

Britain's spying against international leaders disclosed

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18 June 2013

Confidential documents obtained by the *Guardian* reveal that Britain's spy centre, the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), intercepted foreign politicians' communications at international summits, working closely with America's National Security Agency (NSA).

The documents relate to surveillance conducted on diplomats attending two G20 summits in London in April and September 2009. They were supplied by the former NSA contractor Edward Snowden. Snowden is in hiding in Hong Kong, after he revealed himself as the source of leaks exposing the NSA's extensive illegal interception of electronic communications data against US citizens and across the globe. The Obama administration is seeking Snowden's extradition on charges of treason, with former Vice President Dick Cheney denouncing the young whistleblower as a "traitor" and a Chinese spy.

The US authorities have perversely claimed that Snowden's disclosure of its unconstitutional activities is a threat to the "American people" and a blow in the fight against "terrorism" and "serious crime". But the *Guardian's* latest disclosure makes clear that the US and Britain are spying on anyone and everyone.

The documents—some of which were posted redacted on the *Guardian* web site—were published just as the UK hosts G8 leaders for a summit in Northern Ireland.

One refers to GCHQ's use of "ground-breaking intelligence capabilities" to intercept the communications of foreign diplomats.

These included creating Internet cafes for summit delegates that were monitored by GCHQ using email interception programmes and key-logging software to spy on their communications. Referring to the Internet cafes, a document boasts Britain's security services "were able to extract key logging info, providing creds for delegates, meaning we have sustained intelligence options against them even after conference has finished."

Delegates' BlackBerrys were also hacked to monitor messages and phone calls. A document records: "New converged events capabilities against BlackBerry provided advance copies of G20 briefings to ministers... Diplomatic targets from all nations have an MO of using smartphones. Exploited this use at the G20 meetings last year."

The information extracted was supplied to 45 analysts, providing real-time coverage of delegates' discussions and contacts.

The *Guardian* reports that the documents it received "suggest that the operation was sanctioned in principle at a senior level in the government of the then prime minister, Gordon Brown, and that intelligence, including briefings for visiting delegates, was passed to British ministers."

The April 2, 2009 summit was to discuss the global fallout of the 2008 financial crisis. Its run-up was marked by tensions between Washington and Europe, most especially France and Germany, who were opposed to US demands to implement even larger bank bailouts.

One of the documents leaked is a briefing paper dated January 20, 2009, setting out the advice of GCHQ's director, Sir Iain Lobban, to his officials for British aims for the summit.

It states: "The GCHQ intent is to ensure that intelligence relevant to HMG's desired outcomes for its presidency of the G20 reaches customers at the right time and in a form which allows them to make full use of it."

Two documents explicitly refer to the intelligence product being passed to "ministers," the newspaper reports.

The means through which this was to be achieved was by intercepting the communications of the summit's participants.

Among those targeted was then Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, who is now prime minister. An NSA

briefing is entitled “Russian Leadership Communications in support of President Dmitry Medvedev at the G20 summit in London—Intercept at Menwith Hill station.”

RAF Menwith Hill in North Yorkshire is the largest surveillance facility in the world. Essentially an area of US territory in England, it is home to hundreds of US spies working in tandem with GCHQ.

Medvedev’s communications were intercepted from the moment he arrived in the UK on April 1, and were shared with senior officials from Britain, Australia, Canada and New Zealand, the newspaper reports.

The communications of South African diplomats were also a focus, with a document reporting that files “including briefings for South African delegates to G20 and G8 meetings” had been “retrieved”.

At the G20 finance ministers meeting in September, Turkey’s Finance Minister Mehmet Simsek and 15 others in his party were targeted. A document states that the aim was “to establish Turkey’s position on agreements from the April London summit” and their “willingness (or not) to co-operate with the rest of the G20 nations.”

The *Guardian* states that the September summit was “also the subject of a new technique to provide a live report on any telephone call made by delegates and to display all of the activity on a graphic which was projected on to the 15-sq-metre video wall of GCHQ’s operations centre as well as on to the screens of 45 specialist analysts who were monitoring the delegates.”

It quotes an internal review that, “For the first time, analysts had a live picture of who was talking to who that updated constantly and automatically.”

It is suggested that this information was being relayed to British officials in the meeting. A supplementary review states, “In a live situation such as this, intelligence received may be used to influence events on the ground taking place just minutes or hours later. This means that it is not sufficient to mine call records afterwards—real-time tip-off is essential.”

The disclosures met a hostile response from Turkey and Russia.

The British ambassador to Ankara was summoned to Turkey’s Foreign Ministry for what was described as a “furious reaction.” An official statement recorded, “The allegations in the *Guardian* are very worrying... If these allegations are true, this is going to be scandalous for the UK. At a time when international co-operation depends on mutual trust, respect and transparency, such behaviour by an allied country is unacceptable.”

A spokesperson for Russia’s Medvedev declined to

comment. But Senator Igor Morozov said the revelations would deepen mistrust between the US and Russia.

“2009 was the year the Russian-American ‘reset’ was announced,” he said. “At the same time US special services were listening to Dmitry Medvedev’s phone calls. In this situation, how can we trust today’s announcements by Barack Obama that he wants a new ‘reset’? Won’t the US special services now start spying on Vladimir Putin, rather than correcting their actions?”

British officials have refused to comment on the revelations, but they have added their weight to US efforts to hunt down Snowden, warning airlines not to allow him to board flights to the UK. *Associated Press* reported that the Home Office had issued an alert, with Snowden’s photograph and passport details, along with the warning that “If this individual attempts to travel to the UK: Carriers should deny boarding.”

It is highly unlikely that Snowden would want to enter the UK, which continues to seek to extradite WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange to Sweden, forcing him to take asylum at the Ecuadorian Embassy in London. Assange has fought extradition to Sweden because he would then be sent on to the US, where he has been branded a traitor and a criminal for leaking classified documents revealing Washington’s criminal conspiracies internationally. US army Private Bradley Manning is currently before a court martial, charged with passing the files to WikiLeaks and faces a potential sentence of life imprisonment, if not the death penalty.

On Monday, Ecuador’s Foreign Minister Ricardo Patino said the embassy would continue to provide asylum for Assange. Proposals that Assange be allowed safe conduct to Ecuador were reportedly rejected in talks between Patino and his UK counterpart William Hague.



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