

German government demands departure of US spy chief

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The exposure of a second US spy in Germany within five days has unleashed a major scandal. For a while, the topic even succeeded in drawing media attention away from the World Cup. The reactions in Germany include threats of counterespionage against the United States to an official demand that the head of the US intelligence agencies in Berlin leave the country.

On Wednesday, the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office searched the office and residence of an employee of the Ministry of Defence. He is under suspicion of having spied for a US intelligence agency, though it remains unclear which agency; insiders surmise that it is the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA).

The suspected spy has been observed by the German Military Counterintelligence Service (MAD) for months, after he met often suspiciously with an US contact. The last of these meetings was observed in February—more than four months ago.

Why the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office waited until now to take action against the suspect is unknown. It interrogated him for many hours on Wednesday, without issuing an arrest warrant.

According to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the suspect has worked in the political department of the German Defence Ministry for the last year. He allegedly had access to the ministry's political planning.

From the many branches of the Defence Ministry, "copies of almost all important and secret documents are sent as copies to this department," *Spiegel Online* reports. "Themes such as NATO cooperation, armaments questions, as well as documents for the minister preparing important political discussions pass through here."

Last Friday saw the arrest of an employee of the German foreign intelligence service (BND) who had

provided over 200 secret documents to the CIA in exchange for €25,000.

Compared to the massive spying operation on the German people by the National Security Agency, uncovered by the former NSA employee Edward Snowden, or the tapping of German Chancellor Angela Merkel's cell phone, the current espionage cases seem rather trivial. Nevertheless, the reactions were much more intense.

Government spokesman Steffen Seibert, who had downplayed the NSA and cell phone spying affairs, spoke for the first time of "deep going differences of opinion" with the US, which have a bearing "on the trust of this partnership."

On Thursday, Berlin demanded that the top representative of the US intelligence agencies in Berlin leave the country. It was not the type of formal expulsion usually reserved for agents of enemy states, but it came close to it.

As justification for this step—unique in the recent history of German-American relations—Clemens Binninger, chairman of the responsible parliamentary control committee, said the step was "a reaction to the long-standing failure to cooperate in clarification."

Alexander Graf Lambsdorff (Free Democratic Party, FDP) said, "The damage is immense: Public support in Germany for the transatlantic relationship is crumbling." Pointing to the "long prehistory" of the latest espionage cases, he called them "the straw that broke the camel's back."

The leader of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) parliamentary faction in the Bundestag, Thomas Oppermann, called US espionage a "major burden on the German-American relationship."

He told *Spiegel Online*, "I advise the Americans now to make a clean sweep, disclose everything and stop the

espionage activities.” Calling trust a pillar of friendship, he warned: “The US should be careful that this pillar does not completely collapse.”

In *Die Zeit*, Robert Leicht called for counterespionage: “After the US government and its apparatus made a mockery of the German-American friendship, it is now necessary to play hardball.”

Leicht, a former chief editor of the paper, which has long-standing links to the SPD, continued: “The Federal Republic is not a satrap state. Neither friendly nor opposing intelligence agencies can do whatever they want on its soil. Germany ... and Europe should do everything technically possible to develop counterespionage, even if it costs a lot of money.”

There is a great deal of hypocrisy behind the howls of outrage over US espionage activities. It has been well known for decades that US intelligence agencies operate on German soil. As a front-line state in the Cold War, the Federal Republic was a haven for spies from allied countries, which also monitored the German population.

According to the Freiburg historian and intelligence expert Josef Foscith, “The NSA was founded in 1952 and developed as it were in Germany.” The extensive operations of the Allied intelligence services took place with the knowledge of the German government.

After German unification not one of the treaties and secret agreements underlying these operations was cancelled. German and American intelligence agencies work closely together to this day, exchanging huge amounts of data. Among other things, this is how they evade laws prohibiting the spying on their own citizens.

The fierce response to the latest espionage cases has mainly political roots. Since the grand coalition government was formed at the end of last year, it has systematically sought to expand Germany’s role in world politics. Although it does not question its alliance with the US, its efforts to realize its own imperialist interests inevitably lead to tensions with Washington. What once was taken for granted is now perceived as American “patronizing.”

Most of the commentaries on the espionage cases consist of a mixture of pleas and threats: pleas that Washington put an end to espionage, no longer snub Berlin and come clean over its espionage activities; and threats to end the close cooperation and build up more

powerful and more independent agencies and armed forces.

The growing hostility of broad layers of the German population to US imperialism also plays a major role. The wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo, renditions and drone killings have fundamentally altered the image of the United States in the eyes of the German public. The United States no longer stands for freedom and democracy, but for imperialist wars, torture and targeted killings.

The coup in Kiev jointly organized by the United States and Germany is also widely rejected by the German public. A survey by *Der Spiegel* revealed that 57 percent of respondents favour greater independence of Germany from the United States. Sixty-nine percent declare their confidence in the US has fallen, and 40 percent believe that Germany should cooperate more closely with Russia.

In this context, the public threats against the United States are being used to offset these moods and to exploit the hostility to American imperialism to further German imperialism.

The expansion of the German secret services and the revival of German militarism, which are being intensively pursued, are thus portrayed in a “progressive” light—as a means for a “peaceful” and “reasonable” foreign policy based on international law, as opposed to the brutal policies of the Americans. The Greens and the Left Party play a major role in this campaign.

German imperialism is not a jot more progressive than the American variant, however. It committed unprecedented historic crimes in the 20th century, and its revival is bound up with a return to its former criminal traditions—shown not least by its collaboration with the fascists of Svoboda and the Right Sector in Ukraine.

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