"Smoking gun" documents prove massive Canadian spy operations

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3 February 2015

Confidential government documents recently published by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) in collaboration with online publication *The Intercept* have exposed yet another mass spying operation conducted by the Canadian Communications Security Establishment (CSE), the country's foreign signals intelligence agency. The documents, initially obtained by National Security Agency (NSA) whistleblower Edward Snowden, provide what is being widely regarded as a "smoking gun" showing that the Canadian government spies on the entire Canadian population in violation of their constitutional rights.

Codenamed "LEVITATION", the newly unmasked program allows CSE analysts to access information on 10 to 15 million uploads and downloads of files per day from 102 different file-sharing websites, including popular sites such as Rapidshare and the now-defunct Megaupload.

The CSE asserts that LEVITATION is "mandated to collect foreign signals intelligence to protect Canada and Canadians from... threats to our national security, including terrorism." According to its own figures, however, its analysts flag a minuscule 350 "interesting download events" per month, amounting to less than 0.0001 percent of total collected traffic.

Claims by the Canadian security-intelligence apparatus that it is spying on the entire population in order to protect them are repeated ad nauseam, in spite of all evidence pointing to the fact that the working population is the actual target of state surveillance.

In the process, millions of individuals have had their online information collected en masse, including at least two Canadian IP addresses from a Montreal-based data server that were flagged as "suspicious". Given the fact that file-sharing websites are accessed by millions of people all over the world, it is a certainty that thousands, if not millions, of Canadians have had their internet data collected by the LEVITATION program without their knowledge or consent.

After flagging a user's IP address, CSE analysts can plug it into an electronic database operated by the British Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), which allows them to potentially view the past five hours of the targeted user's online activity. The CSE also has access to a robust database operated by the American National Security Agency (NSA), which contains internet traffic logs spanning up to one year.

The power and reach of the LEVITATION program further confirms the CSE's role as an indispensable partner and a de facto subcontractor of its American counterpart, the NSA, in its illegal global spying operations.

This decades-long partnership, under which the CSE was made responsible for eavesdropping on the Soviet Union during the Cold War, sees the two agencies routinely exchange personnel, information and material support. The NSA often provides funding for joint projects, and utilizes the CSE to conduct espionage in countries where Canada has a stronger diplomatic presence.

As Glenn Greenwald, the former Guardian journalist and an editor at *The Intercept* put it, "It's really the first time that a story has been reported that involves [CSE] as the lead agency in a program of pure mass surveillance." Greenwald was instrumental in helping to bring Snowden's revelations about the NSA to the world's attention.

Prior to this most recent exposé, ample evidence had already been brought to light that the CSE and its sister agencies in the "Five Eyes" intelligence partnership were spying on the phone and internet communications of Canadians and millions of others around the world.

In the summer of 2013, during Snowden's initial disclosures, it was revealed that the Canadian government had been spying on Canadians' communications since

2004 through the systematic collection and analysis of their communications metadata. The metadata collection program was initiated by the Liberal government of Jean Chretien and Paul Martin, and expanded by their Conservative successors led by Stephen Harper.

For months after the initial revelations, the Conservative government lied profusely about the CSE's clandestine operations, insisting that they were targeted at "foreign" threats and not at the Canadian population.

After this explanation was exposed as a complete fraud following revelations that the CSE had collected all Wi-Fi traffic at a Canadian airport in 2012 and tracked targeted individuals for up to two weeks afterward, the Conservatives changed tack and asserted the right to collect the metadata of Canadians' communications.

The Conservatives based their argument on the spurious claim that because metadata is the information on the "envelope" of a private electronic communication, it is separate from the constitutionally-protected contents of that communication and can be legally collected and analyzed by the government at will.

In fact, as numerous legal experts continue to insist, the collection and analysis of metadata would allow a spy agency like the CSE to construct a detailed personal profile of an individual or an organization. This includes identifying daily patterns of behaviour, friends and associates, workplaces, and political opinions and affiliations.

Numerous substantial revelations, all of them furnished by Snowden and venomously denounced by the CSE and the Canadian government, have painted a picture of a Canadian security-intelligence apparatus that operates with full impunity to track domestic political dissent for future repression and support the overseas crimes of the Canadian ruling class and its counterparts in the Five Eyes.

The CSE functions under secret Defense Minister directives known at most to a handful of cabinet ministers and a cabal of security-intelligence operatives. Furthermore, the "legal wall" that nominally separates the CSE from the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), which is tasked with discovering and countering "national security threats", is effectively null and void. CSIS routinely seeks and receives the CSE's aid in obtaining communications data on Canadian citizens, regularly lying to the courts in the process.

It must be noted that the CSE and CSIS, along with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), have, under the direction of the ministries of Public Safety as well as Defense, blurred the lines between political dissent and "terrorism". Under current definitions held by both ministries and the government as a whole, peaceful opposition to the government's right-wing and anti-worker measures can and has been labeled a "public security threat" and even low-level "terrorism".

Reports have come to light demonstrating that security-intelligence agents have surveilled and infiltrated peaceful oppositional groups such as environmentalist, aboriginal rights, and anti-capitalist organizations. Protests like those at the 2010 G20 Summit in Toronto, and the protests against the construction of the Kinder Morgan Pipeline in British Columbia, are just a few examples of the targets of state surveillance and repression.

The rapid construction of the scaffolding of a police state in Canada, represented by the blatantly unconstitutional operations of the CSE, CSIS, and the RCMP, has met with muted criticism by the corporate media and the opposition Liberals and New Democratic Party (NDP). After raising a few tepid calls for greater parliamentary oversight of these patently anti-democratic spy agencies in the immediate aftermath of Snowden's revelations, they inevitably lapse into silence.

The reason for their silence is clear. Seven years into the greatest economic crisis since the Great Depression, the Canadian bourgeoisie, and its political representatives in all the main big business parties, is preparing to confront a resurgence of working class opposition to its demands for austerity and war. To an ever-increasing degree, the bourgeoisie sees dictatorship and a police state as its only option for crushing any movement of the working class towards socialism.

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