

Report: US Spied on Netanyahu During Iran Deal Negotiations

The U.S. administration continued to spy on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu even after U.S. President Barack Obama announced two years ago he would curtail the National Security Agency's eavesdropping program on friendly heads of state, *The Wall Street Journal* reported Tuesday.

The NSA's foreign eavesdropping included phone conversations between top Israeli officials and U.S. lawmakers and American-Jewish groups, *The Wall Street Journal* reported, citing current and former U.S. officials.

White House officials believed the intercepted information could be valuable to counter Netanyahu's campaign against the nuclear deal with Iran, according to the unnamed officials cited by *The Wall Street Journal*.

According to the report, NSA eavesdropping suggested to the White House that Netanyahu and his advisers had leaked details of the negotiations, which they learned through Israeli spying operations.

The Wall Street Journal reported that the NSA's "targeting of Israeli leaders and officials also swept up the contents of some of their private conversations with U.S. lawmakers and American-Jewish groups."

Asked for comment on *The Wall Street Journal* report, a White House National Security Council spokesman said: "We do not conduct any foreign intelligence surveillance activities unless there is a specific and validated national security purpose. This applies to ordinary citizens and world leaders alike."

Following former NSA contractor Edward Snowden's disclosures

of the agency's spying operations, President Barack Obama announced in January 2014 that the United States would curb its eavesdropping of friendly world leaders.

A number of such figures, including French President Francois Hollande and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, were put on a list declared off-limits to U.S. eavesdropping. But Obama maintained the monitoring of Netanyahu on the grounds it served a "compelling national security purpose," *The Wall Street Journal* reported.

After Israel's lobbying campaign against the Iran nuclear deal went into full swing on Capitol Hill, it did not take long for administration and intelligence officials to realize the NSA was sweeping up the content of conversations with American lawmakers, the newspaper said.

A 2011 NSA directive said direct communications between foreign intelligence targets and members of Congress should be destroyed when they are intercepted. But the NSA director can issue a waiver if he determines the communications contain "significant foreign intelligence," *The Wall Street Journal* said.

During Israel's lobbying campaign in the months before the deal cleared Congress in September, the NSA removed the names of lawmakers from intelligence reports and weeded out personal information, the newspaper said.

Transportation Minister Yisrael Katz, who also serves as the intelligence and atomic energy minister, remarked Wednesday that if the report turns out to be true, Israel will file an official protest.

"Israel does not spy on the U.S. and we expect our greatest ally to treat us in the same way," Katz said. "If the claims on the matter emerge as true, Israel must file an official protest with the American administration and demand that it cease all activity of this kind."

Referring to recently released spy Jonathan Pollard, who was convicted of spying on the U.S. for Israel, Immigrant Absorption Minister Zeev Elkin noted that “precisely in light of the reports of secret eavesdropping, in violation of official declarations that they would stop spying on friendly nations, the [U.S.’s] insistence on the Pollard issue—the restrictions they imposed on him and their unwillingness to allow him to come to Israel—seem all the more unreasonable.”

“The State of Israel does not spy on the U.S. since the Pollard affair, and our expectation is that the U.S. will return the favor,” he added.

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