

Germany charges US with tapping Chancellor Merkel's cell phone

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On Wednesday evening, the German government publicly charged US intelligence services with having tapped the private mobile phone of Chancellor Angela Merkel for years.

According to government spokesman Steffen Seibert, the chancellor rang President Obama and complained in unusually strong terms. Merkel made it clear that she “unequivocally disapproves of such practices and considers them to be completely unacceptable.”

There should “not be such monitoring of communications of a head of government by close friends and partners,” Merkel told the American president. If the suspicions proved to be true, this would constitute “a serious breach of trust.” The practice had to “stop immediately.”

The allegation that Merkel was being tapped arose from an investigation carried out by the news magazine *Der Spiegel*, which was reviewed by Germany's foreign intelligence agency and the Federal Office for Information Security.

According to a US spokesman, President Barack Obama rejected the allegations. The US “is not monitoring and will not monitor” Merkel's communication, he said. The White House, however, refused to address whether Merkel's phone had been tapped in the past.

The German government was not convinced by Obama's response. On Thursday, German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle officially summoned the US ambassador to the Foreign Office. This is a highly unusual step among allies. The summoning of an ambassador is, in diplomatic terms, a sharp expression of disapproval.

Politicians from all German parties expressed indignation at the allegations of spying.

The parliamentary secretary of the conservative Christian Democratic Union-Christian Social Union (CDU – CSU) group, Michael Grosse-Brömer, spoke of a “monstrous act and a massive breach of trust.” Defense Minister Thomas de Maizière (CDU) said: “The Americans are and remain our best friends, but this is unacceptable.”

Thomas Oppermann of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), who is regarded as a potential future interior

minister, described the alleged phone-tapping as a “very serious breach of trust.” The surveillance activities of the National Security Agency (NSA) had “completely gotten out of hand and were apparently outside of any democratic control.”

Schleswig-Holstein SPD leader Ralf Stegner called US spying on cell phones of German politicians and citizens “scandalous in every respect.”

Left Party Chairperson Katja Kipping criticized “the severest imaginable breach of trust among friends,” while Left Party leader Gregor Gysi said he “now expects not only protests, but serious resistance.”

Similar comments were made by most media outlets. The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* wrote, “A greater affront by a friendly state is barely conceivable.”

The *Stuttgarter Zeitung* commented that US spy activities had “assumed unacceptable proportions” and led to a breach of trust that “augurs badly for future relations between Germany and the US.”

While the allegations are explosive, there is a heavy dose of political hypocrisy in Berlin's expressions of surprise and outrage.

Since the initial revelations by former NSA contractor Edward Snowden over four months ago, voluminous evidence has emerged on the extent of international electronic monitoring by American and European intelligence agencies. Surveillance by these agencies targets the telephone calls, letters and electronic communications of entire populations.

Even as Berlin waxes indignant over US spying on top government officials, it maintains its virulent hostility to the whistle-blower, Snowden, who is responsible for exposing such practices. Germany, like the rest of Europe, has joined in Washington's witch-hunt against the former NSA contractor, refusing to grant him asylum. This underscores the fact that the German state has long collaborated with the NSA and other American spy agencies and has developed its own police state infrastructure of mass surveillance.

No German politicians or prominent media outlets have, in

light of the latest exposures, called for Berlin to offer sanctuary to the persecuted whistle-blower.

The NSA's systematic monitoring of high-ranking figures in business and politics is well known. To date, the list of politicians known to have been tapped by the NSA includes Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff and Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto, as well as his predecessor Felipe Calderón.

Earlier this week, Paris lodged a protest with Washington after *Le Monde* published an exposé about the NSA's bugging of French politicians, business leaders, and other individuals. Just between December 2012 and January 2013, the newspaper reported, the US agency collected 70 million French communications.

Bank data transferred to the US on the basis of the Swift Agreement for the purpose of combating terrorism has also allegedly been seized by the NSA. On Wednesday, the European Parliament voted by a clear majority to call upon the European Commission to suspend the agreement.

It is well known that the Federal Intelligence Service and other German intelligence agencies work closely with the NSA and exchange data extensively. The German agencies were well aware of the extent of the surveillance activities of the NSA before Snowden's revelations became public.

The German government has until now played down the issue of US snooping. In July, Merkel denied there was any possibility she might have been tapped and declared she had "no reason to doubt the information provided by the United States to comply with German law."

German Interior Minister Hans-Peter Friedrich (CSU) declared in August that "suspicions" about the activities of the NSA had "vanished into thin air." The head of the Chancellery, Ronald Pofalla (CDU), added, "The allegations are no longer on the table."

Accusations of NSA spying are emerging again as German imperialism tries to shift towards a more aggressive foreign policy.

For months, the media have argued that Germany should play a role in world politics commensurate with its economic clout. The political crisis in the Middle East and the budget standoff in the United States were cited as evidence of the weakness of the US and proof that it no longer measured up to its "international leadership role." The commentaries concluded that it was up to Germany to assume "international responsibility" both in Europe and in global military operations.

During the recent election campaign, the government was reticent to raise such issues, knowing there is broad popular opposition to great-power posturing and militarism. Since the election, however, Merkel has gone on the offensive to strengthen Germany's position in NATO and the European

Union.

Last Tuesday, Defense Minister Thomas de Maizière succeeded in pushing through plans for a reform of NATO that had been worked out in Berlin and rejected by Paris. "The success shows Germany has underlined its claim to leadership in the Alliance," *Spiegel Online* gloated.

According to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Chancellor Merkel is preparing a "reform offensive" for the European Union, aimed at exerting stronger control over the budget, pension and labor market policies of individual member states. European governments would be even more subject to diktats from Brussels and Berlin. In return, Merkel would be prepared to participate in the winding down of bankrupt banks.

In Brussels, Merkel met with French President François Hollande to discuss a common approach to the espionage activities of the United States.

In regard to a more aggressive foreign policy, the German chancellor not only has the full support of her likely coalition partner in a new government, the SPD, but also of the Left Party and the Green Party. As for Washington, it is prepared to accept a greater role for Germany in Europe and NATO as long as it does not conflict with American interests.

The mass surveillance by the secret services and resulting conflicts are, in the final analysis, a result of growing tensions between the imperialist powers and between each ruling elite and its population, arising from the deep crisis of world capitalism. In the end, there will be more surveillance and militarism rather than less. Only an independent movement of the working class directed against the capitalist system can put an end to the surveillance state and the dangers of war and dictatorship it entails.



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