

US has spied on Japanese government for a decade

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WikiLeaks last Friday released documents showing that the United States has spied on the Japanese government and some of the country's largest corporations for at least the past decade. Japan is just the latest US ally to be revealed as a target of US eavesdropping. Previous leaked documents revealed US spying on German, French and Brazilian leaders.

In a collection of documents labeled, "Target Tokyo," WikiLeaks listed 35 phone numbers tapped by the US's National Security Agency (NSA) as well as five NSA reports, four listed as top secret, dealing with Japanese positions on trade and climate issues.

The publication of the documents further reveals the widespread criminality of the US government's spying programs, both internationally and domestically. Friday's news is likely only the tip of the iceberg.

US State Department deputy spokesman Mark Toner would not confirm the allegations on Monday at a press briefing, but said Washington and Tokyo were discussing the matter. He stated: "Our intelligence activities are always focused on our national security needs as well as the needs of those allies and partners and I would reiterate the fact that Japan is a stalwart US partner and ally in the region." Toner had stated last week: "We do not think Japan will take this as a problem."

Tokyo has been cautious in criticizing the US so far. In the government's first official response, Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said Monday: "I will withhold comment. But if this is true, as an ally, it's deeply regrettable." Suga also stated that Tokyo had asked US National Intelligence Director James Clapper to "confirm the facts" on the matter.

A Japanese source close to the cabinet told the *Financial Times* that the revelations "could not have come at a worse time." He referred specifically to last

week's failure to reach an agreement on the US-led Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade pact and the Abe government's plans to remilitarize Japan through widely unpopular military legislation currently in the upper house of the Diet.

The documents released by WikiLeaks show that the NSA obtained information on discussions held at the prime minister's residence, as well as those by the chief cabinet secretary's staff, officials at the Bank of Japan and the trade and finance ministries, and talks at the natural gas division and petroleum division of companies Mitsubishi and Mitsui respectively.

The spying dates back to at least 2006 when Abe took office for his first term as prime minister. As listed in the files, most of the targets were identified in 2003. According to WikiLeaks, targets are given a number bearing their creation date and dubbed "Information Need" or IN, corresponding to collection requirements decided upon by US policy makers. INs rarely expire, and can easily be renewed.

The five reports released deal with the economy and trade, covering a period from 2007 to 2009. The first, labeled simply "secret," focussed on Abe's visit to the US in 2007 and climate change proposals that were discussed at a briefing at his residence. In it, the Japanese government expressed concern that the US would not approve its plans "of reducing carbon emissions by half by 2050 as part of the 'Abe initiative,'" and therefore was "considering not informing the U.S. in advance of its intention."

The next report, from 2008, concerned Japan's confidential G-8 proposals on climate change. This US report was designated to be shared with the "Five Eyes," the intelligence alliance of NSA-led countries that includes Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, indicating that the data was not restricted to

just the US.

The documents show Tokyo's concerns over US reactions to trade agendas and disputes. The final report, from 2009, deals with a feud over importing US-grown cherries. It stated: "Officials in the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries appeared recently to be seeking ways to prevent damage to relations with the US over the ministry's decision to delay the importation of US-origin cherries, a decision driven by Japanese politicians and growers."

This NSA spying clearly had nothing to do with "national security." Its main aim was to gain US ascendancy in trade negotiations with Japan and give US companies the edge over their Japanese rivals.

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange commented in a statement: "In these documents we see the Japanese government worrying in private about how much or how little to tell the United States, in order to prevent undermining of its climate change proposal or its diplomatic relationship."

With the Obama administration seeking to jail him for exposing US surveillance operations, Assange continues to live in the Ecuadorian embassy in London to avoid extradition to Sweden, in the first instance, on trumped-up allegations of sexual assault.

It is unlikely that Japan was completely unaware of the spying prior to Friday. After it emerged that German Chancellor Angela Merkel's cell phone was tapped, "Japan's top leaders assumed they were being listened to as well," according to a senior advisor to the Japanese cabinet quoted in the *Financial Times*.

The eavesdropping allegations came on the same day that trade ministers negotiating the TPP, a US-driven trade bloc involving Japan, and ten other Pacific Rim nations, failed to reach an agreement after four days of talks in Hawaii. Such a deal, if completed, would cover about 40 percent of the world economy, while excluding China. The discussions broke down in ongoing disputes including between the US and Japan over tariffs and other trade barriers. The spying revelations could further complicate the Obama administration's efforts to conclude the treaty.

As part of its "pivot" to Asia, directed against China, the US is also encouraging Tokyo to remilitarize. The Obama administration is backing the Abe government's reinterpretation of the Japanese constitution last year as well as the current military

legislation, which will codify that reinterpretation to allow the Japanese military to take part in wars abroad, notably those spearheaded by the US.

Tokyo is treading carefully over the US spying. Contrary to the shows of anger made by France, Germany and Brazil, Abe's government is no doubt worried that the NSA revelations could have a negative impact on its efforts to push through the widely opposed military legislation and damage its relations with Washington.



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