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# Britain's GCHQ shepherding mass surveillance operations throughout Europe

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Satellite dishes are seen at GCHQ's outpost at Bude, close to where trans-Atlantic fibre-optic cables come ashore in Cornwall, southwest England June 23, 2013.(Reuters / Kieran Doherty)

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British intelligence agency GCHQ has helped counterpart entities in France, Germany, Spain, and Sweden develop methods of mass surveillance of internet and phone traffic in the last five years, a new report reveals.

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Documents supplied by former National Security Agency contractor Edward [Snowden](#) to the Guardian show the UK Government Communications Headquarters' (GCHQ) enormous influence throughout Europe. The documents detail how the agency developed and promoted

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spying processes, built relationships with telecommunication companies, and evaded national laws that constrain the surveillance powers of intelligence agencies.

In the wake of outrage expressed over the past week across Europe regarding newly exposed NSA surveillance of European countries – including intercepted communications and the monitoring of phones belonging to officials such as German Chancellor Angela [Merkel](#) - documents released Friday by the Guardian show major European countries' culpability in mass surveillance efforts shepherded by the GCHQ.

The GCHQ is part of the 'Five Eyes' intelligence-sharing partnership between Australia, Britain, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States.

US intelligence officials [said](#) the monitoring that received so much indignation from powers like Germany and France was carried out by those countries' own intelligence agencies and later shared with the US.

In June, the Guardian revealed the GCHQ's [Tempora](#) program, in which the agency tapped into transatlantic fiber-optic cables to execute bulk surveillance. Germany's justice minister, Sabine Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger, said at the time that the program sounded "*like a Hollywood nightmare*" and warned that free societies and actions hidden under "a veil of secrecy" are not compatible.

## A nation-by-nation scorecard

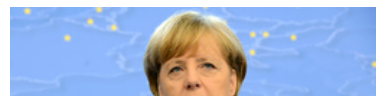
In a 2008 survey of European partners, the GCHQ marveled at Germany's capabilities to produce Tempora-like surveillance. The British service said the Federal Intelligence Service (BND) had "*huge technological potential and good access to the heart of the internet – they are already seeing some bearers running at 40Gbps and 100Gbps.*" The term 'bearers' refers to the fiber-optic cables. Gigabits per second (Gbps) measures the speed at which data runs through them.

The documents also show the British were advising German counterparts on how to change or evade laws that restricted advanced surveillance efforts. "*We have been assisting the BND (along with SIS [Secret Intelligence Service] and Security Service) in making the case for reform or reinterpretation of the very restrictive interception legislation in Germany,*" the survey says.

The report also lauds the GCHQ's French partner, the General



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Directorate for External Security (DGSE), especially for its cozy relationship with an unnamed telecommunications company.

*"DGSE are a highly motivated, technically competent partner, who have shown great willingness to engage on IP [internet protocol] issues, and to work with GCHQ on a 'cooperate and share' basis."*

The GCHQ expressed desire to benefit from the DGSE's relationship with the company.

*"We have made contact with the DGSE's main industry partner, who has some innovative approaches to some internet challenges, raising the potential for GCHQ to make use of this company in the protocol development arena."*

The GCHQ's work with its French counterpart led to improved capabilities to carry out bulk surveillance, despite growing commercial emphasis on encryption.

*"Very friendly crypt meeting with DGSE in July," British officials said. French intelligence officials were "clearly very keen to provide presentations on their work which included cipher detection in high-speed bearers. [GCHQ's] challenge is to ensure that we have enough UK capability to support a longer term crypt relationship."*

## **New opportunities in future partnerships**

GCHQ ties to [Spain's](#) intelligence service, the National Intelligence Centre (CNI), were bolstered by Spain's connections to an unnamed British telecom company, giving them *"fresh opportunities and uncovering some surprising results."*

*"GCHQ has not yet engaged with CNI formally on IP exploitation, but the CNI have been making great strides through their relationship with a UK commercial partner. GCHQ and the commercial partner have been able to coordinate their approach. The commercial partner has provided the CNI some equipment whilst keeping us informed, enabling us to invite the CNI across for IP-focused discussions this autumn,"* the survey said. It reported that the GCHQ *"have found a very capable counterpart in CNI, particularly in the field of Covert Internet Ops."*

When Sweden passed a 2008 law allowing its National Defence Radio Establishment (FRA) to execute Tempora-like surveillance via fiber-optic cables, the GCHQ said in the report that *"FRA have obtained a...probe to*

*use as a test-bed and we expect them to make rapid progress in IP exploitation following the law change."* The GCHQ went on to express delight in future partnerships with FRA after the law passed.

The survey found strong ties between the GCHQ and Dutch external and internal intelligence services MIVD and AIVD, respectively.

*"Both agencies are small, by UK standards, but are technically competent and highly motivated,"* British officials said.

The GCHQ also helped AIVD in handling legal constraints to spying.

*"The Dutch have some legislative issues that they need to work through before their legal environment would allow them to operate in the way that GCHQ does. We are providing legal advice on how we have tackled some of these issues to Dutch lawyers."*

Contrary to the other nations' positive marks, the GCHQ country-by-country scorecard shows [Italy's](#) intelligence agencies to be riddled with internal strife.

*"GCHQ has had some CT [counter-terrorism] and internet-focused discussions with both the foreign intelligence agency (AISE) and the security service (AISI), but has found the Italian intelligence community to be fractured and unable/unwilling to cooperate with one another,"* the report said.

A follow-up six months later noted the GCHQ still saw legal constraints in Italy as hampering AISI's ability to cooperate.

This latest disclosure calls into question how involved the countries were in the overall surveillance of global citizens and world leaders led by the NSA and GCHQ.



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**brian** 02.11.2013 19:04

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Are all these spying on their citizens taking place in the land of the free western democracies?