

Canadian spy agency set up covert sites worldwide at NSA's request

By Dylan Lubao and Keith Jones
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A leaked top-secret US National Security Agency (NSA) memo has provided evidence, straight from the horse's mouth, of the extent to which the Communications Security Establishment Canada (CSEC) functions as an intimate partner, even arm, of the NSA.

Leaked by NSA whistle-blower Edward Snowden, the memo states that CSEC “has opened covert sites at the request of the NSA” to conduct spying operations “targeting approximately 20 high-priority countries.”

Precisely which countries remains secret. This is because the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC)—which partnered with Glenn Greenwald, a journalist who has worked closely with Snowden, to publish a report on the memo—chose to keep portions of it secret, on the grounds that they contained “hyper-sensitive operational” content and it did not want to damage national security.

In suppressing this information, Canada's public broadcaster is helping the Conservative government and ruling elite perpetuate the lie that CSEC exists to protect ordinary Canadians from al-Qaeda terrorists and similar “foreign threats.”

The NSA memo confirms numerous statements made by those close to Canadian and American intelligence circles that CSEC and the NSA are closely integrated. During a CBC radio show interview in early November, Greenwald remarked that there would be “many more significant documents about Canadian surveillance and (its) partnership with the NSA that will be reported.”

What has already been released about CSEC's clandestine operations would suggest that the word “partnership” is grossly inadequate. In the NSA's vast global spying apparatus, CSEC figures as an enthusiastic subcontractor, carrying out surveillance

operations in regions that would otherwise be inaccessible or “unavailable” to the NSA. It also assists in it in some of its most sensitive operations, such as spying on the London 2009 G-20 meeting and the succeeding 2010 G-20 summit in Toronto.

Former NSA executive Thomas Drake described CSEC's unique position as follows: “Just think of certain foreign agreements or relationships that Canada actually enjoys that the United States doesn't, and under the cover of those relationships, guess what you can conduct?”

Plainly speaking, CSEC takes advantage of Canada's illusory “benign” image to spy where the NSA and their other allies in the Five Eyes signals intelligence partnership cannot or find their operations greatly restricted. This partnership includes the signals intelligence agencies of Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand. CSEC has been the NSA's invaluable “little brother” in this arrangement since the end of the Second World War.

Though much smaller than the NSA, CSEC is hailed as a “highly valued second party partner,” by virtue of its “resources for advanced collection, processing and analysis” of phone and internet communications. In exchange for services rendered, CSEC is given wide access to the NSA's own spying capabilities, including its newest data-mining and decryption technology. The NSA also contributes funding for joint projects.

Cementing this union are the regular “exchange of liaison officers and integreees, joint projects, shared activities, and a strong desire for closer collaboration in the area of cyber defense.”

Thanks to Edward Snowden, CSAC's intimate partner, the NSA, has been exposed as a conspiracy of the US state against the people of the world, illegally spying on all forms of electronic communications

worldwide, including subjecting the American people to mass surveillance in flagrant violation of the US constitution.

This raises an obvious but pivotal question: how deep does CSEC's illegality run?

There are abundant reasons to conclude that CSEC is doing everything that the NSA does, albeit with a smaller global footprint.

To point to only a few:

CSEC—as documented above—is a partner in the NSA's criminal activities, has access to many of its most intrusive programs, and continues to work assiduously to expand its cooperation and integration with the NSA.

Since at least 2004—and utterly unbeknownst to all but a tiny number of senior government officials—CSEC has been mining the metadata of Canadians' electronic communications, including telephone calls, text-messages, e-mails and Internet usage.

In 2005, as CSEC and the NSA were massively expanding their capacity to spy on telecommunications, the then director of CSEC publicly declared the agency needed to learn to “own the internet”—i.e. to subject it to blanket surveillance.

The government has systematically lied about CSEC's activities and is determined to keep them veiled in a shroud of secrecy so thick that the public is denied knowledge even of the topics of the secret ministerial directives under which the spy agency operates.

The mantra of CSEC officials and Conservative government spokesman is that CSEC's activities are not directed at Canadians. Yet this is contradicted by the very legislative mandate under which CSEC functions. One of CSEC's three core mandates is “to provide technical and operational assistance to federal law enforcement agencies”—most importantly the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) in their drive to counter “domestic subversion.” In anticipation of growing social unrest, these agencies have in recent years widened their definition of “terrorism” to include civil disobedience, blockades and other forms of peaceful protest.

The government has responded to the exposure of CSEC's metadata mining of Canadians electronic

communications by stonewalling. Publicly it refuses to concede that CSEC is engaged in such spying. But the secret government directives authorizing CSEC to do so reportedly make a spurious legal distinction between the metadata and the “contents” of a communication, so as to arrogate for state the power to see whom Canadians are communicating with, when and for how long.

From such metadata, the state can rapidly develop profiles of individuals and dissident groups, identifying their place of work, sources of news and information, friends, associates and habits.

If Stephen Harper and his Conservatives have been able to so brazenly lie and stonewall about the activities of CSEC, it is because the opposition parties, including the trade union-based New Democratic Party (NDP) are no more eager than the government to expose CSEC as tool of Canadian imperialism and pivotal part of the national-security apparatus charged with preventing any challenge to Canadian capitalism, above all from the working class.

In the half-year since the exposure of CSEC's metadata mining, the opposition parties have raised no more than a handful of questions in Parliament on the matter and otherwise completely ignored it. The same goes for CSEC's partnership with the NSA. Needless to say, the NDP, Liberals, and for that matter the Greens and Bloc Quebecois, have not alerted Canadians to the significance of the Snowden revelations and of CSEC's intimate role in the NSA's global spy network, let alone drawn the crucial political inferences concerning CSEC's complicity in illegality and indifference and hostility to Canadians' democratic rights.

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