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Plucky Australians Spoil World Conspiracy

Australia has become the first country honest or stupid enough to openly admit that it takes part in a global electronic surveillance system that intercepts the private and commercial international communications of citizens and companies from its own and other countries.

Continuing Australia's tradition of either brutal honesty or total dimwittedness, Martin Brady, director of the Defence Signals directorate in Canberra, revealed the decades-old conspiracy on Channel 9's Sunday program. Other countries involved in the massive electronic spy-network, known only as UKUSA (pron. 'Accuser'), have been trying to hide it for over fifty years, both from their own people and the prying noses of other countries; now, thanks to the Aussies, the electronic cat is out of the restricted bag.

Mr Brady states that the Defence Signals Directorate (DSD) "does cooperate with counter-part signals intelligence organisations overseas under the UKUSA relationship"; furthermore, he claims that the Defence Signals Directorate's purpose "is to support Australian Government decision-makers and the Australian Defence Force with high-quality foreign signals intelligence products and services. DSD (provides) important information that is not available from open sources" [check this out at www.dsd.gov.au].

The countries whose 'open sources' are not enough are America (the giant American National Security Agency, NSA is part of the organisation), Canada, Britain and New Zealand. Much of the Western world, therefore, is spying on both itself and everyone else. The DSD operates a network of enormous, highly automated tracking stations that illicitly pick up satellite communications and examine every fax, telex, e-mail, phone call, or computer data message that the satellites carry.

1) The 'Accuser'.

The five Intelligence Agencies form the "Accuser" pact. They are bound by a secret agreement signed in the forties. The clandestine UKUSA agreement provides for sharing facilities, staff, methods, tasks and product between the participating governments. Due to a fast-growing UKUSA system called

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Echelon, millions of messages are automatically intercepted every hour, and checked according to criteria supplied by intelligence agencies and governments in all five UKUSA countries. The intercepted signals are passed through a computer system called the Dictionary, which checks each new message against thousands of "collection" requirements. The Dictionaries then send the messages into the spy agencies' equivalent of the Internet, making them accessible all over the world.

Australia's main contribution to this system is a base at Kojarena, near Geraldton in Western Australia. The station was built in the early 1990s. At Kojarena, four satellite tracking dishes intercept Indian and Pacific Ocean communications satellites. The exact target of each dish is concealed by hiding them inside golfball like "radomes". About 80 per cent of the messages intercepted at Kojarena are sent automatically from its Dictionary computer to the CIA or the NSA, without ever being seen or read in Australia; and, even though under Australian command, the station - like Pine Gap - employs American and British staff in key posts. I think an Aussie might make the coffee, although maybe he's been demoted to sugar duty now the secret's out.

The Kojarena Dictionary has been set to examine messages for North Korean economic, diplomatic and military data, Japanese trade ministry plans, anything about Preston black metal, and Pakistani developments in nuclear weaponry. In return, we can ask for information to be sent to Canberra; who looks likely for the next Melbourne Cup, beer rumours, the latest info on ride-on mowers. A second, larger DSD satellite station has been built at Shoal Bay in the Northern Territory. Here, nine satellite tracking dishes are locked into satellites covering Indonesia and south-west Asia.

2) Automated Thought-Police... or Worse?

Concern about the 'Accuser' Echelon system has grown since 1996, when New Zealand writer Nicky Hager revealed secret details of exactly how it operated. The New Zealand satellite interception site at Waihopai, South Island, is half the size of Kojarena and its sister NSA base at Yakima, Washington, which also covers Pacific rim states. Waihopai's task is to monitor two Pacific communications satellites, and intercept all communications from and between the South Pacific islands. Like other Echelon stations, the Waihopai installation is protected by electric fences, intruder detectors, infra-red cameras and a motherfucking big Maori guy.

A year after publishing his book, Hager and New Zealand TV reporter John Campbell mounted a daring raid on Waihopai, carrying a TV camera and a stepladder. From open, high windows, they then filmed into and inside its operations centre. It was *completely automatic*. Although Australia's DSD does not use the term "Echelon", Government sources have confirmed to Channel 9 that Hager's

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description of the system is correct, and that the Australia's Dictionary computer at Kojarena works in the same way as the one in New Zealand.

The US Government has tried to ignore the morality of Echelon by denying that it exists; but now, thanks to witless Aussie honesty, it has to come up with something better. US intelligence writer Dr Jeff Richelson has also obtained documents under the Freedom of Information Act, showing that a US Navy-run satellite receiving station at Sugar Grove, West Virginia, is an Echelon site, and that it collects intelligence from civilian satellites. The station, south-west of Washington, lies in a remote area of the Shenandoah Mountains. US documents say the station's job is "to maintain and operate an Echelon site". Others are at Sabana Seca, Puerto Rico, Leitrim, Canada and at Morwenstow and London. Information is also fed into the Echelon system from taps on the Internet, and by means of monitoring pods which are placed on undersea cables. Since 1971, the US has used specially converted nuclear submarines to attach tapping pods to deep underwater cables around the world.

According to DSD director Martin Brady, "to ensure that (our) activities do not impinge on the privacy of Australians, DSD operates under a detailed classified directive approved by Cabinet and known as the Rules on Sigint [Signal Intelligence] and Australian Persons". Compliance with this Cabinet directive is monitored by the inspector-general of security and intelligence, Mr Bill Blick. He says that "Australian citizens can complain to my office about the actions of DSD. And if they do so then I have the right to conduct an inquiry."

3) Yeah, right.

Like it would do any good; Cabinet has ruled that Australians' international calls, faxes or e-mails can be monitored by NSA or DSD in "specified circumstances". Mr Brady says that he must be given specific approval in every case, and that other UKUSA nations are not permitted to record our communications unless Australia has decided that this is required. "Both DSD and its counterparts operate internal procedures to satisfy themselves that their national interests and policies are respected by the others," he says. So if NSA happens to intercept a message from an Australian citizen or company whom DSD has decided to leave alone, they are supposed to strike out the name and insert "Australian national" or "Australian corporation" instead; or, simply destroy the intercept. That's the theory, but specialists differ. According to Mr Hager, Australia is considered a 'junior ally', and says that "...when you're a junior ally like Australia or New Zealand, you never refuse what they ask for."

There are also worries about what allies might get up to with information that Australia gives them.



When Britain was trying to sell Hawk fighters and other arms to Indonesia, staff at the Office of National Assessments feared that the British would pass DSD intelligence on East Timor to President Soeharto in order to win the lucrative contract.

The Australian Government does not deny that DSD and its UKUSA partners are told to collect economic and commercial intelligence. Australia, like the US, thinks this is specially justified if other countries or their exporters are perceived to be behaving unfairly. Britain recognises no restraint on economic intelligence gathering.

Neither does France. According to the former Canadian agent Mike Frost, it would be "naïve" for Australians to think that the Americans were not exploiting stations like Kojarena for economic intelligence purposes. "They have been doing it for years," he says. "Now that the Cold War is over, the focus is towards economic intelligence. Never ever over-exaggerate the power that these organisations have to abuse a system such as Echelon. Don't think it can't happen in Australia. It does."

first published in The Plunge #2, now out of print; based largely on 'Careful, they might Hear You' by D. Campbell.



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