

# NSA listens in on the German chancellor's contacts

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After President Barack Obama promised not to listen in on German Chancellor Angela Merkel's phone calls, the National Security Agency (NSA) stepped up its operations against those she speaks to. News of the spying emerges from a report published by *Bild am Sonntag* last Sunday.

According to the paper, the NSA is currently spying on 320 high-level targets in Germany, "mainly decision-makers from the field of politics, but also from business." In particular, this select group includes those close to the chancellor. Specifically, the paper names Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière (Christian Democratic Union, CDU), who was also the target of an NSA wiretap when he was defence minister.

The businesses being targeted include Europe's largest software maker SAP, a competitor of the US company Oracle.

*Bild* cites an anonymous NSA informant, but also spoke with Caitlin Hayden, a spokeswoman for the National Security Council of the United States.

The NSA has 297 agents working in Germany, the newspaper reports. Following Obama's order not to eavesdrop on Merkel, the NSA has intensified its espionage activities. "We have orders not to allow any loss of information after the chancellor's communications may no longer be directly monitored," the paper quotes its informant saying.

The spokeswoman for the National Security Council justifies the NSA's spying activities by pointing out "that the United States collects intelligence information in the same way it is collected by all states".

Both Germany's overseas spy agency, the Federal Intelligence Service (BND), and its domestic counterpart, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, benefit from the NSA's extensive wiretapping, writes *Bild*. For this reason, "senior US

intelligence officials" were not impressed by "the Germans' duplicity", which followed the "the recent fuss about Merkel's wiretapped phone".

In reality, the German government has no objections to people being spied upon in Germany and around the world, to which end the German and US intelligence services collaborate closely. But they have protested against espionage that affects the government itself and the economic interests of German companies.

It is in this context that the \$185 million project to lay a new fibre optic cable across the Atlantic from Europe directly to Brazil should be seen. So far, all Internet data connections have run from Europe to South America via the United States.

The connection between the Portuguese capital, Lisbon, and Fortaleza in northeastern Brazil should be completed in the coming year, Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff said at the EU-Brazil Summit earlier this week in Brussels. Rousseff has also been spied on by the NSA. She also emphasized that she "does not want companies to be spied upon."

The revelations of Edward Snowden concerning the wiretap operations of the American and British intelligence agencies in Europe have triggered considerable transatlantic tensions. Both German and American politicians have since endeavored to smooth things over.

However, Washington would not countenance a "no-spying agreement" that German politicians had insisted upon. President Obama was only prepared to limit the interception of friendly heads of state, as he announced in mid-January in a keynote speech. In parts of the German establishment, this attitude provoked some harsh criticism, including demands for economic sanctions against the United States.

Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière, who had

previously spoken with restraint, referring to ongoing and confidential discussions between the Germans and Americans, then sharply criticized the US intelligence agencies at the Munich Security Conference in January: “The harm done to German interests is huge. The explanations we have received are insufficient. The political damage is greater than the security policy benefits across the Atlantic.”

According to a report in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, de Maizière called on the German government to send a “signal” against the NSA’s spying operations, but rejected the idea of a “no-spying agreement”: “What’s to be regulated? And who is going to control that?” Instead, he urged the United States to send “a signal to one of its main European allies”.

In mid-February, newsweekly *Der Spiegel* reported that the German government was planning “to deploy its own spies against partner countries like the US”. The “breaking of a taboo” was not yet decided, but was agreed by all the members of the coalition government, even the traditionally pro-US Christian Social Union (CSU). The magazine quoted the Social Democratic Party (SPD) domestic affairs expert Michael Hartmann saying, “We must protect ourselves, regardless from where danger threatens.”

Wiretapping, recruiting sources or observations of the Western partners were not initially considered, but we should “do everything to find out what is going on, especially in embassies and consulates—who works there and what technical possibilities exist.” For example, determining whether German government agencies are being surveilled from the US embassy in Berlin.

The German Secret Service had already “called on the US Embassy to provide the names and information about diplomatically accredited intelligence representatives in Germany”. In addition, the head of the Secret Service, Hans-Georg Maassen, demanded information about “which private firms the Americans were cooperating with in Germany in the area of espionage”, *Spiegel* writes. Germany’s Military Counterintelligence Service (MAD) was currently discussing whether it “should not also cast its eye more in the direction of friendly intelligence services when conducting counter-intelligence operations.”

In addition, Justice Minister Heiko Maas, Foreign

Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Economics Minister Sigmar Gabriel (all SPD members) have agreed with their CDU colleagues Peter Altmaier (Chancellery) and de Maizière (Interior Ministry) not to stop a criminal investigation of espionage activities in Germany initiated by the federal attorney general for political reasons.

But the White House is not prepared to make concessions. *Bild am Sonntag* quoted Caitlin Hayden saying, “If our intelligence agencies continue to gather information about the intentions of governments ... all over the world, in the same way as the intelligence service of every other country does, we will not apologize for the fact that our services may work more effectively.”



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