

# Germany ends Cold War spying pact with US, Britain (Update 2)

August 2 2013, by Frank Jordans

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The July 8, 2013 file photo shows the former monitoring base of the U.S. intelligence organization National Security Agency (NSA) in Bad Aibling, near Munich, southern Germany, that was closed in 2004. The German government has canceled a Cold War-era surveillance pact with the United States and Britain following concerns about their alleged electronic eavesdropping in Germany. Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle said Friday, Aug. 2, 2013 that ending the agreement was "a necessary and proper consequence of the recent debate about protecting personal privacy." A government official says the move is largely symbolic and has no practical consequences for intelligence cooperation. (AP Photo/Matthias Schrader)

Germany canceled a Cold War-era surveillance pact with the United States and Britain on Friday in response to revelations by National

Security Agency leaker Edward Snowden about those countries' alleged electronic eavesdropping operations.

The move appeared largely symbolic, designed to show that the German government was taking action to stop unwarranted surveillance directed against its citizens without actually jeopardizing relations with Washington and London. With weeks to go before national elections, opposition parties had seized on Snowden's claim that Germany was complicit in the NSA's intelligence-gathering operations.

Government officials have insisted that U.S. and British intelligence were never given permission to break Germany's strict privacy laws. But they conceded last month that an agreement dating back to the late 1960s gave the U.S., Britain and France the right to request German authorities to conduct surveillance operations within Germany to protect their troops stationed there.

"The cancellation of the administrative agreements, which we have pushed for in recent weeks, is a necessary and proper consequence of the recent debate about protecting personal privacy," Germany's Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle said in a statement.

British Foreign Office brushed off the significance of the German move. "It's a loose end from a previous era which is right to tie up," the Foreign Office said in a statement, noting that the agreement had not been used since 1990.

A spokeswoman for the U.S. embassy in Berlin, Ruth Bennett, confirmed that the agreement had been canceled but declined to comment further on the issue.

A German official, speaking on condition of anonymity, also said the cancellation would have little practical consequences.

He said the agreement had not been invoked since the end of the Cold War and would have no impact on current intelligence cooperation between Germany and its NATO allies. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to publicly discuss the issue.

Germany is currently in talks with France to cancel its part of the agreement as well.

Public reaction in Germany to Snowden's revelations was particularly strong, with civil rights campaigners recalling the mass surveillance carried out by secret police in communist East Germany and during the Nazi era. Chancellor Angela Merkel went so far as to raise the issue of alleged NSA spying with President Barack Obama when he visited Berlin in June.

"The government needs to do something to show voters it's taking the issue seriously," said Henning Riecke of the German Council on Foreign Relations, a Berlin-based think tank. "Ending an agreement made in the pre-Internet age gives the Germans a chance to show they're doing something, and at the same time the Americans know it's not going to hurt them. Given the good relations between the intelligence agencies, they'll get the information they need anyway."

According to Snowden, Germany has been a particular focus on U.S. intelligence gathering operations in recent years. Several of those who plotted and carried out the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks in the United States had lived in Germany.

In March 2011, two U.S. Air Force members were killed and two wounded when a gunman from Kosovo fired on a military bus at Frankfurt International Airport. The gunman told police he was motivated by anger over the U.S.-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

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Citation: Germany ends Cold War spying pact with US, Britain (Update 2) (2013, August 2)  
retrieved 25 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-08-germany-nixes-surveillance-pact-britain.html>

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