



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on December 19, 2013

Angela Merkel Tells Obama: NSA is Like the Stasi

In an angry conversation, recently reelected German Chancellor Angela Merkel (shown) told President Obama that the surveillance tapping of her cellphone by the National Security Agency (NSA) was “like the Stasi,” the infamous East German secret police.



The exchange, [as reported by the New York Times December 16](#), occurred after reports surfaced of the NSA’s nearly decade-long surveillance of Merkel’s cellphone.

Despite Merkel’s angry reaction (and similar recriminations around the globe from other monitored politicians), NSA leadership reportedly refuses to promise Merkel to exclude Germany from its surveillance scope. As explained by the *New York Times*:

American officials have refused to extend the “no spying” guarantee beyond Ms. Merkel, telling German officials in private sessions that if the White House agreed to forgo surveillance on German territory, other partners would insist on the same treatment.

“Susan Rice has been very clear to us,” one senior German official said, referring to Mr. Obama’s national security adviser. “The U.S. is not going to set a precedent.”

Nothing, not even the prospect of souring the relationship with a long-time ally, can dissuade the NSA from keeping the entire planet under its constant and technologically dazzling gaze.

There are those within the the president’s security inner circle who realize the ironic blowback that may result from the NSA’s rock-ribbed insistence on its right to continue listening to leaders around the globe when they think they are speaking in private. Again, from the *Times* article:

The director of the National Security Agency, Gen. Keith B. Alexander, said in an interview after the monitoring of Chancellor Merkel was revealed that the United States may soon have to choose between spying on partners and making them full participants in combating digital threats.

Naturally, nearly every story on the subject published by the mainstream (read: state-run) media focuses on the potential threat to the “security of the homeland” should the NSA’s ability to monitor Internet and phone traffic be curtailed. There are very few of these articles taking up the legitimate question raised in Merkel’s outburst: Are NSA tactics similar to those of the Stasi?

In an interview in June with a German television station, German President Joachim Gauck said the surveillance conducted by the National Security Agency was not comparable to that conducted by the Stasi — the infamous East German Ministry for State Security — because “it is not like it was with the Stasi and the KGB — that there exist big filing cabinets in which all the content of our conversations are written down and nicely filed. This is not the case.”

Gauck is right. The NSA is nothing like the Stasi because the East German secret police relied on such things as typewriters, carbon copies, handwritten transcriptions of phone conversations, agents listening through doors and rudimentary bugging devices, and the aforementioned filing cabinets. The NSA, on the other hand, can apparently monitor electronically — in real time — every word of every



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phone call, every text message, every social media post, every website visited, and every form of electronic communication.

How much data is being collected by the NSA? William Binney, a former NSA technical director turned whistleblower, estimates that the newly completed NSA Utah Data Center “[will be able to handle and process five zettabytes of data.](#)” In a story quoting Binney’s claim, National Public Radio reports that a zettabyte is equal to “the amount of data that would fill 250 billion DVDs.”

Back to those bulging Stasi filing cabinets. Imagine that a typical filing cabinet with 60 files of 30 pages per file takes up about 4.3 square feet of space. [Each 30-page file would equal roughly 120 MB of data.](#) Given the amount of storage available to the NSA in its Utah location, if all the data stored there were printed and stored in traditional filing cabinets, those cabinets would occupy nearly 6.6 million square miles!

In describing the growth and survival of the East German surveillance state and the Stasi’s activities that undergirded it, [Scott Horton wrote](#) that East Germany was a country “in which the power and authority of the intelligence services to spy on their own citizens rested on an elaborate network of laws that empowered surveillance and eroded the rights of citizens specified in the country’s constitution.”

Again, the Stasi and the Cold War communist East German regime had nothing on the NSA and 21st-century America.

From the enactment of the Patriot Act to the renewal of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act amendments, Congress after Congress and consecutive presidents have usurped powers the scope of which are unknown in the written record of government.

In order to appreciate the clear and present danger to liberty posed by the myriad methods being used by our own federal government to keep us under the constant vigilance of its never-blinking eye, the reader needs to have in the front of his mind the standard to which the federal government must be held.

The [Fourth Amendment to the Constitution](#) guarantees that:

The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.

Recent events demonstrate that for over a decade, our elected representatives (and the federal courts, for that matter) have disregarded the Constitution and built a domestic spy apparatus that bears no resemblance whatsoever to the blueprint provided by our Founding Fathers in the Constitution.

Despite the government’s intrusions into Americans’ private business, many Americans dismiss its activities, saying, “I’ve done nothing wrong. Why should I worry?” This is the question often put to opponents of the federal government’s surveillance activity. Furthermore, many Americans accept the surveillance state with rationalizations such as: “The government is protecting us from terrorism, so I think it’s fine that they keep an eye out for extremists. If they happen to listen to my phone calls or read my e-mail, that’s just the price we pay for safety.”

In light of the protections afforded by the Fourth Amendment, these mentalities look at the surveillance from the wrong angle.

Americans are endowed by their Creator with the right to be free from unwarranted searches and



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seizures. When the government takes away these rights, then there is no liberty, regardless of pretexts and purposes put forth by the federal government.

While it's true that most Americans have "done nothing wrong" criminally speaking, it is equally true that most of us have done many embarrassing things that we would prefer not to have put in a file for future use by political enemies — inside or outside the government. What are these possible peccadilloes? Think bad credit, poor scholastic performance, Web surfing habits, sensitive medical diagnoses, etc.

It is most important to remember that there is no evidence that the government's massive surveillance and deprivations of rights has made us any safer. What, then, is the true purpose of the surveillance?

It isn't security. Demanding freedom in exchange for safety is the economy of tyrants. When the federal government — or any government — robs citizens of their basic civil rights, then that government has become despotic by definition.

In a [308-page report](#) issued Wednesday, December 18, a review board appointed by President Obama recommended some 46 changes to NSA surveillance policies. Notably missing from the group's list, however, is a proposal to immediately cease every program that violates the Fourth Amendment.

Given the upshot of that document, it seems that whether Angela Merkel likes it or not, the snooping will carry on as usual.

Photo of German Chancellor Angela Merkel: AP Images

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