

Kim Dotcom debates New Zealand leader over spying (Update)

July 3 2013, by Nick Perry



Internet millionaire Kim Dotcom speaks during the Intelligence and Security select committee hearing at Parliament in Wellington, New Zealand, Wednesday July 3, 2013. Dotcom is the founder of the once-popular file-sharing site Megaupload, which was shut down by U.S. authorities last year. Before his arrest last year, New Zealand's Government Communications Security Bureau spied on Dotcom, an action later found by a New Zealand court to be unlawful. (AP Photo/New Zealand Herald, Mark Mitchell)

In America, Kim Dotcom is a racketeering suspect. In New Zealand on Wednesday, he was the prime minister's debate partner.

The flamboyant Internet entrepreneur, who has gained celebrity status here while fighting extradition, took a helicopter from his estate to the capital, tweeting photos along the way, to speak against a bill that would expand the powers of New Zealand's foreign spy agency.

In Parliament, he used his allotted 15 minutes to rail against U.S. and New Zealand snooping, then traded jabs with Prime Minister John Key.

Dotcom is founder of the once-popular file-sharing site Megaupload, which was shut down last year by U.S. authorities who accuse him of facilitating online piracy. His testimony at the committee hearing was a highly anticipated piece of political theater, and his every word was followed on live video streams and Twitter.

Dotcom spoke against a bill that would allow the Government Communications Security Bureau (GCSB) to spy on New Zealanders under certain circumstances, something not expressly permitted under current law. One such instance would be on behalf of another domestic agency.

Dotcom had a stake in the debate because the GCSB concluded in a review of its actions that it unlawfully spied on him before his arrest in the South Pacific nation last year. Key publicly apologized to Dotcom after that ruling, but Dotcom later questioned his sincerity given the government's interest in expanding the agency's powers.

When he confirmed earlier this week that Key was chairing Wednesday's hearing, Dotcom tweeted, "It's ON."

At the end of Dotcom's prepared remarks, Key challenged him. The

prime minister had Dotcom agree that people once used Megaupload to outsource their file storage. Wasn't it the same thing, the prime minister asked, for the spy agency to accept work that other agencies outsource to it?



Internet millionaire Kim Dotcom leaves after the Intelligence and Security select committee hearing at Parliament in Wellington, New Zealand, Wednesday July 3, 2013. Dotcom is the founder of the once-popular file-sharing site Megaupload, which was shut down by U.S. authorities last year. Before his arrest last year, New Zealand's Government Communications Security Bureau spied on Dotcom, an action later found by a New Zealand court to be unlawful. (AP Photo/New Zealand Herald, Mark Mitchell)

"On Megaupload you would share a file," Dotcom replied. "On the

GCSB spy cloud you share private information about citizens that you don't have any right to access. That is the big difference."

Opposition Labour leader David Shearer then asked Dotcom whether Key knew the GCSB had spied on the entrepreneur before he was arrested in a dramatic raid, a point that has been politically contested for months.

"Oh, he knew about me before the raid. I know about that," Dotcom replied.

Key said that wasn't true.

"Why are you turning red, Prime Minister?" Dotcom asked.

"I'm not. Why are you sweating?" responded Key.

"Ah, it's hot," Dotcom replied.

The exchange drew laughter from the crowd watching and brought the debate to a close.

"See you later," Key said. "It's been fun."

Dotcom was joined at the hearing by his colleague Bram van der Kolk, who remained silent at his side throughout.

Proponents say the bill helps clarify a legal gray area; opponents say it amounts to an unwarranted intrusion into domestic affairs.

The agency's spying on Dotcom was found to be illegal because Dotcom, a German citizen by birth, was a legal resident of New Zealand at the time. Although embarrassing for the agency, the misstep to date hasn't

significantly impacted the underlying case.

U.S. prosecutors are trying to extradite Dotcom, van der Kolk and two other Megaupload executives from New Zealand, claiming they facilitated massive copyright piracy through the site. Dotcom and his colleagues deny the charges, saying they can't be held responsible for users who chose to illegally download music or movies.

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