known.

In fact, according to *Deutsche Welle*, NSA reports about its spying on Merkel were sent directly to the White House. *Deutsche Welle* also cites *Bild* sources indicating that in 2002, the NSA began spying not only on Merkel, but also on her immediate predecessor, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, when he came out against the US war drive that led to the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

The spying was conducted by the Special Collection Service (SCS) organization, which is jointly run by the CIA and the NSA. The SCS has 80 offices internationally, with 19 in European cities, including Paris, Rome, Madrid, Prague and Geneva. Within

Germany itself, the SCS has bases in Berlin and Frankfurt.

From the fourth floor of the centrally located US embassy near Berlin's Brandenburg Gate, US operatives were able to monitor all of the German government's wireless communications. British investigative journalist Duncan Campbell, who broke the story of the US Echelon spying system in Europe in 1999, told *Der Spiegel* that US embassies internationally carry out electronic surveillance through roofs made of specially designed dielectric materials. These allow even the weakest radio signals to pass through the roof and be recorded.

These revelations shatter the lies with which US and European officials responded to whistleblower Edward Snowden's revelations of NSA spying. These included revelations of the NSA's systematic recording and monitoring of global Internet activity, on which the NSA worked in tandem with European intelligence agencies. Several of these, like Britain's Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) and France's General Directorate of External Security (DGSE), are now known to run similar mass surveillance operations.

Officials claimed that this was part of the "global war on terror" to protect all NATO countries from terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda. The latest revelations show, however, that the intelligence agencies' spying was aimed at targets completely unrelated to Islamist terrorism. US and European officials lied about the identity of their targets, which were selected in line with their governments' political and geostrategic interests—that is, in the final analysis, the interests of the capitalist aristocracies that dominate the US and the European Union (EU).

The same class interests drive the construction in North America and Europe of the architecture of a total

surveillance state, on a scale far beyond what was technically possible for Nazi Gestapo or East German Stalinist Stasi police forces. According to a report that surfaced shortly before the scandal over Merkel's cell phone, the NSA tapped some 70 million telephone calls in France alone in a one-month period this year.

This surveillance is aimed above all at working populations in North America and Europe, where there is rising anger over the imperialist wars and social cuts demanded by the ruling class.

According to *Der Spiegel's* account, Merkel's main concern was to control the public reaction to these revelations and prevent them from turning on her government. After German intelligence confirmed the authenticity of the documents on the NSA's surveillance of Merkel, *Der Spiegel* recounts, "a sense of nervousness began to grow at government headquarters. It was clear that if the Americans were monitoring Merkel's phone, it would be a political bomb."

The Merkel government feared, according to *Der Spiegel*, that it would be left "looking like a group of amateurs." Before the Merkel spying scandal broke, German Interior Minister Hans-Peter Friedrich had said that his concerns on NSA spying had "dissipated." Yesterday, however, Friedrich told *Bild am Sonntag* that "if the Americans intercepted mobile phone communications in Germany, they broke German law," which he said would be an "unacceptable violation of German sovereignty."

Before she criticized Washington, however, Merkel asked her foreign policy advisor Christoph Heusgen to make "a preliminary call to Obama to let him know that Merkel planned to place some serious complaints, with which she would then go public. At stake was control over the political interpretation of one of the year's most explosive news stories."

Washington's European allies covered up the issue of electronic spying by NATO intelligence agencies on the European and American populations. Instead, Berlin, Paris and other European governments sought to divert popular anger in Europe over electronic spying into a campaign to limit the spying carried out by the NSA on other European governments and somewhat shift US foreign policy.

At last week's EU summit, Merkel proposed that Washington negotiate a "no-spying" deal with Berlin

and Paris along the lines of its arrangements with the British, Australian, New Zealander and Canadian governments. According to the terms of the "Five Eyes" no-spying deal sealed after World War II, Washington supposedly does not directly spy on the governments of its English-speaking allies.

Such a deal in Europe would not halt spying on the European population, which—like the people of the United States, Britain, Australia, New Zealand and Canada—faces continued Internet and telephone surveillance and electronic spying by various intelligence agencies.

Similarly, Berlin is working with the government of Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff to draft a resolution condemning NSA spying, to be presented to the United Nations General Assembly. "It is still at a very early stage, so we don't know when it will be presented or if other countries will join," German officials told CNN.

A UN General Assembly resolution would be non-binding, however, and would not compel US intelligence to cease its electronic spying.

The author also recommends:

Germany charges US with tapping Chancellor Merkel's cell phone
[25 October 2013]

New evidence of NSA spying on France, Mexico
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