

NSA surveillance targets Turkish political and military leadership

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The US National Security Agency (NSA) is involved in systematic spying against large sections of the Turkish ruling elite, according to reports this week in the German news magazine *Der Spiegel* and *The Intercept*, the online publication edited by Glenn Greenwald.

Both reports were based on documents leaked by former NSA employee and surveillance whistleblower Edward Snowden. *Der Spiegel* and *The Intercept* have not released the new Snowden documents for direct viewing by the public.

US espionage against Turkey is coordinated by the NSA's Special Liaison Activity Turkey (SUSLAT) office and other secret offices and listening stations housing Special Collection Services agents, the documents show. The NSA has spied on the Turkish army, intelligence agencies, top companies and government ministries.

US surveillance operations have targeted Turkey's political elite in an effort to collect information about "leadership intentions" inside the government. As part of a "Turkish Surge Project Plan" initiated in 2006, the NSA began attacking the computers of Turkey's political leadership. The NSA spied on the Turkish embassy in Washington DC and installed "Trojan" software on electronics used by Turkish representatives at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City as part of programs codenamed POWDER and BLACKHAWK, respectively.

The US has conducted extensive joint surveillance operations with Turkey against the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which fought a guerrilla war against the Turkish military for more than decade. This collaboration included the formation of a Combined Intelligence Fusion Cell to facilitate collaboration between US and Turkish agents.

The NSA has wire-tapped PKK leaders living abroad and tracked the PKK's financial operations in Europe. The agency initiated moves to supply Turkey with cutting-edge voice recognition technology for use against the PKK in January 2012, the documents show.

According to a document dated January 2007, the NSA has provided Turkey with cell phone location data, updated on an hourly basis, in support of targeted assassinations against PKK leadership.

"Geolocations data and voice cuts from Kurdistan Worker Party communications which were passed to Turkey by NSA yielded actionable intelligence that led to the demise or capture of dozens of PKK members in the past year," the NSA document says, according to the *Der Spiegel* and *Intercept* reports.

These operations have led to mass deaths of civilians. In December 2011, Turkish F-16s launched strikes against a convoy of civilian fuel smugglers traveling from Iraq, killing 34, after a US surveillance drone incorrectly identified the travelers as terrorists, the new documents confirm.

Despite listing the PKK as a terrorist organization and backing Turkish strikes against the organization, the US has now begun providing air support for PKK fighters engaged in combat against Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

Documents from the British GCHQ cited by *Der Spiegel* show that UK intelligence has directed its own espionage activities against the Turkish Energy Ministry, the Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO) and the Turkish Pipeline Corporation (BOTAS), and against the country's Finance Minister Mehmet Simsek.

Turkey is one of the most important regional allies of US imperialism. Historically, Turkey has served as a key base for US military and intelligence operations,

and the CIA maintains surveillance partnerships with Turkey dating back to the 1940s. As the NSA documents note, intelligence ops against the “underbelly of the Soviet beast” were carried out from posts in Turkey throughout the Cold War.

Since 2011, in coordination with the CIA and US regional allies Saudi Arabia and Qatar, Turkey has served as a staging area for US-backed Islamist militias fighting against the Syrian regime. NSA spy bases in Turkey currently direct espionage against Russia, Georgia, and increasingly since 2011 against Syria’s Assad regime. Intelligence gathered on Turkey through these operations is shared with other powers including the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

The US-Turkish relationship is thus contradictory, with the US determined to keep a close watch on its “strategic partner,” the documents show. US intelligence metrics cited by *Der Spiegel* listed Turkey as a surveillance priority of equal or greater importance than Venezuela and Cuba.

“The very politicians, military officials and intelligence agency officials with whom U.S. officials work closely when conducting actions against the PKK are also considered legitimate spying targets by the NSA,” the magazine noted.

These are only the latest exposures of unrestrained spying by US imperialism against nominally allied powers. Since 2013, revelations stemming from Snowden-leaked documents have exposed NSA operations against hundreds of high-level targets within the German government and against European Union computer networks and facilities in Washington DC and Brussels, including the offices of the EU Council of Ministers and the European Council.

Responding to the news Monday before departing for this week’s NATO summit, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan downplayed the exposures, saying, “There is no such thing as countries with strong intelligence agencies not eavesdropping on other countries. Everybody does this.”



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