Fresh revelations of Canada's role in NSA's global spying network

Dylan Lubao, Keith Jones
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In partnership with the US National Security Agency (NSA), the Canadian state's eavesdropping agency conducts covert spying operations against foreign governments and diplomatic missions using clandestine listening posts housed in Canadian embassies and consulates.

This latest revelation of the intimate ties between the NSA and the Communications Security Establishment Canada (CSEC) comes from reports published this week in the German magazine *Der Spiegel* and Australia's *Sydney Morning Herald*. The reports are based on files leaked by the former National Security Agency contractor-turned whistleblower Edward Snowden.

Under a program known by the codename "STATEROOM," CSEC, the NSA, the Australian Signals Directorate and the signals intelligence agencies of Britain and New Zealand mount spying operations from secret installations within their diplomatic missions.

Their collaboration in STATEROOM takes multiple forms: the sharing of intelligence and technical expertise—which is standard practice under the "Five Eyes" partnership that has for decades united these five national spy agencies; and the housing of NSA listening posts in the diplomatic missions of the other four countries.

The Australian Signal Directorate, reported Thursday's *Sydney Morning Herald*, has for years used its embassies and consulates to spy on communications in countries across Asia, including China, Indonesia, and Vietnam.

To date there is little information as to CSEC's targets under the STATEROOM program. But Bill Robinson, a CSEC expert and critic, notes that former CSEC employee Mike Frost "reported in his 1994 book *Spyworld* that NSA applied heavy pressure on CSEC to place an intercept site in the Canadian embassy in Beijing."

CSEC has long played an integral role in NSA's worldwide operations. In addition to continuous intelligence sharing, CSEC routinely exchanges personnel with the NSA and seconds the NSA in such politically sensitive operations as the joint US-British spy operation that targeted the official delegations to the 2009 London G-20 summit.

At the height of the Cold War, CSEC had the primary responsibility within the Five Eyes for eavesdropping on the USSR—a measure of its importance as a US ally and proxy.

It has been suggested that Canada's role in STATEROOM is probably most significant in countries where the US does not have diplomatic missions—with Cuba and, at least until September 2012 when Canada closed its Tehran embassy, Iran at the top of the list.

While there is some sense to this argument, the last five months' of revelations from the files leaked by Snowden show that the Five Eyes' spy operations are virtually boundless—targeting everything from the communications of German Chancellor Angela Merkel and other heads of government of close US allies to the texts and e-mails of ordinary North American citizens.

Moreover, the CSEC has its own agenda based on the economic and geopolitical interests of Canada's elite.

Last month it was revealed that CSEC spied on Brazil's Ministry of Mines and Energy (MME), provoking an angry response from the government of Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff. Canada and Brazil are major rivals in the mining and oil sectors.

As explained by Glenn Greenwald, a journalist who has worked closely with Snowden, CSEC used a powerful software program known as "Olympia" to trawl through immense amounts of communications, so as to construct a detailed map of the MME's internet and voice communications systems and thereby pinpoint phones and computer servers to be hacked so as to steal communications.

Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper claimed to be "very, very concerned" about CSEC's spying on Brazil. But he and his Conservative government have continued to vigorously defend CSEC, repeating at every opportunity the lie that CSEC doesn't monitor Canadians' communications.

This claim is at least trebly false:

CSEC is specifically mandated to assist the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and other police agencies in combating

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domestic subversion and terrorism—which the security agencies of the Canadian state have repeatedly "defined" so as to include non-violent protests, political dissidence and civil disobedience.

Under the 2002 Anti-Terrorism Act, CSEC has the power to spy, without need of a court-issued warrant, on Canadians' communications if they are doing so as part of investigating a "foreign threat."

Since at least 2005, CSEC has been spying on the metadata of Canadians' electronic communications—phone calls, text messages, e-mails, internet use, etc. In public statements and ministerial directives, CSEC and the government have justified this flagrant violation of Canadians' rights on the spurious grounds that metadata is not constitutionally protected communications, merely the "envelope" that contains the communication.

In fact, metadata can be even more revealing that the contents of a communication. Through its systematic collection, the state can quickly develop a comprehensive portrait of an individual or group, including their jobs, friends and associates, reading material, and political views.

While systematically covering up CSEC's role in spying on Canadians, the Conservative government has also continued to be tight-lipped about the targets of CSEC's foreign spying—and with good reason, since they put the lie to the notion the government has sought to promote that CSEC is focussed on fighting al-Qaeda type terrorism.

Harper, Defence Minister Rob Nicholson and their aides have refused to confirm the veracity of the report on CSEC's activities in Brazil, saying they cannot comment on "national security operations."

CSEC chief John Forster, for his part, in a rare public speech declared that "everything that CSEC does in terms of foreign intelligence follows Canadian law." He made no comment, however, on whether these operations violate international law or the sovereignty of foreign nations.

Further evidence of CSEC's role in advancing the political and commercial interests of Canadian big business comes from a report in the British *Guardian* newspaper that the spy agency has, since 2005, met twice a year with scores of Canadian energy corporations. According to CSEC documents obtained by the *Guardian*, these meetings are purportedly to assist the companies in improving physical and electronic security infrastructure. Notably, however, two additional discussion topics were redacted from the documents accessed by the *Guardian* .

The Conservative government is dependent on the complicity of the corporate media and the opposition parties in covering up CSEC's sinister, anti-democratic activities.

Notwithstanding the revelations about CSEC's systematic mining of Canadians' metadata and its close partnership with an NSA that has been shown to be systematically spying on Americans in violation of that country's constitution, Canada's media has shown no interest in probing CSEC's activities or alerting Canadians about them.

At most they have issued a tepid call for more "oversight" of CSEC, by which they mean allowing a carefully screened panel of parliamentarians or more likely, as in the case of CSEC, a handful of trusted ruling class representatives to review in secret CSEC's operations.

Currently CSEC functions entirely under ministerial directives that are secret from all but the highest echelons of the government.

The opposition parties have been at least as indifferent as the media. Following the revelation of CSEC's spying on Brazil, Liberal Defence critic Marc Garneau told *La presse* the agency does "necessary and vital work."

The Official Opposition, the trade union-based New Democratic Party, has made the Senate expense-spending scandal its almost exclusive focus for the past six months. While claiming to be fighting for the abolition of the "undemocratic" Senate, an appointed body that has little if any legitimacy with most Canadians, it has maintained a complicit silence about CSEC's activities. The revelation that CSEC is mining the metadata of Canadians' communications has merited no more than a handful of questions in parliament. Similarly, Canada's social democrats have mounted no more than nominal opposition to the Conservatives growing assault on workers' rights. This includes legislation introduced last week that would gut federal workers' right to strike and bargain collectively.

On Tuesday, the NDP presented a motion that called for the striking of a parliamentary committee led by a Conservative and with a Conservative majority to make recommendations as to how there could be parliamentary oversight of Canada's intelligence gathering. When the Conservatives voted the motion down, the NDP again relapsed into silence.

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