

“Project 6”: Joint German/US spy program

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The two principal German intelligence services (the Federal Intelligence Service, BND, and the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, BFV) conducted a surveillance program codenamed “Project 6”, or “P6”, in collaboration with the CIA, over a six-year period. According to information from the German intelligence services, the project ran from 2005 to 2010.

In its last edition, *Der Spiegel* magazine reported that the CIA and its counterparts ran a joint operation from a secret flat in the Rhineland town of Neuss. A key aim of the project, according to *Der Spiegel*, was assembling a common database named “PX”. The database was supposed to collect information on Islamists and their contacts suspected of terrorism.

No details have emerged about the type of information collated, the size of the database and the criteria by which persons were included. The statement issued by the intelligence agencies on the affair does not even indicate if the database still exists.

The case of one journalist, however, makes clear that anyone could end up on the databank of “P6” if they undertook trips to unusual places, spoke foreign languages--or merely spoke on the phone with the “wrong people”. The journalist Stefan Buchen has discovered he was included on a list of suspected jihadists and terrorist suspects that the CIA handed over to the German secret services in 2010.

The CIA file included Buchen’s passport number, date of birth and mobile phone number. In addition it noted that Buchen had travelled to Afghanistan on several occasions and specialized in investigative journalism. The reporter, who worked for the local *Norddeutscher Rundfunk* (NDR), came to the attention of the intelligence services after he made several phone calls to Yemen in the course of his work.

It is not clear whether the German secret services complied with the request from the CIA for more information on Buchen, but based on the extent of the

cooperation across the Atlantic revealed in the Snowden NSA revelations there can be little doubt that they did.

Buchen has said that, like many other colleagues, he had “always feared” that he would crop up “on the radar of the secret services” due to his investigations. Nevertheless he admitted he underestimated the extremes to which the intelligence services would go: “The fact that they so openly spied on us journalists is shocking.”

The data protection officer of the federal government, Peter Schaar, has declared that, despite their formal protection by law, journalists frequently become the target of the secret services. He told the ARD television channel: “It can happen quite quickly if you are staying in certain areas, if you talk to certain people, or are at certain places where possibly terrorists or terrorist suspects are active--then you can end up in a file or come to the attention of the intelligence services.” Schaar said that he was unaware of the database, although its existence should have been officially reported to his authority.

Members of the Parliamentary Control Panel (PKG), which is responsible for monitoring the intelligence services, also report that they were not informed about Project 6, although the intelligence agencies claim they informed the committee. There is even one mention of “P6” in the course of the Snowden NSA revelations.

The conflicting claims allow only two conclusions: either the secret services failed to inform the Data Protection Officer or the PKG of Project 6 and acted outside any official control, or the PKG knew and covered up its compliance rather than expose itself as a parliamentary cloak for illegal espionage operations.

Various media reports have drawn a link between Project 6 and the so-called “Sauerland group”. The latter consisted of four Islamists living in Germany who were sentenced to prison for attempted bombings. The

group was arrested by the police in September 2007 after functioning for months directly under the eyes of the security agencies. It now emerges that not only did the CIA inform its German counterparts of its existence, but that it was also active against the group inside Germany itself.

In late June *Focus* magazine reported on a CIA command centre set up years ago in the building of a savings bank in Neuss. At the end of 2006, several dozen specialists were flown in from the US Secret Service headquarters in Germany, including a number of former Navy Seals.

The circumstances surrounding the “Sauerland group” remain highly dubious up to today. The man who delivered the fuses for the planned terror attacks is alleged to have been a contact of the Turkish MIT secret service. And according to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, a Muslim cleric responsible for radicalising the group was an undercover agent for the Baden-Württemberg secret service agency for more than seven years.

It is also notable that the tracks of the Sauerland group had been closely followed for months by hundreds of police officers and agents, but the group was only arrested at the last minute, allegedly in order to prevent a terror attack. The arrest of the Sauerland group, accompanied by a media storm, was then used by political circles to demand a massive beefing up of the state apparatus and an upgrading of the police and intelligence agencies.

The revelations about Project 6 are part and parcel of the huge expansion of the powers of the German police and intelligence agencies after the September 11, 2001 terror attacks. The separation of the police and intelligence agencies, constitutionally guaranteed after the Second World War following the reign of terror of the Gestapo, has now been largely dissolved. Currently the employees of more than 40 German security agencies work closely together in the joint Extremism and Terrorism Centre (GETZ). The Federal Criminal Police Office has been provided with the same powers as the intelligence services and can operate outside of any official control.

At the same time Germany has intensified its cooperation with the intelligence services of other major powers. This is evident from the revelations of Edward Snowden. Irrespective of growing national

antagonisms and conflicts, the ruling elites across the globe are agreed that authoritarian state measures are necessary in order to suppress all opposition to social cuts and in the preparation of new imperialist wars.



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