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GCHQ snoops on hotel reservations targeting diplomats – Snowden leaks

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Reuters / Kiyoshi Ota



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A UK spy agency infiltrated international hotel booking systems for some three years, tracing high profile officials and wiretapping their suites, new leaks reveal. GCHQ's top secret 'Royal Concierge' program tracked 350 hotels across the globe.

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Germany's Der Spiegel has published yet another episode of scandalous revelations from the former NSA contractor Edward Snowden, currently enjoying temporary asylum in Moscow.


Constantly on the move, top officials and diplomats prefer to stay in high-end establishments and boutique hotels with premier service standards.

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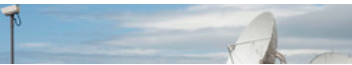
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And since the number of high-class hotels in the world is finite, British Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) came up with the idea of turning them into a huge net to fish for secrets in high-tech style.

After the 'Royal Concierge' program underwent testing in 2010, it was readied and put into action.

Documents unearthed by Snowden reveal that over a three-year period GCHQ had an automatic system for singling out people of interest, who made reservations in about 350 upscale hotels worldwide.

Field operatives then allegedly wiretapped the phone and network cables inside the targetted suite, and were potentially able to check into the next door suite in order to eavesdrop the target at the scene.

'Royal Concierge' in operation

According to documents seen by Der Spiegel, when a top official or a diplomat makes a reservation using his working e-mail address (or his secretary does) with a governmental domain like .gov, GCHQ gets a notification and decides whether it needs to take 'action' or not.

Once a foreign diplomat is booked into a hotel, putting him under the microscope becomes a purely technical objective. Der Spiegel lists an impressive array of spying techniques and capabilities "that seem to exhaust the creative potential of modern spying". No details, however, are provided.

On occasions, when a guest of special interest checks in, a crack intelligence unit can be deployed who have 'specialist technologies' for spying at their disposal. GCHQ may also put into action codename 'Humint' [Human Intelligence], for close scrutiny of the target, an operation that could also include field agents working in the vicinity.



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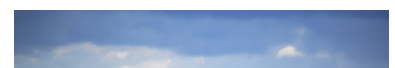
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The 'Royal Concierge' secret program logo showing a penguin wearing a crown. The black and white penguin might be mocking luxury hotels' staff uniform.

Der Spiegel also highlights the speculation that 'Royal Concierge' could possibly manipulate hotel choices through the booking programs and also bug hired cars.

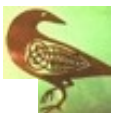
Der Spiegel has not provided information about whether 'Royal Concierge' has been spying on Britain's major allies, or if the targets of the GCHQ hotel surveillance had any connections to Al-Qaeda.

Remarkably, the report comes right after British intelligence chiefs made assurances that their actions were conducted within the framework of the war on terror. At a November-7th hearing by parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee in London, GCHQ head, Sir Ian Lobban, acknowledged that Edward Snowden's leaks would make GCHQ's work "far harder" for years to come.



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greencrow 18.11.2013 05:41

Connie says:

" ;That may also explain Arafat & Castro"

Yes and numerous others...even Jackie Kennedy died of a

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