

# CSEC's spying: What Canada's elite don't want the public to know

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28 September 2013

Even as documents leaked by whistle-blower Edward Snowden continue to surface, further revealing the massive scope and scale of the US National Security Agency's (NSA) surveillance of the world's electronic communications, the Canadian political and media establishment have closed ranks and draped a cloak of deafening silence around the activities of Canada's own NSA—the Communications Security Establishment Canada or CSEC.

The politicians and corporate media would have Canadians believe that they have only “moved on” from discussing CSEC's activities because there is nothing for Canadians to worry about.

In fact, the elite's silence about the CSEC is only the follow-up to the concerted disinformation campaign that Canada's Conservative government mounted after the *Globe and Mail* revealed in early June that CSEC has been mining the metadata of Canadian electronic communications—including telephone and cell phone calls, e-mails, and text-messages—since at least 2005.

The corporate media and the opposition parties, including the trade union-supported New Democratic Party (NDP), abetted this cover-up, refusing to challenge the lies, half-truths, and obfuscation of the government.

Recently the NDP held several press conferences to discuss the issues it intends to raise in the coming parliamentary session. Not once did it make any reference to the undemocratic, clandestine operations of CSEC.

Government spokespeople, including the Defence Ministers responsible for overseeing CSEC's operations, have sought to counter the evidence that CSEC is spying on Canadians by asserting that the agency is only concerned with “foreign threats”—no matter that it is specifically mandated to support the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and other police agencies in countering “domestic subversion.”

Furthermore, the government has disingenuously implied that the CSEC's activities are largely, if not almost exclusively, devoted to tapping into the communications of Islamist terrorists, such as Al Qaeda, in order to prevent terrorist attacks on Canadian soil.

In reality, the CSEC is a vital tool of the Canadian ruling class that plays an important role in the pursuit of its imperialist foreign policy and in the surveillance and suppression of opposition at home. The size of CSEC's staff—it employs almost 2,000 people and a further thousand military personnel assist its work—give an inkling of the scale of its activities.

These include everything from supporting the overseas

operations of the Canadian military, to spying on governments that are reputed allies of Canada and assisting CSIS and the RCMP in conducting a vast program of domestic surveillance. Of especial importance is the CSEC's partnership with the NSA. According to former NSA technical director William Binney, the two organizations “have integrated personnel”—i.e. swap personnel to improve seamless collaboration. They also share Internet surveillance programs.

The extensive and intimate relationship between CSEC and NSA dates back to the end of the Second World War when they joined with the signals intelligence agencies of Britain, Australia and New Zealand to create the “Five Eyes” alliance. The group was created with the explicit purpose of sharing signals intelligence with each member taking on a part of the globe and Canada assuming the major responsibility—from the perspective of Cold War-era capitalism—of monitoring Russia.

These relationships continue unabated. For instance, the US agency shares information on Canadians' communications with Canada's national security apparatus in exchange for information that CSEC gathers on Americans. According to former Liberal Party MP Wayne Easter, who was Canada's Solicitor-General from 2002 to 2003, the cabinet minister responsible for CSIS and the RCMP, it was “common” for the NSA “to pass on information about Canadians.”

At that time, Canada's allied security agencies would scan global intelligence signals and would be “looking for key words on Canadians ... and they'd give it to the Canadian agencies,” said Easter.

Easter's comments are confirmed in some of the Edward Snowden-leaked documents on the NSA spying tool xKeyscore, which show multiple show headers that read “TOPSECRET/COMINT [*Communications Intelligence*]/ REL [*Relay*] to USA, AUS, CAN, GBR, NZL .” Since almost all Canadian internet traffic passes through the United States—an email from Montreal or Toronto could pass through several American locations before being returned to Canada—Canadian communications are inevitably intercepted *en masse* by the NSA, which has no legal-constitutional restrictions on eavesdropping on Canadians. In response to direct questions on the subject, the Canadian government has systemically refused to deny that the NSA passes on information to Canada's national-security apparatus.

As a further element of its collaboration with the Five Eyes

alliance, CSEC was relied on in the project of spying on diplomats and officials during the 2009 London G20 meeting according to a report in the British newspaper *The Guardian*, which was based on documents supplied by Snowden. The highly sensitive operation involved the penetration of delegates' smartphones to monitor their email messages and calls.

This operation would be far from the first time that CSEC has spied on supposed allies. In the mid-1990s a former linguist for the organization, Jane Shorten, explained that since 1990 Canada had spied on Japan and South Korea for economic reasons. During this period, CSEC is also known to have monitored the Mexican government regarding the negotiation and ratification of the 1992 North American Free Trade Agreement between Canada, Mexico, and the United States.

Other documents leaked by Snowden point to the key role CSEC played in the NSA's years-long efforts to crack encrypted data on the internet.

According to a recent *New York Times* story, CSEC had been tasked with working on the standards process for the International Organization for Standardization. During this time, the NSA "finessed" CSEC into handing over control of the standards process, allowing the US agency to construct a "backdoor" to secretly decrypt data that millions regarded as safe.

A classified NSA memo reads: "After some behind-the-scenes finessing with the head of the Canadian national delegation and with [CSEC], the stage was set for NSA to submit a rewrite of the draft ... Eventually, NSA became the sole editor."

When *Maclean's* journalist Jesse Brown posed a direct question to CSEC on the content of the NSA memos, the agency's Director of Public Affairs and Communications Andy McLaughlin only offered an obtuse response that avoided denying that CSEC assisted the NSA in its secret anti-encryption campaign.

If CSEC's own propaganda is to be believed, a large part of its operations are directed towards tactical and other assistance to the Canadian Armed Forces. During the Canadian military's most intense involvement in the occupation of Afghanistan, CSEC reportedly contributed intelligence in nearly every major battle or operation involving Canadian troops.

The 2002 Anti-Terrorism Act stipulates that the third of CSEC's three core mandates is "to provide technical and operational assistance to federal law enforcement agencies and security agencies"—most importantly CSIS, the RCMP, and the Canadian Border Agency (CBA).

The collaboration between CSIS and CSEC, which has effectively no parliamentary, let alone public, oversight (see <http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2013/07/22/csec-j22.html>), allows the Canadian state to ruthlessly pursue domestic groups and even private citizens who are perceived as threats to the predatory interests of the ruling elite. The rules that reputedly protect Canadians from CSEC surveillance fall-off when the CSEC is working with CSIS and the RCMP.

Moreover, CSEC has insisted and the government has endorsed in its ministerial directives to CSEC the anti-democratic claim that the meta-data of Canadians electronic communications is not constitutionally protected communication and therefore can be "mined", i.e. collected and scrutinized, at will.

Documents released under freedom of information laws and published by *The Guardian* show that the RCMP and CSIS are deliberately blurring the distinctions between "terrorism" and civil disobedience and other forms of peaceful protest, so as to justify widespread surveillance of anti-government groups. According to the *Guardian*, Canada's national-security apparatus defines activities such as blocking roads and buildings as "forms of assault," while everything from sit-ins to marches can be considered "threats" or "attacks."

CSIS and the RCMP have employed this spurious catch-all definition of terrorism to justify surveillance of environmentalist groups, opponents of the Vancouver Olympic Games, the Idle No More movement, and the opposition to the 2010 Toronto G-20 summit. A secret RCMP intelligence assessment asserts that, "Multi-issue extremists and aboriginal extremists ... have demonstrated the intent and capability to carry out attacks against critical infrastructure in Canada."

"Security and police agencies have been increasingly conflating terrorism and extremism with peaceful citizens exercising their democratic rights to organise petitions, protest and question government policies," explains Jeffery Monaghan of the Surveillance Studies Centre at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario

Under conditions of the greatest crisis of capitalism since the Great Depression and mounting popular anger over poverty, economic insecurity, and increasing social inequality, it is no rhetorical flourish to insist that the Canadian ruling elite views the mass of the Canadian population as a domestic threat.

As more and more Canadian workers and young people enter into direct conflict with big business and their political hirelings in mass demonstrations, strikes, and occupations, they must anticipate and politically prepare for the police state-apparatus that has been constructed in recent decades to be employed to criminalize and ruthlessly suppress opposition to the capitalist status quo.



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