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'Partner and Target': NSA spying on NATO 'friend' Turkey

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Turkey is the National Security Agency's (NSA) oldest partner in Asia. However, their military and intelligence officials, as well as politicians, are seen in the US as legitimate targets to spy on. According to a report in Der Spiegel in conjunction with The Intercept, documents released by Edward Snowden show just how far Washington was willing to go to snoop on its ally.

The new leak cites the National Intelligence Priorities Framework (NIPF), a document produced by the NSA to establish intelligence priorities. The list is updated every six months to keep it relevant and also to take into account geopolitical changes around the globe. For instance, it shows that interest and surveillance in Syria has increased dramatically over the last few years.

However, despite Turkey supposedly being a US *"friend,"* it seems America is treating it more like a foe, with the country that spans Europe and Asia being listed as "one of the most frequently targeted by Washington for surveillance." The US has two secret branch offices, with listening stations in Istanbul and Ankara, as well as its official bureau, SUSLAT, which the Turkish authorities know about.

American paranoia surrounding Turkey has reached such levels that it is surveyed at the same level as Venezuela, and its surveillance is given a higher priority than Cuba. Both Latin American nations are openly hostile to the US government.

According to the documents leaked by Snowden, the NSA began a surveillance campaign to infiltrate the computers of Turkey's most important political leaders in 2006. The operation,

which was named "*Turkish Surge Project Plan*," took only six months to achieve its aims, giving US intelligence official's unprecedented access to the thoughts of Turkey's political elite.

The NSA's surveillance campaign against Turkey was not just limited to the country itself, according to Der Spiegel. A classified document from 2010 states that the intelligence organization kept a very close watch on the [Turkish Embassy](#) in Washington DC, where they had access to the telephone system, while they also had the ability to hack into computers.

The NSA also reportedly installed Trojan software at Turkey's UN representation in New York. According to the NSA document, this even gave it the capability of copying entire hard drives at the UN mission.

### **Shifting relations with Turkey's Kurds**

The US has not only had Turkey in its sights, but also the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). Recently America has been trying to woo the [Kurds](#) in their battle against the Islamic State in northern Iraq and has even supplied them with arms. However, their counterparts in Turkey are still considered a terrorist organization by both the US and the EU, despite many of them traveling to Syria and Iraq to fight against the group formally known as ISIS.

Documents leaked by Snowden show that the [PKK](#), who want to achieve independence from Turkey and create their own state, are the most spied-upon group or nation by the NSA, with the exception of Russia.

Washington has given the Turkish government frequent assistance in their quest to curb the perceived threat that the Kurds pose. One top secret NSA document from 2007 states that the agency provided Turkey with geographic data and recording of telephone conversations between PKK members, which then helped Turkish intelligence agents capture or kill their targets. State-of-the-art voice recognition technology was offered to the Turks in 2012, while they were also given information about PKK money flows and where exiled leaders were living abroad.

US misinformation even led to the deaths of 34 Kurds in December 2011 near the Turkish-Iraqi border, the leaked documents said. An American drone had been flying overhead and spotted a group, which they believed were terrorists. However they turned out to be smugglers, who were returning from Iraq with fuel containers. Several Turkish F-16 fighter jets were scrambled and the convoy was destroyed, the Wall Street Journal reported in 2012.

### **Germany, UK also keep eye on Turkey**

The US is not the only nation to have kept close surveillance on Turkey. The Der Spiegel newspaper recently revealed that [Germany's intelligence service](#), the BND, has been spying on Turkey since 2009.

Conservative lawmaker Hans-Peter Uhl defended his country's actions by referring to such issues of concern such as human trafficking, drugs and terrorism.

*"We need to know what is coming to us from EU-applicant Turkey,"* he told Focus.

Meanwhile the UK has monitored Turkey's political elite as well as elements of the country's

energy sector and its pipelines. The Guardian newspaper ran a story last summer about a planned spying operation against the Turkish finance minister during his visit to London in the run-up to the G-20 summit in 2009. Officials in Ankara were so angered that the Foreign Ministry summoned the British ambassador and criticized the *"scandalous"* and *"unacceptable"* operation.

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