

# New Chapter in NSA-Danish Intelligence Scandal: NSA Targetted Denmark's Own Allies

by Michelle Rasmussen

COPENHAGEN, June 4—On Sunday night, May 30, Danish Radio's TV1 and investigative journalists in Germany, France, Sweden, and Norway publicized a new chapter of disclosures about Danish Military Intelligence (*Forsvarets Efterretningstjeneste*, FE) having given the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA) access to massive amounts of data from the Danish underwater electronic data cable nexus. The new story was the proof that the NSA spying operation, by way of the Danish cables, was not only being directed against terrorists and Russia and China, or even Danish citizens, which was disclosed last year; but also against some of Denmark's closest allies, including Germany, France, Sweden and Norway. By Monday it was headline news around the world.

This occurred because nine sources, convinced that this was not in Denmark's national interest, confirmed to Danish Radio journalists the existence and conclusions of an internal FE report from 2015.

The previous chapter in this story occurred in August 2020. Based on documentation provided by an FE whistleblower, the Danish Intelligence Oversight Board publicly chastised the FE, including stating that the material indicated that the FE had "initiated operational activities against Danish law, including gathering and forwarding a significant amount of information about Danish citizens." The new Social Democratic government initiated an investigation, and Defense Minister Trine Bramsen suspended the top FE leadership. Danish Radio stated that Bramsen was also informed, at the same time, that the FE had been involved in NSA's spying on Denmark's allies—but those who were spied upon were not informed.

Let's go back in time to 2014. A year earlier, in 2013, the courageous Edward Snowden had leaked documen-

tation that the National Security Agency (NSA) in the United States was spying on almost everyone, everywhere, not just around the world, but also in America.

## 'Operation Dunhammer' Caught NSA

In a building along the coast in Copenhagen, in sight of coattails blowing in the wind along the water, the Snowden revelations created waves, and the director of



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*Whistleblowers say that a secret 2015 Danish Military Intelligence (FE) report revealed that NSA sent search selectors to FE, which led FE to send NSA data about not only Danes, but also some of Denmark's closest allies, but FE didn't stop it.*

FE, Thomas Ahrenkiel selected four hackers and analysts to investigate just who the NSA was asking the FE to tap electronic data on from 2012-2014, and if the NSA had misused a 1997 intelligence sharing agreement. The investigation was kept secret from the NSA.

Denmark had become an important international

telegraph hub in the 1870s, when the Great Northern Telegraph Company, founded 20 years after the death of electromagnetism's discoverer Hans Christian Ørsted completed the first trans-continental cable to China through Russia, begun by the Russians. Many of today's Internet cables have been laid in proximity to these. The FE had originally rejected the NSA request for FE to tap massive amounts of data streaming through the concentrated nexus of internet cables lying beneath the sea surrounding Denmark, including from Russia and China.

But in 1997, when Bill Clinton personally asked the Danish Prime Minister, Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, to approve the agreement, Poul Nyrup agreed. One of the conditions was that Danish citizens or companies could not be targets. Some think that Bill Clinton's trip to Denmark later that year, as the only sitting U.S. President to do so, was his expression of thanks. Denmark is also a member of the Nine Eyes intelligence group: Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the U.K., the U.S. (the Five Eyes), plus Denmark, France, the Netherlands, and Norway). There is only one copy of the NSA-FE Agreement, kept in a safe, which the Prime Minister, and all successive Prime and Defense Ministers have signed.

The FE investigation team, dubbed "Operation Dunhammer" (Operation Coattails), took a closer look at the thousands of "selectors," the search words, numbers, concepts, and IP-addresses that the NSA had sent to FE, which FE had been putting into an NSA search program called XKeyscore, in order to pluck out the resulting data to send back to the NSA.

One team member suddenly gasped, and called his colleague over. Here was the documentation that the German Chancellor Angela Merkel's private cell phone, the tapping of which was already made public through the 2013 Snowden leak, had been a selector that the NSA had given the Danes. The names of German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (now president of Germany), and Peer Steinbrück, the Social Democratic Party opposition leader in Germany, also ap-

peared, as well as leading politicians and civil servants in France, Sweden and Norway. "But these are our allies, not enemies or terrorists!" *Deutsche Welle* would later report that Denmark's own Foreign and Finance Ministries as well as a Danish weapons manufacturer were on the target list. The FE had even cooperated with the NSA on spying operations against the U.S. government itself.

Operation Dunhammer concluded in May 2015 with a report, signed on the front page by FE director Thomas Ahrenkiel and the head of intelligence gathering. An important conclusion was that by investigating the target list provided by the NSA to FE, Operation

Dunhammer had documented that the NSA had spied on some of Denmark's closest allies. Later in 2015, when Lars Findsen became the new director, he was also informed.

Yet, they did nothing to stop it. Did they inform the Defense Minister and Prime Minister? Or the parliament's intelligence committee? Is it still going on?

What we know is that according to German political leader Peer Steinbrück, and other targets, those spied upon had not been told.

### Fast-Forward to 2018

A member of the Operation Dunhammer team went to the Danish Intelligence Oversight institution, set up after the

Snowden revelations, with recordings that he made in secret of conversations he had had with other FE people, proving that the NSA-FE cooperation included spying against Danish citizens, which is illegal. FE cannot spy on Denmark's own citizens; that is explicitly forbidden in the NSA-FE Agreement. He was outraged and wanted to stop it. The Intelligence Oversight institution could address that problem, but it has no authority to investigate a charge of spying on Denmark's allies.<sup>1</sup>



CC/WikiLeaks

*Whistleblower Edward Snowden made public in 2013 that German Chancellor Angela Merkel's private cell phone conversations were being secretly monitored and recorded by the NSA.*

1. Intelligence Oversight has five members, appointed by the Minister of Justice in consultation with the Minister of Defense. Its Chairman must be a Supreme Court judge, and the others are chosen in a dialogue with the Parliament's Committee for Intelligence Services.

Then in 2020, Defense Minister Trine Bramsen, in the recently elected Social Democratic government, allowed the Intelligence Oversight institution, when it delivered a comprehensive report to her, to issue an unprecedented public press release with a strong criticism of FE activities, including the above-stated spying on Danes and the withholding of information from that institution. By allowing the release to be issued, Bramsen publicized the existence of the NSA-FE Agreement, secret since 1997. The Danish government established an investigative commission of three Supreme Court judges, tasked with issuing a report by the end of 2021—but without allied spying being specifically part of their mandate!

At that time—and Bramsen now states this was when she was also first informed that FE participated in spying against Chancellor Merkel and other German political leaders—she suspended former FE director, Thomas Ahrenkiel, who was just about to become Denmark’s ambassador to Germany—of all places. She also suspended current FE director, Lars Findsen, and the intelligence gathering chief, to allow the investigation to proceed independently.

Now in 2021, the only official Danish government comment is again from Defense Minister Bramsen, that “a systematic tapping of close allies is unacceptable.”

### Concern Around the World

But elsewhere in the world, leaders have responded. Helga Zepp-LaRouche, Schiller Institute founder and international president said in her [webcast](#) on June 2 that this exposes the hypocrisy of “the rules-based order.”

Tom Gillesberg, chairman of the Schiller Institute in Denmark, gave a video briefing with the title, “What Is in Denmark’s Interest—To Be a Spy for the NSA against Our Allies, or Something Else?”

“Is it in Denmark’s interest,” Gillesberg asked, “to have a regime-change policy, as in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria and Iran? Or in Ukraine, Russia, China, or Belarus? It cannot be justified, as it might have been during the old Cold War, he said. We need to cooperate with Russia and China to solve world problems. Is it in our interest to cooperate in spying against Germany, France, Sweden and Norway, on behalf of the NSA?”



Dalibor Urukalic/Pixsell/EU2020HR

*When Denmark’s Defense Minister, Trine Bramsen, found out that the secret NSA-FE cooperation led to spying on Danes, she let it be publicized. Now she says, “A systematic tapping of close allies is unacceptable,” but has not notified those of Denmark’s allies that have been spied on.*

What if that leads to regime-change operations against our allies in Europe?”

From his forced asylum in Russia, Edward Snowden posted the following tweet:

Biden is well-prepared to answer for this when he soon visits Europe, since, of course, he was deeply involved in this scandal the first time around. There should be an explicit requirement for full public disclosure not only from Denmark, but their senior partner as well.

Biden was Obama’s Vice President when the Snowden leaks came out, and when the NSA “spying on U.S. ‘allies’” was done.

Snowden also sarcastically tweeted in Danish and other languages:

If only there had been some reason to investigate many years ago. Oh, why did no-one warn us?

In Norway, Prime Minister Erna Solberg told public broadcaster NRK:

It’s unacceptable if countries which have close allied co-operation feel the need to spy on one another.

And Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven said,

Being intercepted by your allies is naturally serious, if it is true. Therefore, we have to get to the bottom of this.

In Washington, White House deputy press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre simply said that the Biden Administration will work with allies and European partners to address any questions raised by the NSA-FE operations.

French President Emmanuel Macron was not at all satisfied:

If the information is true, this is not acceptable between allies, and even less between allies and European partners.

Macron had just met with Angela Merkel; the latter agreed with his comments, but said, according to BBC, that she was reassured by the Danish Defense Minister's condemnation of the spying.

*Deutsche Welle* reported:

Patrick Sensburg, who led the German parliamentary committee to investigate the NSA spying scandal, was not surprised by the news and gave a sobering assessment on the motives: "It's not about friendships. It's not about moral-ethical aspirations. It's about pursuing interests." he told NDR.

Sensburg might have been referring to British 19th-Century Prime Minister Lord Palmerston's "dictum" that London has no permanent allies, only interests.

The strongest denunciation of this extraordinary scandal, now eight years since its first exposure with very few consequences for any of the perpetrators, came from Serbia's President Aleksandar Vučić. On a Serbian TV program June 3, 2021, Vučić exclaimed:

Imagine if Belarus did it, if you [they] listened to Angela Merkel: What sanctions would be imposed against Belarus! If Lukashenko had listened to Angela Merkel with the help of Russia, what would they have done to Russia and Belarus? [But when it is disclosed that the U.S. tapped Merkel through Denmark, nothing happens,] because there are no principles. There

have been no principles or laws in international relations for a long time.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova charged that,

The United States is supervising everyone and everything, [while NATO and EU governments remain quiet.] Perhaps they decided to toss their vassal partners a bone, allowing them to bend the rules as well.

China's *Global Times* editorialized:

It's not easy to be a U.S. ally. Not only is their sovereignty infiltrated, but they are monitored by Washington at any time. This is the cold reality under the deceptive appearance of unity between the U.S. and Europe.

The paper demanded the rest of the international community speak out, because the NSA-Danish action—

severely violated international laws.... Those who are being spied on are not just European leaders, and more countries must have been included.

### **More to Come**

Expect more disclosures in the future, as the investigations, both governmental and by the press, continue. It is possible that these whistleblowers, a whole group in the footsteps of Edward Snowden, will continue to leak information.

If something positive is to come out of all of this, it is for government leaders, and citizens, to reflect about what their national interest really is, and the importance of creating a new paradigm of cooperation among sovereign states—including Russia and China—to initiate a new, just, world economic order. We must solve conflicts by going up to a higher level of unity, the coincidence of opposites, where we solve problems by finding our common interests.

The question is whether intelligence gathering is used for that purpose, or for the purpose of perpetuating a surveillance state, tasked with preventing any challenge to the current dying financial system and the political and military attempts to preserve it.