

NSA documents expose secret US spying program in Ethiopia

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According to documents released Wednesday by the *Intercept*, the National Security Agency (NSA) has established an elaborate network of spy facilities in Ethiopia.

The documents, acquired from the trove made public by Edward Snowden in 2013, reveal that the NSA's Ethiopian operation dubbed "Lion's Pride" encompasses a surveillance effort by Washington over East Africa of enormous magnitude. The secret program's broad operational components include not only spying and eavesdropping, such as the indiscriminate gathering up of phone calls, e-mails, and Internet traffic in multiple countries, but also comprises a program of cyber warfare and the infection of networks and computers with spyware.

The program set up by the NSA in Ethiopia is strongly suspected to have utilized FinSpy, a software product marketed by the company Finfisher, that allows the user to hijack other computers by e-mailing the target an "infected" attachment file. This enables the FinSpy user to steal passwords remotely, from the target's Internet browser, e-mail, and even administration passwords. Essentially, the user of this software can take total control of another computer without the target being aware.

The "Deployed Signals Intelligence Operations Center" was set up by the NSA in 2002 in Ethiopia's capital city, Addis Ababa, as part of Washington's "war on terror" in the aftermath of 9/11. According to the document, the spying operation began as a small outpost, employing only twelve Ethiopian officials.

By 2005, the program had expanded its reach and influence to include an additional three remote branches around the country, including one in Gondar, a province in northwestern Ethiopia. The program also expanded its operations to include the eavesdropping on communications in Sudan, Somalia and Yemen.

The spying operations established by Washington in

Ethiopia are a key element of the broader drive by imperialist strategists to assert US dominance over the region and the Horn of Africa.

The Ethiopian program functions as a subset of the worldwide operational effort of the NSA's vast anti-democratic architecture that has stretched its tentacles into Internet and communications networks across the planet.

Illustrating the close relationship Washington has cultivated with the government of Ethiopia with the introduction of the NSA program, the documents cite a report written in 2005 by Katie Pierce, who was the officer-in-charge of Lion's Pride in Ethiopia, "[The] NSA has an advantage when dealing with the Global War on Terrorism in the Horn of Africa."

Pierce describes the mutually beneficial relationship between the US and Ethiopia, writing, "The benefit of this relationship is that the Ethiopians provide the location and linguists and we provide the technology and training."

The establishment of such a blatantly anti-democratic operation in Ethiopia, a country with a history of grave human rights abuses, including extra-judicial murder and torture, corresponds with Washington's lawless methods in striving for total dominance over the Horn of Africa.

Between 2015 and 2016, during a wave of anti-government demonstrations in Ethiopia, more than 500 protesters were gunned down by security forces, while many others were arrested and beaten. Teargas was used by police indiscriminately to disperse the demonstrations.

In October, attempting to quell the protests, the government of Hailemariam Desalegn imposed a nationwide state of emergency and assumed sweeping draconian powers—which included restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly and granting the police extra-legal powers to detain anyone without cause.

Exposing the true nature of the government's claim of fighting terrorism, media outlets critical of the government were shut down under the pretext of

“promoting violence and disorder”.

In May, elucidating Washington’s imperialist aims for Ethiopia, the US State Department stated on the US Embassy in Ethiopia’s web site: “The U.S. Embassy engages with the Ethiopian government to improve the business climate, create a level playing field for all investors, and to foster an entrepreneurship culture. There are growing opportunities for U.S. trade and investment, particularly in manufacturing, energy, and agricultural processing”.

The NSA program in Ethiopia began after September 11, 2001, when Washington commenced its so-called “war on terror”. Long before the 2001 attacks, Washington regarded the Horn of Africa as a geo-strategic target because the region fronts the main waterway for the world’s oil traffic originating from the Middle East through the Red Sea. In more recent years, the struggle for hegemony has unfolded as part of US imperialism’s rivalry with Chinese influence in Africa.

The chaotic state of Somalia, itself the result of decades of US imperialist intervention, has long been an obstacle to Washington’s aims for the region, beginning with the fall of the Mohamed Siad Barre dictatorship in 1991, which precipitated Somalia’s plunge into complete disarray, with various warring factions battling for power. The destruction of Somalian society has had a grave impact on the masses, and fueled the rise of the Islamist militant organization Al-Shabaab.

Backed by the US, Ethiopian forces in 2006 invaded and occupied Somalia to neutralize the Council of Islamic Courts (CIC), when the Somali Islamist organization staged a political rebellion against the US-backed Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in Mogadishu.

According to Human Rights Watch, Ethiopia carried out grave atrocities during the invasion and ensuing occupation, including indiscriminate killings and torture.

Another NSA document divulged by Snowden dated from 2007 reveals that the agency praised Ethiopia’s invasion of Somalia. “Ethiopian invasion of Somalia plays to the advantage of US counter-terrorism forces,” it stated.

The document goes on to detail that the NSA provided Ethiopian forces with the agency’s Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) efforts against the CIC, including reports of its troop movements and communications.

Coordinating its intelligence-sharing with the CIA and the US military in Djibouti, the NSA boasted that its “program paid off handsomely” and that “Ethiopia easily defeated the CIC”. The document also boasted of the

killing of two unnamed so-called leaders of Al-Qaeda by Ethiopian forces, owing to the effectiveness of the intelligence provided by the NSA program.

The US support has propped up an oppressive regime representing a narrow ruling elite against the Ethiopian masses, who experience immense social misery. More than half of the population lives in poverty, surviving on less than \$2 per day.

Illustrating the stark contrast of the social position of the masses to that of the small layer of the ruling elite sitting atop Ethiopian society is the fact that ten of these individuals collectively possess more than \$25 billion.

Making clear the Ethiopian masses are the principal target of the NSA program is the revelation that the ruling Desalegn government has used the program against internal political enemies and dissidents.

Felix Horne, a senior researcher for Human Rights Watch, told the *Intercept*, “The Ethiopian government uses surveillance not only to fight terrorism and crime, but as a key tactic in its abusive efforts to silence dissenting voices in-country. Essentially anyone that opposes or expresses dissent against the government is considered to be an ‘anti-peace element’ or a ‘terrorist.’”

Under conditions of continual decline in its living standards, fueling a rise in mass social anger, the increasingly restive population is perceived by the establishment as a threat to be crushed.



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