



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on October 25, 2013

World Leaders React to NSA Surveillance of Their Phone Calls

Wretched indeed is the nation in whose affairs foreign powers are once permitted to intermeddle!

-Thomas Jefferson, 1787

According to [the Guardian's account of information](#) passed to the paper by National Security Agency (NSA) whistleblower Edward Snowden, there are at least 35 countries around the world that are now very wretched indeed.



"The National Security Agency monitored the phone conversations of 35 world leaders after being given the numbers by an official in another US government department," the *Guardian's* James Ball wrote on October 24.

Citing a "confidential memo," the *Guardian* reports that NSA officials asked other departments of the Executive Branch to hand over their foreign contact lists so that they phone numbers on those "Rolodexes" could be added to NSA surveillance target rosters.

After the U.S. government officials complied with the NSA's request, the numbers of the foreign leaders were immediately "'tasked' for monitoring by the NSA."

Many of those overseas targets of NSA snooping have called out the Obama administration, demanding that the president explain the reports and order the wiretaps be removed. Among those most vocal in their remonstrance was German chancellor Angela Merkel (shown, left). In a separate article, the *Guardian's* Ian Traynor wrote:

Merkel was said by informed sources in Germany to be "livid" over the reports and convinced, on the basis of a German intelligence investigation, that the reports were utterly substantiated.

The German news weekly, *Der Spiegel*, reported an investigation by German intelligence, prompted by research from the magazine, that produced plausible information that Merkel's mobile was targeted by the US eavesdropping agency. The German chancellor found the evidence substantial enough to call the White House and demand clarification.

When [asked October 23 about Merkel's allegations](#), White House press secretary Jay Carney responded,

I can tell you that today, President Obama and Chancellor Merkel spoke by telephone regarding the allegations that you mention, that the U.S. National Security Agency intercepted the communications of the German Chancellor. And I can tell you that the President assured the Chancellor that the United States is not monitoring and will not monitor the communications of the Chancellor.

Curiously, there is more in Carney's crafted denial than he likely meant to convey. Notice, for example,



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that he says that the United States “is not monitoring” and “will not monitor” Merkel’s phone calls. That leaves out one very important and germane time period: the past. Carney was not pressed on the issue and so escaped having to deny that the U.S. *has ever monitored* the German chancellor’s communications.

Another White House official was asked directly if the government of the United States had monitored Merkel’s phone calls in the past. According to the *Guardian*, Caitlin Hayden, the White House’s National Security Council spokeswoman, said: “The United States is not monitoring and will not monitor the communications of Chancellor Merkel. Beyond that, I’m not in a position to comment publicly on every specific alleged intelligence activity.”

Short answer: Yes, we were monitoring Merkel, but now that we’ve been caught we’ll stop for a while.

In fairness, the spying didn’t start during the Obama administration. The *Guardian* reports that the memo it reviewed was written “halfway through George W. Bush’s second term, when Condoleezza Rice was secretary of state and Donald Rumsfeld was in his final months as defense secretary.”

So, rather than extinguish the fire started by his predecessor, President Obama decided to douse it with gasoline. Again, from the *Guardian*:

Earlier in the week, Obama called the French president François Hollande [shown, right] in response to reports in *Le Monde* that the NSA accessed more than 70m phone records of French citizens in a single 30-day period, while earlier reports in *Der Spiegel* uncovered NSA activity against the offices and communications of senior officials of the European Union.

The European Commission, the executive body of the EU, this week backed proposals that could require US tech companies to seek permission before handing over EU citizens’ data to US intelligence agencies, while the European parliament voted in favour of suspending a transatlantic bank data sharing agreement after *Der Spiegel* revealed the agency was monitoring the international bank transfer system Swift.

Europe isn’t the only region of the globe where the American snoops are listening to leaders’ conversations. Other documents leaked by Snowden reveal that [officials in Mexico and Brazil](#) were under the NSA’s powerful surveillance scope, as well.

In response to the U.S. government’s monitoring of its ersatz allies, two of those allies have now joined together to thwart the surveillance. As [reported by the Financial Times](#), Merkel and her French counterpart, François Hollande

would launch a “joint initiative” to renegotiate their intelligence services’ co-operation with the US, saying new protocols must be set in the wake of revelations of widespread American eavesdropping on European leaders.

Ms Merkel said other countries were welcome to join the initiative, but at the outset they would involve only parallel bilateral efforts between the American intelligence agencies and, separately, Paris and Berlin. She said she and François Hollande, the French president, hoped to complete the agreements with the US by the end of the year.

“I think the services need to come to agreement between each other on yardsticks and other norms and standards,” Merkel said at a press conference during an EU summit that began in Brussels on Thursday. “Words are not sufficient. True change is necessary.”

How true that is. From e-mail and social media posts, to web search history and phone records at home,



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to the listening in on the otherwise private conversations of national leaders abroad, the NSA is collecting all the data — historical and real-time — necessary to make every U.S. citizen a suspect and keep their every movement under the watchful eye of the federal government.

The same is apparently true for foreign leaders, as well.

But, as the date on the memo proves, the party affiliation of the president is immaterial when it comes to the expansion of the surveillance state. When all the spying — domestic and foreign — is viewed through the proper lens, it becomes obvious that the surveillance is less a matter of U.S. policy and more a tactic employed by those who would see all national sovereignty subjugated to one central authority possessed of all power and of all information necessary to keep quiet those who would otherwise speak out against the consolidation.

Americans concerned about the rapid sprawl of the surveillance web need to demand that elected leaders in Washington, D.C., refuse to fund any agency of the federal government that is violating the Fourth Amendment or that is using the resources of the United States to meddle in the affairs of foreign governments.

Photo of German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President François Hollande: AP Images

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