

European intelligence agencies carry out massive Internet spying

Peter Schwarz
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The forced landing of the Bolivian president's plane in Vienna has exposed European governments' protests against massive surveillance by the US intelligence agency NSA as a sham.

Evo Morales was forced to land in Vienna on Tuesday because several European countries—including France, Italy, Spain and Portugal—closed their air space to his aircraft, which was en route from Moscow to La Paz. This was due to incorrect suspicions that American whistleblower Edward Snowden was aboard the plane.

The incident was a disgrace, especially for the French President François Hollande. On Monday, he had criticized the NSA interception measures undertaken by the United States. “We cannot accept such conduct among partners and allies. We demand that this cease immediately”, he said.

On Tuesday, he then functioned as a deputy sheriff for the US intelligence services, endangering the life of the President of Bolivia in order to deliver up to the United States the man who revealed the scope of NSA wiretapping.

France subsequently apologized to the Bolivian government. In doing so, Hollande admitted indirectly that he had taken the decision himself on the closure and opening up of France's airspace.

He spoke of “conflicting information about the passengers who were on board”—suggesting that he had received reports that Snowden was on board. “As soon as I knew that it was the plane of the Bolivian President, I immediately granted overflight permission,” he added.

All the other European governments behaved much like the French. Although the public is indignant about the massive data interception being carried out by the United States, not one European government is willing to grant Snowden asylum.

Even the scandalous treatment of the Bolivian president did not lead to a murmur of protest in the European capitals.

When the CIA used European airspace to kidnap alleged terror suspects in order to torture them (so-called “extraordinary renditions”), quite different standards applied. Not a single government made claim to their sovereignty to close their airspace, although the flights were clearly illegal.

In Italy, 22 CIA agents and the former head of Italian intelligence Nicolo Pollari, were sentenced to long prison terms for the kidnapping of an Egyptian cleric. Some EU countries—such as Poland and Romania—even provided the CIA with torture facilities.

Behind this attitude is more than simple servility and cowardice towards US imperialism. What connects the European governments with Washington is their common class interests.

They are concerned that the US government is spying on their state offices, diplomatic missions and corporations; and the knowledge gained is then used to blackmail them. Nevertheless, they work closely with the US secret services and maintain a similar surveillance apparatus themselves to monitor their own populations and to suppress social and political opposition.

The longer the debate over Snowden's revelations continues, the more comes to light about what actually happening in Europe.

For example, the daily *Le Monde* revealed on Thursday that the French foreign intelligence service DGSE (General Directorate of External Security) “systematically collects the electromagnetic signals from computers and phones in France, as well as the exchange [of data] between France and abroad.”

“The whole of our communications system is spied

upon,” writes the newspaper. “The politicians know it, but secrecy is the rule: this French Big Brother works in secret. It defies all control.”

As in America, it is claimed that the secret services only look at the metadata, not the content. “The DGSE collects data on the phone calls of millions of subscribers, emails, SMS, faxes ... and the entire Internet activity on Google, Facebook, Microsoft, Apple and Yahoo,” wrote *Le Monde*. “The set-up is valuable for the fight against terrorism. It also makes it possible to spy on any person at any time.”

In this way, the DGSE collects billions upon billions of pieces of data that are stored on three floors in the basement of its offices in Paris. The secret service’s supercomputers can process dozens of millions of gigabytes of data.

According to *Le Monde*, the other French intelligence services also have access to this huge database. Under the cloak of it being “anonymous information” even the police have access to certain information. The set-up is totally illegal, since there is no legal basis for the massive storage of such data by the secret services.

The German foreign intelligence service BND also collects large amounts of data, as its former CEO Hans-Georg Wieck confirmed in an interview with *Deutschlandfunk* radio. Wieck said he was not surprised at the extent of Internet surveillance by British and US intelligence agencies. Such procedures are “the natural, daily bread of the secret services”—including the BND.



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