

Canada Spies on Its Own Citizens

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Canadian government spies on Brazil — and its own citizens, Our spies work closely with U.S. National Security Agency, Canada's spy agency espionage arm of Canadian corporations

In the September issue of the CCPA Monitor, I reported on the U.S. National Security Agency's (NSA) spying on hundreds of millions of its citizens, as revealed by whistle-blower and former NSA contractor Edward Snowden. Now it appears that the Canadian government, too, is engaged in surreptitiously spying on its citizens, in collaboration with the NSA.

Canada has also been caught spying on Brazil. The United States and Canada are clearly close partners in the creation of an insidious global surveillance system that blatantly violates domestic and international human rights with impunity.

In October, Snowden exposed the extent of the Canadian government's spying activities. The Canadian counterpart to the NSA is the Communications Security Establishment Canada (CSEC). The two agencies have had close relations for more than six decades and share intelligence on each other's citizens. Both spy on their own citizens as well as on each others' nationals, and pass this information on to each other, thereby circumventing any legal restrictions on domestic surveillance.

Such close co-operation is part of the "Five Eyes" program of the U.S., Canada, Australia, Britain and New Zealand, which have shared responsibilities for a massive global surveillance system that includes commercial espionage.

CSEC has a staff of more than 2,000, with another 1,000 military personnel assisting it, a yearly budget worth hundreds of millions of dollars, and a new headquarters that cost \$1 billion to build. As one observer put it, "CSEC operations are shrouded in almost total secrecy, authorized under ministerial directives that are themselves so secret that their subject matter, let alone their contents, is secret."

Economic spying appears to be the reason for CSEC's surveillance of Brazil's Ministry of Mines and Energy. According to documents leaked by Snowden, in 2012 CSEC used a spying program code-named Olympia "to map the phone calls, e-mails, and video conferences made within the mines and energy ministry."

More than 40 Canadian companies are active in Brazil's mining sector, including Kinross Gold, Teck, Yamana Gold, Aura Minerals, Luna Gold, and El Dorado Gold. Canadian investment in Brazil is worth \$9.8 billion, while Brazil's investment in Canada amounts to \$15.8 billion. With a population of 200 million, Brazil has one of the world's largest economies boasting a major industrial sector and enormous oil deposits.

Brazil's Embraer corporation is one of the largest aircraft manufacturers in the world, while the state-owned Petrobras has the second biggest oil reserves in South America. Canada and Brazil are rivals in the economic sectors of aircraft exports, oil exploitation, mining, and agriculture.

Canadian spying on Brazil's Ministry of Mines and Energy appears to be aimed at giving Canadian companies an advantage over competitors in the bidding for drilling rights on auctioned oil blocks in Brazil, and getting information related to the perceived competitive threat posed by Brazil's oil sector to Canada's tar sands as a destination for foreign investment. Four Canadian companies recently secured 10 Brazilian oil blocks in an auction of 200 blocks.

Brazilian Foreign Minister Luis Alberto Machado expressed outrage at the revelations of Canadian spying and demanded an explanation, as did Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff, who accused Canada of violating her country's sovereignty. She called the spying "unacceptable" and an act of industrial espionage.

"The fact that our Ministry of Mines and Energy was the target of espionage confirms the strategic and economic reasons behind such acts," the President stated. Rousseff had already frozen all major relations with the United States and cancelled her planned visit to Washington after that country's spying on Brazil was also revealed by Snowden in September.

According to The Globe and Mail, Canada-Brazil economic relations are at a "standstill" due to the spying revelations, and Brazilian officials have pledged "to closely scrutinize the activities of Canadian mining companies and other investors in Brazil."

Prime Minister Stephen Harper has responded to the major spying scandal disingenuously by saying that he is "very concerned" about reports that CSEC is involved in industrial espionage in Brazil (as if he hadn't known about it). Harper vaguely promised "appropriate follow-up" on the charges, indicating further disdain for Brazil's sovereignty.

An October 9 article in The [UK] Guardian makes clear that CSEC is the espionage arm of corporate Canada. The newspaper explains that "[CSEC] has participated in secret meetings in Ottawa where Canadian security agencies briefed energy corporations. Claims of spying on the [Brazilian] ministry by CSEC come amid the Canadian government's increasingly aggressive promotion of resource corporations at home and abroad, including unprecedented surveillance and intelligence sharing with companies. According to freedom of information documents obtained by the Guardian, the meetings - conducted twice a year since 2005 - involved federal ministries, spy and police agencies, and representatives from scores of companies who obtained high-level security clearance.

"Meetings were officially billed to discuss 'threats' to energy infrastructure, but also covered 'challenges to energy projects from environmental groups,' 'cyber security initiatives,' and 'economic and corporate espionage.' The documents - heavily redacted agendas - do not indicate that any international espionage was shared by CSEC officials, but the meetings were an opportunity for government agencies and companies to develop 'ongoing trusting relations' that would help them exchange information 'off the record,' wrote an official from the Natural Resources ministry in 2010.

"At the most recent meeting in May 2013, which focused on 'security of energy resources

development.’ meals were sponsored by Enbridge, a Canadian oil company trying to win approval for controversial tar sands pipelines. Since coming to power, Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper has used his government apparatus to serve a natural resources development agenda, while creating sweeping domestic surveillance programs that have kept close tabs on indigenous and environmental opposition and shared intelligence with companies. Harper has transformed Canada’s foreign policy to offer full diplomatic backing to foreign mining and oil projects, tying aid pledges to their advancement and jointly funding ventures with companies throughout Africa, South America and Asia.

“Keith Stewart, an energy policy analyst with Greenpeace Canada, said: ‘There seems to be no limit to what the Harper government will do to help their friends in the oil and mining industries. They’ve muzzled scientists, gutted environmental laws, reneged on our international climate commitments, labelled environmental critics as criminals and traitors, and have now been caught engaging in economic espionage in a friendly country. Canadians, and our allies, have a right to ask who exactly is receiving the gathered intelligence and whose interests are being served’.”

Snowden leaked the CSEC spying documents to Guardian journalist Glen Greenwald, who lives in Brazil. Greenwald then gave the information to the Brazilian O Globo channel television investigative journalism program Fantastico. In an interview with The Globe and Mail, Greenwald explained that “Brazil is the tip of the iceberg on Canadian spying” and that “more disclosures about Canada’s aggressive foreign spying activities are coming.”

According to Greenwald, “There is a huge amount of stuff about Canada in these archives [held by Snowden] because Canada works so closely with the NSA... Canadians should know that there is nothing really unique about what Canada is doing to Brazil – it’s not like Brazil is the only target for Canada. The reason this is so newsworthy is that the U.S. and its allies love to say the only reason they are doing this kind of mass surveillance is they want to stop terrorism and protect national security – but these documents make clear that it is industrial and economic competition, it’s about mining resources and minerals.”

Canada works so closely with the NSA that both collaborated with GCHQ, which is Britain’s NSA equivalent, in spying on the closest allies of all three countries – France and Germany. According to Guardian reports based on Snowden’s documents, CSEC, NSA and GCHQ together spied on diplomats participating in the G-20 meeting in London in 2009. This very “sensitive” operation included breaking into the delegates’ smart-phones to gather their e-mail messages and calls. CSEC has also spied on Japan, South Korea, and Mexico for commercial purposes.

Greenwald was struck by how avidly Canada participated in the NSA’s most damaging activities. These include the NSA’s “highly aggressive” Tailored Access Operations” (TAO) unit. “TAO is one of the most aggressive and insidious parts of the NSA – they’re hackers – they hack other people’s computers exactly the way hackers that the U.S. puts in prison do,” Greenwald said. “Canada is working with the NSA on some of the most aggressive techniques that the NSA did.”

Such aggressive techniques include the important part CSEC has played in the NSA’s attempts to break encrypted information on the Internet. CSEC’s help has allowed the NSA to create a “backdoor to secretly decrypt data that millions regarded as safe.”

Significantly, Greenwald added in an interview with the CBC that there would be further revelations also about CSEC spying on “ordinary [Canadian] citizens”: “There’s a lot of other documents, about [CSEC] spying on ordinary citizens, on allied governments, on the world, and their co-operation with the U.S. government, and the nature of that co-operation... I think most Canadian citizens will find [this] quite surprising, if not shocking, because it’s all done in secret and Canadians are not aware of it.”

In June, a Globe and Mail article made clear that CSEC is conducting a vast program of domestic surveillance in Canada that blatantly violates Canadians’ civil liberties. Since 2005, “CSEC has been systematically mining the metadata of Canadians’ electronic communications — phone calls, e-mails, text messages, Internet visits, and collecting, thereby, information that can be used to develop comprehensive profiles of the habits and social networks of targeted individuals and groups.”

Peter Mackay, Canada’s Defence Minister, told Parliament in response to a question about the mass surveillance of Canadians’ communications: “I have a heads-up for the member... This is something that has been happening for years.”

According to Keith Jones writing on the World Socialist Website: “As Canada’s government from 1994 and 2006, the Liberals oversaw a vast expansion of the repressive powers of the state, including the issuing by Defence Minister Bill Graham of a ministerial directive in 2005 authorizing the metadata mining of Canadians’ electronic communications.”

Canadian officials maintain that the country’s laws prevent CSEC from spying on Canadians, but, as Jones puts it: “This is a patent lie, and the fact that the government and CSEC invoke it so readily is itself in an indication that there is much they want to hide.”

CSEC is actually required to spy on Canadians as part of its official mandate because one of its main tasks is to help the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS — Canada’s CIA), the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Canada Border Services, and other police forces carry out “national security” investigations. Also, the NSA gives CSEC information on Canadians regularly and in exchange receives the same kind of information on Americans. Both agencies claim that they do not spy on their citizens, which is questionable; but even if this were true, the claim is deceptive because they can get the information they seek on their citizens from any of the other “Five Eyes” agencies.

Ed Patrick points out on the World Socialist Website that, “Since almost all Canadian Internet traffic passes through the United States – an e-mail from Montreal or Toronto could pass through several American locations before being returned to Canada – Canadian communications are inevitably intercepted en masse by the NSA, which has no legal or constitutional restrictions on eavesdropping on Canadians. In response to direct questions on the subject, the Canadian government has systemically refused to deny that the NSA passes on information to Canada’s national-security apparatus.”

As Canada’s Solicitor-General during 2002-03, former Liberal MP Wayne Easter was the cabinet minister in charge of CSIS and the RCMP. Easter says that it was “common” for the NSA “to pass on information about Canadians.” At that time, “the Five Eyes” partners of Canada would scan global intelligence signals and would be “looking for key words on Canadians... and they’d give it to the Canadian agencies,” Easter explained. William Binney, former NSA technical director, adds that NSA and CSEC “have integrated personnel,” which means they exchange employees to “improve seamless collaboration.”

In order to provide legal justification for spying on its citizens, the Canadian government conveniently considers metadata the container in which a communication occurs, and so not constitutionally exempt from surveillance. The government's position is that it has the right to spy on who you send e-mails to and receive them from, with the same being the case for phone calls and text messages, as long as CSEC does not look at the content of all these messages. But, with such detailed information, a lot can be discovered about any person. and this obviously constitutes massive spying. Also, once CSEC has all this information, how do we know it is not examining the contents of the communications as well? Are we to trust the word of a government that is already spying on us without our permission?

As Keith Jones explains: "Through such metadata mining it is possible for the state to rapidly develop a detailed portrait of an individual — including his place of work, political views, associates, and whereabouts — and of the members and supporters of any group deemed by the state to be a potential threat to national security."

While justifying its metadata spying, the Canadian government denies that CSEC has access to the NSA's PRISM Program and has been using it as a means of looking at Canadians' communications. PRISM, as I reported in September, allows the NSA to gain access to the servers of Microsoft, Apple, Google, AOL, YouTube, Skype, Yahoo, PalTalk, and Facebook, thereby turning the Internet into a colossal spying system. This official Canadian denial cannot be taken seriously, given that the NSA and CSEC are very close partners and have been sharing intelligence for more than six decades.

Following the Obama administration in the U.S., the Harper government is well on its way to turning Canada into a police state in which civil liberties are openly violated. In Canada's case, this would be a petro-police state since both the Harper government's spying on Brazil and its ominous domestic surveillance appear tied to its economic strategy based on expanding the profits of Canada's oil and mining companies. This obsessive focus on resource extraction has already made Canada an international disgrace by turning it into a leading destroyer of the global environment. The spying scandal further shames Canada worldwide and damages its relations with an important country. The resource obsession has also deindustrialized Canada, made it increasingly a puppet of Washington and violated its people's basic freedoms.

As a February Guardian article by Stephen Leahy titled "Canada's Environmental Activists Seen as Threat to National Security" puts it: "Monitoring of environmental activists in Canada by the country's police and security agencies has become the 'new normal,' according to a researcher who has analyzed security documents released under freedom of information laws. Security and police agencies have been increasingly conflating terrorism and extremism with peaceful citizens exercising their democratic rights to organize petitions, protest and question government policies, said Jeffrey Monaghan of the Surveillance Studies Centre at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario.

"The RCMP and CSIS view activist activities such as blocking access to roads or buildings as 'forms of attack' and depict those involved as national security threats, according to the documents. Protests and opposition to Canada's resource-based economy, especially oil and gas production, are now viewed as threats to national security, Monaghan said."

"In 2011, a Montreal man who wrote letters opposing shale gas fracking was charged under Canada's Anti-Terrorism Act. Documents released in January show the RCMP has been monitoring Quebec residents who oppose fracking. 'Any Canadians going to protest the

Keystone XL pipeline in Washington DC had better take precautions,' Monaghan said. In a Canadian Senate committee on national security and defence meeting on Feb. 11, Richard Fadden, the director of CSIS, said they are more worried about domestic terrorism, acknowledging that the vast majority of its spying is done within Canada. Fadden said they are 'following a number of cases where we think people might be inclined to acts of terrorism'."

Such purported inclinations to "terrorism" resulted in many activists being jailed by the police in Toronto in 2010, a week before the G-20 Summit began there. The activists had done absolutely nothing wrong. Their only "offence" was that they might do something the government would not like after the G-20 leaders arrived, making it clear that Canadians have no right to demonstrate or even plan to do so.

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