

Beat: News

Britain spied on foreign diplomats during G20 meetings, docs show

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USPA News - Britain intercepted phone calls and monitored computers used by foreign diplomats who took part in G20 summit meetings in London in 2009, according to the British newspaper The Guardian which obtained classified documents from American whistleblower Edward Snowden. The bombshell revelations were made public just hours before Britain began hosting the G8 summit in Northern Ireland.

It claims the British intelligence agency GCHQ made great efforts to intercept the communications of foreign diplomats during G20 meetings in April and September 2009. Snowden, a 29-year-old American who worked for defense contractor Booz Allen Hamilton as an infrastructure analyst for the National Security Agency (NSA), provided the classified documents to The Guardian. He was also the source behind recent newspaper articles that revealed previously unknown details about the U.S. government's secret surveillance programs. The documents, including a GCHQ document describing "recent successes", said the agency used "ground-breaking intelligence capabilities" to intercept the communications of visiting delegations. It included hacking into BlackBerry devices used by foreign officials to monitor their e-mail messages and phone calls. The intelligence agency also set up fake internet cafes at which the computers were bugged with key-logging software and a program to intercept incoming e-mails. Some of the information was fed in near real-time to dozens of analysts, who in turn provided a summary of the results to British officials. The documents suggest the spying was carried out purely from a political objective, and not to investigate any kind of criminal offense. "The GCHQ intent is to ensure that intelligence relevant to HMG's (the British government's) desired outcomes for its presidency of the G20 reaches customers at the right time and in a form which allows them to make full use of it," according to an GCHQ document marked "top secret." Among those targeted by the agency was Turkish Finance Minister Mehmet "im"ek and up to 15 other officials from his delegation. The documents make clear the spying was to find out Ankara's attitudes to financial regulation and reform, as well as to determine Turkey's willingness to co-operate with the rest of the G20 nations. The British government refused to comment on the report, but Turkey's Foreign Ministry described the claims as "alarming" and raised the issue with British Ambassador David Reddaway. "The British authorities are expected to present an official and satisfactory explanation on this issue," a spokesperson said. The ministry added: "If there is even the slightest truth to any of these claims contained in this news report, this will evidently constitute a scandal primarily for the country concerned. In an environment where mutual trust, respect and transparency should be essential for international cooperation, such act by an allied country would clearly be deemed unacceptable, should the news report turn out to be true."

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