



More Spy Revelations About Targeting of Traveling Diplomats

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The latest Edward Snowden revelations, published in Der Spiegel, have focused on a British GCHQ program called “Royal Concierge,” which tracks the travels of diplomats and then facilitates surveillance and/or bugging of their hotel rooms. According to a description of the program published today by Voice of Russia, GCHQ creates bogus LinkedIn accounts and then intercepts commercial transactions booking hotel rooms and other travel arrangements. This facilitates direct spying through bugging of telephones and fax machines, and sometimes results in surveillance teams being placed in adjoining hotel rooms. According to the reports, GCHQ, in league with the NSA, runs a program called Quantum Insert, which intercepts commercial transactions en route and enables personal data on diplomats and other targets to be grabbed before hotel reservations and other cyber-transactions are even completed. According to the Spiegel account, at least 350 luxury hotels around the world have been targeted by “Royal Concierge.” The program has been operational since 2010.

One priority target of the program is OPEC. Through the bogus commercial LinkedIn accounts, GCHQ is able to track the activities of both the Secretary General of OPEC and the Saudi governor of the oil cartel. LinkedIn officials issued a strong denunciation of the program and said they were never informed that their service was being penetrated and used for the data collection. British intelligence has been notorious for decades for targeting diplomats for blackmail and extortion while traveling, particularly during the UN General Assembly sessions in New York City.

In parliamentary testimony last week, the heads of three British intelligence services defended the GCHQ programs, claiming that they were only directed against terrorists. The revelations about the diplomatic spying clearly indicate they were lying.

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