

Snowden documents reveal New Zealand's spying on China

Tom Peters**14 March 2015**

Revelations from US National Security Agency whistleblower Edward Snowden, published in the *New Zealand Herald* on March 11, indicate that New Zealand's spy agency, the Government Communications Security Bureau (GCSB), carries out surveillance on more than 20 countries as part of the Five Eyes intelligence alliance, which also includes the US, Canada, Britain and Australia.

Previous documents released by the newspaper, in collaboration with the *Intercept* web site and investigative journalist Nicky Hager, showed that the GCSB captures almost all communications in several Pacific Island nations and shares them with the Five Eyes. (See: "Snowden documents reveal New Zealand's spying in Pacific")

According to a newly released 2013 document, titled "NSA Intelligence Relationship with New Zealand," the GCSB also targets communications in China, Japan, North Korea, Vietnam, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, unspecified Latin American countries and scientific bases in Antarctica.

The document describes the GCSB as "especially helpful in its ability to provide NSA ready access to areas and countries ... difficult for the US to access." It also states that "the GCSB highly values its relationship with NSA," which provides its New Zealand partner with "raw traffic, processing, and reporting on targets of mutual interest, in addition to technical advice and equipment loans."

According to other documents, the GCSB hacks into cellphones and electronic devices of foreign targets, such as diplomats. It also operates at least one secret listening station inside an unspecified New Zealand embassy or high commission. Hager told the radio station bFM that further details would be released and "in some respects we're only just at the beginning of

what people are going to find out."

The *Intercept*'s Glenn Greenwald noted that Hager has faced state intimidation while working on stories about the Snowden documents. Last October police ransacked Hager's house for 10 hours and seized paper files, made copies of USB storage devices, and seized his computers and dictaphone. The police were ostensibly trying to find the source for Hager's exposure of the government's links to far-right blogger Cameron Slater.

The new documents further demonstrate the extraordinary global reach of the NSA and its allies, whose mantra is to "collect it all, know it all, process it all and exploit it all." They also point to the deep integration of the GCSB in the ongoing US war in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and Washington's machinations against Iran and China—both countries with which New Zealand officially has friendly relations.

Hager told bFM that spying on China was "dangerous and rash" given that New Zealand is heavily reliant on exports to China, which is its largest trading partner. However, Washington has sought to integrate New Zealand into its strategic "pivot to Asia," aimed at pushing back China's influence in the Asia-Pacific and preparing for war against China.

Despite its economic relationship with China, Wellington relies strategically on its alliance with US imperialism to safeguard its own neo-colonial interests in the South Pacific and around the world. Labour Party leader Andrew Little, Internal Affairs Minister Peter Dunne, and numerous media commentators have defended the GCSB's right to spy on the Pacific on the grounds that China is increasing its diplomatic and economic presence in the region.

In the wake of the Snowden revelations, Prime

Minister John Key insisted that the GCSB had not broken the law, while refusing to give any details of its operations. The National Party government, like the 1999–2008 Labour government, has strengthened military and intelligence collaboration with the US. Key recently announced that New Zealand troops will be deployed to assist Obama's renewed military intervention in Iraq. At the same time, the government is anxious not to upset the country's economic relations with China by openly endorsing the US "pivot."

On March 10, Key succeeded in diverting much of the media's attention from the spying revelations by suddenly announcing that the police were investigating an "eco-terrorism" threat. The dairy company Fonterra and Federated Farmers received anonymous threats three months ago that infant milk formula would be poisoned unless the government stopped using the poison 1080 to eradicate pests in native forests. The announcement pushed revelations that New Zealand spies on China off the front pages.

GCSB acting director Una Jagose made a rare public appearance at parliament's Security and Intelligence Committee on March 11 in an attempt to defend the agency's activities. She bluntly declared that there was a "tension" between "New Zealanders' call for openness and... the bureau's need for secrecy around a lot of what it does."

Asked by Little if the agency engaged in mass surveillance or mass collection of data in the Pacific, Jagose refused to answer directly, stating: "The connotation I get from those phrases is some indiscriminate, for no purpose, not necessary collection of information for collection's sake, and we do not do that." She insisted that all the GCSB's spying was "authorised" by the government.

Despite Jagose's obfuscation and outright refusal to answer questions, the Labour leader told the *Herald* that the hearing had given him "a greater level of assurance than I had perhaps a week ago" about the GCSB's operations.

In fact, former GCSB director Bruce Ferguson confirmed to Radio NZ on March 5 that the agency's Waihopai spy base engages in the "mass collection" of communications from the Pacific. This includes collecting the data of New Zealand citizens in the region, which was illegal prior to 2013, when a highly unpopular amendment allowed the agency to spy on

New Zealanders.

On March 12, the *Herald* reported that according to the GCSB's latest annual report, spying on New Zealanders has "skyrocketed" since the law change. There were "59 access authorisations which were 'in force' over the year ending 30 June 2014, up on 26 the previous 12 months."

These "access authorisations," which require a minister's warrant, can target specific persons, "classes of persons," places, or "information infrastructure," such as a specific computer system or network, or a phone system.

While the government and Labour Party are closing ranks to defend the GCSB, it is all but obvious that the agency violates the privacy of millions of innocent people in New Zealand and around the world.

In what amounts to an open admission, speaking to the media on March 9, Prime Minister Key retracted a promise he made in 2013 to resign if it was found that the GCSB engages in mass surveillance. Key justified the retraction with the spurious argument that "mass collection" of private information was not the same as "mass surveillance."

Last September, Snowden wrote that "any statement that mass surveillance is not performed in New Zealand, or that the internet communications are not comprehensively intercepted and monitored, or that this is not intentionally and actively abetted by the GCSB, is categorically false."



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