

IF US WON'T SHARE INTELLIGENCE WITH THOSE HOSTING SNOWDEN, WHY ARE WE ENGAGED WITH RUSSIA ON ISIL?

Glenn Greenwald reports that, when he asked German Vice Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel why he doesn't offer asylum to Edward Snowden, Gabriel revealed the US had threatened to cut Germany off from intelligence sharing if they did.

German Vice Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel (above) said this week in Homburg that the U.S. Government threatened to cease sharing intelligence with Germany if Berlin offered asylum to NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden or otherwise arranged for him to travel to that country. "They told us they would stop notifying us of plots and other intelligence matters," Gabriel said.

The Vice Chancellor delivered a speech in which he praised the journalists who worked on the Snowden archive, and then lamented the fact that Snowden was forced to seek refuge in "Vladimir Putin's autocratic Russia" because no other nation was willing and able to protect him from threats of imprisonment by the U.S. Government (I was present at the event to receive an award). That prompted an audience member to interrupt his speech and yell out: "why don't you bring him to Germany, then?"

[snip]

Afterward, however, when I pressed the Vice Chancellor (who is also head of the Social Democratic Party, as well as the

country's Economy and Energy Minister) as to why the German government could not and would not offer Snowden asylum – which, under international law, negates the asylee's status as a fugitive – he told me that the U.S. Government had aggressively threatened the Germans that if they did so, they would be “cut off” from all intelligence sharing. That would mean, if the threat were carried out, that the Americans would literally allow the German population to remain vulnerable to a brewing attack discovered by the Americans by withholding that information from their government.

Which is odd, because CIA Director John Brennan just implied – in a speech that was largely about information sharing – that the US continues to engage with Russia on terrorism issues, even though it hosts Snowden.

QUESTION: James Sitrick, Baker & McKenzie. You spent a considerable amount of your opening remarks talking about the importance of liaison relationships. Charlie alluded to this in one of his references to you, on the adage—the old adage has it that the enemy of your enemy is your friend. Are we in any way quietly, diplomatically, indirectly, liaising with Mr. Soleimani and his group and his people in Iraq?

BRENNAN: I am not engaging with Mr. Qasem Soleimani, who is the head of the Quds Force of Iran. So no, I am not.

I am engaged, though, with a lot of different partners, some of close, allied countries as well as some that would be considered adversaries, engaged with the Russians on issues related to terrorism.

We did a great job working with the Russians on Sochi. They were very supportive on Boston Marathon. We're also looking at the threat that ISIL poses both to the United States as well as to Russia.

So I try to take advantage of all the different partners that are out there, because there is a strong alignment on some issues—on proliferation as well as on terrorism and others as well.

Admittedly, the timing on Snowden's asylum in Russia is pretty remarkable, coming as it did after Sochi and two months after the Marathon attack, launched by brothers with ties to Chechnya. In fact, in Dzhokhar's trial, we just learned that Tamerlan sent \$900 back to Chechnya in the weeks before the attack. Thus, at the time Putin granted Snowden his first year of asylum, the US needed Russian cooperation more urgently than Russia needed America's (and Putin was carefully managing that relationship).

Still, by tying cooperation with Russia to ISIL, Brennan implied it is ongoing (not least because the government was not as engaged against ISIL as it might have been until a year after Snowden arrived in Russia).

At least if we're to believe Gabriel, the US threatened to cut off a close ally if it hosted Snowden, but it continues to share intelligence with one of our major adversaries on matters of common interest.