

AMERICA'S INTELLIGENCE EMPIRE

I've been reading *Empire of Secrets*, a book about the role of MI5 as the British spun off their empire. It describes how, in country after country, the government that took over from the British – even including people who had been surveilled and jailed by the British regime – retained the British intelligence apparatus and crafted a strong intelligence sharing relationship with their former colonizers. As an example, it describes how Indian Interior Minister, Sardr Patel, decided to keep the Intelligence Bureau rather than shut it down.

Like Nehru, Patel realised that the IB had probably compiled records on himself and most of the leaders of Congress. However, unlike Nehru, he did not allow this to colour his judgment about the crucial role that intelligence would play for the young Indian nation.

[snip]

Patel not only allowed the continued existence of the IB, but amazingly, also sanctioned the continued surveillance of extremist elements within this own Congress Party. As Smith's report of the meeting reveals, Patel was adamant that the IB should 'discontinue the collection of intelligence on orthodox Congress and Muslim League activity', but at the same time he authorised it to continue observing 'extremist organisations'. Patel was particularly concerned about the Congress Socialist Party, many of whose members were communist sympathisers.

[snip]

The reason Patel was so amenable to continued surveillance of some of his fellow Indian politicians (keeping tabs

on his own supporters, as one IPI report put it) was his fear of communism.

And the same remarkable process, by which the colonized enthusiastically partnered with their former colonizers to spy on their own, happened in similar fashion in most of Britain's former colonies.

That's what I was thinking of on March 13, when John Brennan gave a speech to the Council on Foreign Relations. While it started by invoking an attack in Copenhagen and Charlie Hebdo, a huge chunk of the speech talked about the value of partnering with our intelligence allies.

Last month an extremist gunned down a film director at a cafe in Copenhagen, made his way across town and then shot and killed a security guard at a synagogue. Later the same day the terrorist group ISIL released a video showing the horrific execution of Coptic Christians on a beach in Libya.

The previous month, in a span of less than 24 hours, we saw a savage attack on the staff of the satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo in France. We saw a car bomb kill dozens at a police academy in Yemen.

[snip]

As CIA tackles these challenges, we benefit greatly from the network of relationships we maintain with intelligence services throughout the world. This is a critically important and lesser known aspect of our efforts. I cannot overstate the value of these relationships to CIA's mission and to our national security. Indeed, to the collective security of America and its allies.

By sharing intelligence, analysis, and know-how with these partner services, we

open windows on regions and issues that might otherwise be closed to us. And when necessary, we set in concert to mitigate a common threat.

By collaborating with our partners we are much better able to close key intelligence gaps on our toughest targets, as well as fulfill CIA's mission to provide global coverage and prevent surprises for our nation's leaders. There is no way we could be successful in carrying out our mission of such scope and complexity on our own.

Naturally these are sensitive relationships built on mutual trust and confidentiality. Unauthorized disclosures in recent years by individuals who betrayed our country have created difficulties with these partner services that we have had to overcome.

But it is a testament to the strength and effectiveness of these relationships that our partners remain eager to work with us. With the stakes so high for our people's safety, these alliances are simply too crucial to be allowed to fail.

From the largest services with global reach to those of smaller nations focused on local and regional issues, CIA has developed a range of working and productive relationships with our counterparts overseas. No issue highlights the importance of our international partnerships more right now than the challenge of foreign fighters entering and leaving the conflict in Syria and Iraq.

We roughly estimate that at least 20,000 fighters from more than 90 countries have gone to fight, several thousand of them from Western nations, including the

United States. One thing that dangers these fighters pose upon their return is a top priority for the United States intelligence community, as well as our liaison partners.

We exchange information with our counterparts around the world to identify and track down men and women believed to be violent extremists. And because we have the wherewithal to maintain ties with so many national services, we act as a central repository of data and trends to advance the overall effort.

On this and in innumerable other challenges, our cooperation with foreign liaison quietly achieves significant results. Working together, we have disrupted terrorist attacks and rolled back groups that plot them, intercepted transfers of dangerous weapons and technology, brought international criminals to justice and shared vital intelligence and expertise on everything from the use of chemical armaments in Syria to the downing of the Malaysian airliner over Ukraine.

These relationships are an essential adjunct to diplomacy. And by working with some of these services in building their capabilities we have helped them become better prepared to tackled the challenges that threaten us all.

[snip]

With CIA's support, I have seen counterparts develop into sophisticated and effective partners. Over time our engagement with partner services fosters a deeper, more candid give and take, a more robust exchange of information and assessments, and a better understanding of the world that often ultimately encourages better alignment on policy.

Another advantage of building and maintaining strong bilateral and multilateral intelligence relationships is that they can remain, albeit not entirely, insulated from the ups and downs of diplomatic ties. These lengths can provide an important conduit for a dispassionate dialogue during periods of tension, and for conveying the U.S. perspective on contentious issues.

In recognition of the importance of our liaison relationships, I recently reestablished a senior position at the CIA dedicated to ensuring that we are managing relationships in an integrated fashion. To developing a strategic vision and corporate goals for our key partnerships and to helping me carryout my statutory responsibility to coordinate the intelligence communities' foreign intelligence relationships. [my emphasis]

We are and still remain in the same position as MI5, Brennan seems to want to assure the CFR types, in spite of the embarrassment experienced by our intelligence partners due to leaks by Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden. Information sharing remains the cement of much of our relationships with allies; our ability to let them suck off our dragnet keeps them in line.

And of particular note, Brennan described these "strong bilateral and multilateral intelligence relationships ...remain[ing], albeit not entirely, insulated from the ups and downs of diplomatic ties."

The spooks keep working together regardless of what the political appointees do, Brennan suggested.

But that speech is all the more notable given the revelations in this Der Spiegel story. It describes how, because of the Snowden leaks, the

Germans slowly started responding to something they had originally discovered in 2008. The US had been having BND spy on selectors well outside the Memorandum of Understanding governing the countries' intelligence sharing, even including economic targets. At first, BND thought this was just 2,000 targets, but as the investigation grew more pointed, 40,000 suspicious selectors were found. Only on March 12 – the day before Brennan gave this remarkable speech – did Merkel's office officially find out.

But in October 2013, not even the BND leadership was apparently informed of the violations that had been made. The Chancellery, which is charged with monitoring the BND, was also left in the dark. Instead, the agents turned to the Americans and asked them to cease and desist.

In spring 2014, the NSA investigative committee in German parliament, the Bundestag, began its work. When reports emerged that EADS and Eurocopter had been surveillance targets, the Left Party and the Greens filed an official request to obtain evidence of the violations.

At the BND, the project group charged with supporting the parliamentary investigative committee once again looked at the NSA selectors. In the end, they discovered fully 40,000 suspicious search parameters, including espionage targets in Western European governments and numerous companies. It was this number that SPIEGEL ONLINE reported on Thursday. The BND project group was also able to confirm suspicions that the NSA had systematically violated German interests. They concluded that the Americans could have perpetrated economic espionage directly under the Germans' noses.

Only on March 12 of this year did the information end up in the Chancellery.

This has led to parliamentary accusations that BND lied in earlier testimony. The lies are notable, given how they echo the same kind of sentiment John Brennan expressed in his speech.

According to a classified memo, the agency told parliamentarians in 2013 that the cooperation with the US in Bad Aibling was consistent with the law and with the strict guidelines that had been established.

The memo notes: “The value for the BND (lies) in know-how benefits and in a closer partnership with the NSA relative to other partners.” The data provided by the US, the memo continued, “is checked for its conformance with the agreed guidelines before it is inputted” into the BND system.

Now, we know better. It remains to be determined whether the BND really was unaware at the time, or whether it simply did not want to be aware.

The NSA investigative committee has also questioned former and active BND agents regarding “selectors” and “search criteria” on several occasions. Prior to the beginning of each session, the agents were informed that providing false testimony to the body was unlawful. The BND agents repeatedly insisted that the selectors provided by the US were precisely checked.

As almost a snide aside, Der Spiegel notes that in spite of these lies, the public prosecutor has not yet been informed of these lies.

That is, the spooks have been lying – at least purportedly including up to and including Merkel’s office. But the government seems to be

uninterested in pursuing those lies.

As Brennan said as this was just breaking out, the spooks retain their “strong bilateral and multilateral intelligence relationships ...remain[ing], albeit not entirely, insulated from the ups and downs of diplomatic ties.”

And as with Brennan – who, as Gregory Johnsen chronicles in this long profile of the CIA Director published yesterday – the spooks always evade accountability.