

It's Illegal for foreign nations to record and store third party communications on Australian soil

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Snowden leaks may embarrass Canberra

Under Oz communications laws all forms of bugging and recording of other peoples' data communications local and international are clearly illegal. Which places America's Pine Gap communications and surveillance facility in the spotlight once again. It has been known for decades that the Pine Gap installation has been performing sensitive surveillance on foreign and local communications, as these practices (local surveillance) were illegal in the USA when the installation was constructed -- how handy to have servile political leaders in Oz that kowtow to Washington's every whim whether legal or illegal!



Pine Gap, central Australia

Both major parties fall over themselves to please criminal America and it is hoped that those responsible -- local and American -- are called upon to justify their illegal practices at long last. Pine Gap was an integral part of the 'echelon' and 'carnivore' illegal surveillance programs.

American intelligence whistle-blower Edward Snowden may expose top secret Australian intelligence gathering operations and embarrass Australia's relations with neighbouring Asian countries, Australian intelligence officials fear.

Former Labor Defence Minister John Faulkner has confirmed that the heads of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation and Australia's signals intelligence agency, the Defence Signals Directorate, David Irvine and Ian McKenzie, have briefed the federal parliament's intelligence committee on the US PRISM internet surveillance program.

The Australian Government would not comment yesterday on whether Mr Snowden's exposés of top secret US and British intelligence and surveillance programs have been the subject of diplomatic exchanges between Canberra and Washington. Foreign Minister Bob Carr's office would not say whether he has had any exchanges with US Secretary of State John Kerry on the subject.

However Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus's office has confirmed that a high level interagency taskforce is monitoring events and coordinating the government's response.

"Agencies have been meeting formally on this important issue and have been coordinated in their consideration of the matter and their briefing of Ministers," a spokesperson for Mr Dreyfus said.

Defence intelligence officials speaking on condition of anonymity have acknowledged there had been "intense exchanges" on Mr Snowden's disclosures through liaison channels between the US National Security Agency and the Central Intelligence Agency and Australia's intelligence agencies.

Australian officials said it was still unclear precisely what information Mr Snowden may have taken from the National Security Agency and his former employer, defence and intelligence consulting firm Booz Allen Hamilton.

Despite this officials said there was little doubt that the intelligence contractor had "very wide access, including access to much detail of communications intelligence cooperation between the US and Australia."

"Disclosure of highly sensitive collection operations and methodology will damage Australia's intelligence capabilities. It already has done so. But there's also risk of serious complications in our relations with our neighbours," one official said.

"The US may be able to brush aside some of the diplomatic fallout from the Snowden leak, but that may not be the case for Australia. China, Malaysia, other countries may respond to us in ways that they would not to Washington."

Officials said that the Australian Government's response to any new disclosures was being developed through the National Security Adviser in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet Dr Margot McCarthy, the Attorney-General's Department, the Defence Signals Directorate and ASIO.

The Prime Minister's department previously convened a whole of government task force to deal with the consequences of WikiLeaks' release in late 2010 of thousands of US diplomatic cables leaked by US Army private Bradley Manning.

Defence intelligence officials said that Mr Snowden's disclosures of US and allied signals intelligence programs "will have a much greater and more lasting impact than the Manning leaks."

On Sunday the Chair of the US Senate intelligence committee, Senator Dianne Feinstein accused Mr Snowden of treason and said that his disclosures through The Guardian and Washington Post newspapers had caused "irreversible and significant damage to our country and to our allies."

In the company of a WikiLeaks staffer Mr Snowden flew from Hong Kong to Moscow on Sunday. The US Government has charged him with espionage and has revoked his passport. He has sought political asylum from the Government of Ecuador.

WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange said yesterday "We are aware of where Snowden is, he is safe and his spirits are high. We cannot reveal what country he is in at this time."

Senator Faulkner told the Australian Senate on Monday that Mr Snowden's revelations

"will heighten anxiety in this country about data retention."

Speaking on the tabling of the parliament's intelligence committee's report on telecommunications and internet data retention, the former Defence Minister said it was essential that "any legislation to establish a mandatory data retention scheme in Australia contains the strongest safeguards to protect the privacy of our citizens."

"Our challenge will be to achieve the right balance between the safety and security of our citizens, and their personal rights and freedoms, including the right to privacy, if a proposal for a mandatory data retention scheme goes forward."

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