

German chancellor defends Western intelligence agencies

Stefan Steinberg**13 July 2013**

In a long interview with the weekly political magazine *Die Zeit*, German Chancellor Angela Merkel vehemently defended the work of US and Western intelligence agencies and reaffirmed that her government was not prepared to offer whistle-blower Edward Snowden asylum in Germany.

Merkel used the interview to whitewash the activities of intelligence agencies, and stressed that any discussions conducted over intelligence matters would be held in a spirit recognising that the US “was and is our most trusted ally over decades.”

In recent weeks, the German media and sections of the international media have sought to play up differences between the German government and the US following revelations from Snowden of the extent of the NSA spying operations. The data released by Snowden made clear that in Europe, Germany is the country that is most clearly subject to US surveillance.

Praising Merkel’s “caustic” criticisms of US intelligence practices, *Die Tageszeitung* welcomed one week ago what it referred to as a “transatlantic wake up call.”

Merkel’s interview in *Die Zeit* makes clear, however, that she will not lift a finger to challenge the illegal activities of the American or German intelligence agencies.

At one point in the interview, the journalists from *Die Zeit* note that a well-known German author, Uwe Tellkamp, made a direct comparison between the activities of the NSA and the State Security Service (nicknamed Stasi) of the Stalinist German Democratic Republic (GDR). In his own interview with *Die Zeit*, Tellkamp declared: “What the Stasi carried out with enormous effort is now completed with just 15 clicks of the mouse.”

Merkel vigorously rejects such a comparison,

declaring: “For me, there is absolutely no comparison” between the Stasi and “the work of intelligence agencies in a democratic state.” “Such a comparison”, she continues, “leads to trivialising what the State Security in the GDR [East Germany] did to people”. She concludes with a blanket justification of the activities of all Western intelligence agencies: “A country without the work of intelligence agencies would be too vulnerable.”

Merkel is well aware of the implications of a comparison between Western intelligence agencies and the notorious Stalinist Stasi secret police.

Denunciation of the activities of the Stasi and the construction of the Berlin Wall by the GDR bureaucrats was at the heart of the ideological campaign to justify the restoration of capitalism in East Germany, which brought in its wake a profound social counterrevolution and the destruction of hundreds of thousands of jobs. Such denunciations of the crimes of the Stasi were the hallmark of the political careers of both Merkel and the current German president, Joachim Gauck.

Following the reunification of Germany in 1990, the East German pastor’s daughter and former secretary for agitation and propaganda in the FDJ, (the East German youth organisation loyal to the Stalinist regime), Angela Merkel, made rapid progress within the conservative Christian Democratic Union based on her tirades against East German totalitarianism and praise for Western democratic values and its alleged respect for individual liberties.

The East German pastor Gauck was appointed federal commissioner for the Stasi Archives and headed the authority bearing his own name for ten years. The mandate of the Gauck Commission was to rake through the archives and roll out every crime committed by the Stasi against East German citizens in order to feed anti-

communist propaganda, in particular, the myth that the Stalinist system in the GDR bore any relation to socialism.

Now these stalwart “defenders,” of the free market and democratic values are struck dumb when confronted with the criminal activities of the US and Western intelligence agencies that in many respects make the activities of the Stasi look amateurish.

When asked in the *Die Zeit* interview whether she agreed with the treatment afforded to Bolivian President Evo Morales, whose life was put at risk when European nations refused to grant airspace to his plane, Merkel declares she does not know the background to the case and refuses to comment.

When asked why the German government refuses to give Snowden political asylum, Merkel parrots the argumentation of her ministries, which have rejected any asylum application on formal grounds.

When reminded that previous German governments were quite prepared to override such formalities and granted political asylum to Soviet dissidents such as Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Lev Kopelev, Merkel replies that she can only repeat the formal justifications already given by her ministers.

On Thursday, Merkel’s top security official, Interior Minister Hans-Peter Friedrich travelled to Washington to meet with US Attorney General Eric Holder and other officials. Friedrich is already on record as deplored the alleged “anti-Americanism” evident in the criticism of NSA spying activities. Based on the interview with Merkel in *Die Zeit*, one can presume the chief topic in his discussions with his American colleagues will be how to isolate and destroy the whistle-blower Edward Snowden.

Even a brief examination of the activities of the US and West German intelligence agencies makes clear that a comparison with the East German Stasi is entirely justified. Indeed, in many respects the criminal practices of modern Western intelligence services far exceed those of their poorer East German cousins.

This point was made recently by veteran US whistle-blower Daniel Ellsberg. In a comment published in the *Guardian* Ellsberg wrote that Snowden had exposed how “The NSA, FBI and CIA have, with the new digital technology, surveillance powers over our own citizens that the Stasi—the secret police in the former ‘democratic republic’ of East Germany—could

scarcely have dreamed of. Snowden reveals that the so-called intelligence community has become the United Stasi of America.”

The NSA is just one of 16 intelligence agencies officially registered as active in the United States. In addition to their spying activities directed at the entire US population and hundreds of millions of citizens worldwide, these agencies are responsible for providing information for officially sanctioned US drone murder programs, for the years-long illegal detention and torture of alleged terrorist suspects, and for the establishment of a network of camps in Europe and beyond to “outsource” the torture of enemies of the United States.

In Germany, evidence is emerging almost every day pointing to the intimate involvement of federal and state intelligence agencies in the series of racist murders committed over the course of a decade by a neo-Nazi organisation. In Luxembourg, the prime minister has just resigned due to his own involvement in the cover-up of a Secret Service campaign of terror bombing dating back to the 1980s.

Sections of the German business community undoubtedly have qualms about the extent to which the NSA program is used to promote US commercial interests at their expense, but Merkel’s interview in *Die Zeit* makes clear that at a political level there is complete accord between Washington and Berlin. Germany is intent on developing the same sort of police state methods to suppress its domestic population that have been pioneered by America.



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