

## NSA spying on Europe revelations – our experts react

Last week, new evidence came to light of the U.S National Security Agency's widespread surveillance of European populations and leaders, most prominently, the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel. We asked our expert contributors for their reactions.



- **It is important to distinguish between the issues of governments spying on each other and of the protection of EU citizens' personal data** – David Cadier -LSE Department of International Relations and LSE IDEAS
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### It is important to distinguish between the issues of governments spying on each other and of the protection of EU citizens' personal data

**David Cadier** - LSE Department of International Relations and LSE IDEAS

Former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had been famously looking for Europe's phone number – it seems that the NSA has found it. The current row over US surveillance activities in Europe has the potential to harm the transatlantic relationship, leading some analysts to compare it the 'Iraq Crisis' of 2003. As then, European public opinions are mobilized and will have to be counted with. A difference though is that, so far, European governments have not presented a disunited front as they did in 2003. This is in spite of the fact that the leaked documents made the distinction between Washington's 'second-party' (e.g. UK) and 'third-party' (e.g. Germany or France) allies and have a polarizing potential somehow reminiscent to that of Donald Rumsfeld's (captious) opposition between 'Old' and 'New' Europe.



In Germany, protests and condemnations have been above all directed at the US and not at other European states that have either, according to the allegations, played a role in the NSA program or are known to have their own surveillance program. This focus on the US can also be explained by the symbolic weight of the story around Chancellor Merkel's mobile phone.

In contemplating the potential consequences of this scandal, it is important to distinguish between the issues of governments spying on each other and of the protection of EU citizens' personal data. While the spat around the former can be expected to deflate relatively quickly (it should not in any case irremediably obstruct diplomatic channels), the latter is cause of a more profound disagreement between the EU and the US that has been anterior to – and which is likely to survive – the NSA scandal.

How might the negotiations over the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) be affected by this context? It is unlikely that the whole process will be derailed by the scandal: put simply, the geo-economic stakes are too high. In fact, EU leaders meeting in Brussels have made clear that they have no intentions of cancelling the talks. It might however indirectly affect the shape of the deal and potentially complicates its ratification. Berlin has been recently reported to wish to include data safeguards in the negotiations, a move that is likely to be resisted by the European Commission. On its part, the European Parliament (EP) adopted two weeks ago a resolution calling for a suspension of the (separate) SWIFT agreement on the sharing of bank transfer data between the EU and the US while its largest political grouping, the EPP, advocated in parallel the scrapping of the data exchange agreement known as Safe Harbour. The EP is an actor to be watched in particular: its vetoing of the initial SWIFT agreement back in early 2010 was its first *fait d'armes* in influencing EU external relations; European Parliamentary elections will be held next year; and if the TTIP is eventually concluded it will need to be ratified by the EP.

## **In the long run we may look back on this as a seminal moment in transatlantic relations**

**Chris Brown** – *LSE Department of International Relations*



More or less everything that could be said about the NSA's spying on America's allies has been said, and more than once; we can be clear that (i) everyone does it, but that (ii) the NSA (and Britain's GCHQ) are better at it than anyone else, (iii) most governments are inwardly fairly philosophical about such activities, but (iv) public opinion isn't, so at least feigned outrage is required. What else is there to say? Perhaps this; for decades the 'Five Eyes' programme linking the signals intelligence operations of US, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand has been basic to the 'Special Relationship(s)' that these members of the Anglosphere have with one another, and has been a source of considerable annoyance to other 'friendly' countries, who feel the exclusivity of this partnership implies that they (particularly the French and the Germans) can't be trusted.

Now that the scale of the operations of the Five Eyes partners has been revealed to the world at large – it was always known to other intelligence services – it may be more difficult to sustain. The Americans and the Germans are already talking of a new intelligence-sharing relationship, and similar deals may have to be made much more widely. The exclusivity of the Five Eyes partnership may have to end, and if it does the consequences will go beyond the limited area of intelligence sharing. Given the increasing inability of the UK's armed forces to make a serious contribution to allied operations, the relationship between GCHQ and the NSA is the last remaining feature of US/UK relations that remains 'special'. If that relationship goes it will signal a seismic change in British foreign policy and even if the immediate effects are minimal, in the long run we may look back on this as a seminal moment in transatlantic relations.

## **The NSA leaks will put pro-American forces in Europe even more on the defensive**

**Matthew Hinds** – *LSE Department of International History*



Out of all of the influential sections of opinion in Europe, the one that will find the NSA revelations the most distressing will no doubt be those politicians who identify themselves as pro-American. Their politics are indelibly tied to their own core belief in fostering closer relations with the United States, an objective made harder to justify to their domestic constituencies after the NSA debacle. As such, in Germany, the actions of the US have taken on existential significance for the Merkel government. After having publicly backed Washington over the Snowden episode last summer, Merkel has now been placed in a most awkward diplomatic situation, with US surveillance bringing to mind – in a German context -the machinations of the Stasi.

For someone like Merkel's predecessor, Gerhard Schroeder, leader of the SDP (Social Democratic Party), such revelations would have in some respects strengthened his political hand as it would have merely confirmed his own suspicions of American hegemony. But for Merkel, the same Chancellor who has said more than once that the US was a beacon of freedom while she lived under the tyranny of East German surveillance, these NSA leaks will undoubtedly put her on the back-foot politically and force her to question the extent and nature of German-American ties. With that being said, the wider security and economic relationship between the United States and Europe is far too enmeshed for it to be significantly damaged from Washington's spying. Indeed, from the perspective of the intelligence community, the revelations hardly come as a surprise. It has emerged that the intelligence services from many European countries, including Britain, Spain and Denmark have to some degree colluded with their counterparts in Washington. Instead, the impact of the NSA leaks is likely to take a far more insidious form. Namely, it will put pro-American forces in Europe even more on the defensive and contribute to the transatlantic drift that has marked this century.

*Image: Headquarters of the NSA at Fort Meade, Maryland, via Wikimedia Commons*

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