

Swedish intelligence service spying on Russia for US National Security Agency

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Documents released by Edward Snowden reveal that Sweden's National Defence Radio Establishment (FRA) has been collecting large quantities of communications data from Russia, which it has passed to the American National Security Agency (NSA).

The revelations confirm that such collaboration goes back for decades.

According to one document published by public broadcaster SVT December, Stockholm signed a top-secret cooperation agreement in 1954 with the United States, Britain, Australia, New Zealand and Canada—the so-called Five Eyes—to exchange intelligence information. This was replaced in 2004 by bilateral agreements with each country, which saw the collaboration intensify. Throughout the Cold War, FRA passed information obtained from the Soviet Union to its Western allies.

“The relationship with Sweden is protected on the top-secret level because of the country's political neutrality,” a 2006 NSA document noted.

Due to its geographic location, the FRA has access to Russian communications, including those from “high priority” targets from politics and areas of economic interest, such as the energy sector. Estimates from *Russia Today* put the amount of communications data from Russia that passes through Sweden at 80 percent. A recent NSA document from April 2013 states, “FRA provided NSA (with a) unique collection on high-priority Russian targets, such as leadership, internal politics.”

The cooperation between FRA and the NSA was expanded significantly in 2011, with the NSA gaining access to FRA's network of cables. This included the ability to intercept communications from the Baltic countries through under-sea cables controlled by Sweden.

British investigative journalist Duncan Campbell gave an indication of the scale of collaboration between Sweden, the US and Britain at a European Parliament hearing on state surveillance in early September. “A new

organization has joined the “Five Eyes” and is seen as the largest cooperating partner to [the UK's Government Communications Headquarters] GCHQ outside the English-speaking countries—and that is Sweden,” he said.

A FRA spokesman accepted that the NSA had full access to data collected by Swedish intelligence, and explained how this was in the interests of the Swedish government:

“We will not give away something without getting anything in return. We are able to gather information in our part of the world, which we can then exchange with information from other parts of the world that would be more difficult to obtain. This may be information that is of great importance for Swedish foreign policy.”

One thing obtained by FRA in return for its close relationship with the NSA is the latter's notorious Xkeyscore surveillance programme, which enables the communications and online activities of individual targets to be traced. This has not only been used against external targets, as revealed by a document which detailed collaboration by FRA with the NSA to hack into computers and carry out surveillance on Swedish citizens. The document, dated April 2013, referred to Sweden's participation in the Quantum project, an operation which hijacks computers in order to seize information for further analysis.

In early November, reports confirmed that Swedish authorities had worked closely with US and British agencies in the preparation of the so-called FRA law in 2008, which allows Sweden's intelligence agency to wiretap all communications that cross the country's borders. A *Guardian* report described the response from GCHQ to the passage of the law as “delighted.”

A US State Department cable released by WikiLeaks in 2011 exposed the intimate involvement of American authorities in the preparations for the new surveillance law. It reads, “The agreement may have to be presented to

Parliament under a vague constitutional requirement for ‘matters of great importance’. If so, the process will take considerably longer and be subject to public scrutiny, something the Government of Sweden will want to avoid. As the Ministry of Justice continues to analyze the proposed text, it is also considering how to craft an arrangement that will avoid the need for parliamentary review.” Responding to criticism of his government’s collaboration with external agencies, Carl Bildt, foreign minister in the right-wing Alliance coalition, commented, “Today, we face a world of more diverse risks, challenges and threats. Constant knowledge of these is important for security of the nation.”

Explicitly defending the 2008 surveillance law, he added, “We have one of the clearest, most law-abiding and probably best systems in this regard. I would think that other countries see us as a role model.”

The legal framework hailed by Bildt involves the overseeing of requests for information from the intelligence services by a secret court, the defence intelligence court, over which there is no democratic oversight.

In addition, reports point to repeated law-breaking by FRA agents, including as a result of their mishandling of personal data.

The sustained nature of the collaboration between Swedish intelligence services and those from Britain and the US not only implicates the current government, but the entire political establishment. The Social Democrats were the dominant party of government in the post-war period and would thus have been fully responsible for the arrangements that initiated cooperation in the 1950s and saw it continue over subsequent decades. More recently, the Social Democrat-led government of Göran Persson, which was voted out of office in 2006, began the process that led to the passage of the wire-tapping law in 2008 by the current government of Prime Minister Frederick Reinfeldt.

In September, Reinfeldt acknowledged the long-standing ties with the US. Without mentioning them by name, he commented to the TT news agency, “I’m not confirming anything, other than to say that Sweden, for a long time, throughout the post-war period, has cooperated with other countries and that we have a national security policy doctrine that says we should.”

The deepening connections between Swedish intelligence services with the US and Britain over the past decade coincided with the country’s formal abandonment of its posture of neutrality. It has made available troops

for the NATO operation in Afghanistan and in the bombardment of Libya in 2011, in which Saab Gripen fighter jets were used.

In a sign of the international tensions these revelations have provoked, the daily *Expressen* reported at the beginning of December that Russian military forces carried out a simulation attack on Swedish intelligence-gathering facilities earlier this year.

The revelations also raise questions over Sweden’s involvement in the pursuit of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange. According to the documents released by Snowden, the pursuit of Assange coincided with the vast expansion of collaboration between Sweden’s intelligence services and the NSA in 2011. It would be difficult to believe that this matter was not the subject of discussion in the regular meetings between Swedish and US authorities that have been revealed to have taken place, particularly given that the intervention of a senior Social Democratic politician was necessary to re-open an investigation which had initially been abandoned due to the lack of any evidence.

On the domestic front, Sweden has stepped up its repressive powers in line with its allies. Immigrant communities and ethnic minorities have come in for particularly close scrutiny, as shown by the revelation earlier this year that a massive database of the Roma population in Sweden was maintained by a regional police force, which was accessible by other agencies.

These powers have been established by the state as it confronts unprecedented levels of social inequality. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has designated Sweden as the country with the fastest growing divisions between rich and poor. In a recent study, daily newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* uncovered an average pay increase for the country’s top 20 CEOs of more than 20 percent in 2012. Meanwhile, youth unemployment is crippling high in some areas, which provoked riots in June in the suburbs of Stockholm.



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