NSA Spied on Israel and US Lawmakers over Iran Deal

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The U.S. National Security Agency spied on close ally Israel, exposing how Israelis lobbied U.S. authorities to undermine the Iranian nuclear deal, RT reports.

The monitoring came in spite of a U.S. pledge to tone down surveillance of friendly states, while the latest snooping even included some Congress members private conversations.

Former Chairman of the House Intelligence Committee Pete Hoekstra called the interceptions an “abuse of power” and called for an investigation into the allegations.

“WSJ (Wall Street Journal) report that NSA spied on Congress and Israel communications very disturbing. Actually outrageous. Maybe unprecedented abuse of power,” Hoekstra wrote on his official Twitter account.

“NSA and Obama officials need to be investigated and prosecuted if any truth to WSJ reports. NSA loses all credibility. Scary,” he added.

Massive surveillance has continued under President Barack Obama’s two terms, and the revelations of Edward Snowden in 2013 over the extent of the data harvested from civilians did little to dent the spy agency’s activities, according to the Wall Street Journal.

A “protected list” rapidly pulled together by the Obama administration in the wake of the scandal to safeguard its closest allies from monitoring included countries including Germany and France.

Israel, however, was not on this list, and was instead placed as NSA’s top monitoring priority, as was Turkey.

A senior US official said told the Wall Street Journal, “Going dark on Bibi? Of course we wouldn’t do that,” using Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s nickname.

President Obama endorsed the espionage on Israel because it satisfied a “compelling national security purpose,” further officials told the newspaper, which carried out the report interviewing more than 24 former and current intelligence and administration officials.

As Obama’s administration painstakingly worked toward reaching a nuclear deal with Iran, the NSA tapped communications between Israeli and U.S. lawmakers, revealing the lengths Netanyahu’s government was going to prevent the negotiations from concluding successfully.

The harvested communications between the Israeli prime minister and his colleagues created tension between Washington and Tel Aviv, and led to an awkward moment when Netanyahu addressed the U.S .Congress to hammer home his anti-Iran stance.

Yet the White House was unable to use much of the information gleaned from surveillance as it would have been “politically risky:” exposing a “paper trail stemming out from a request.”

But, the Wall Street Journal reports that when the NSA was tasked with deciding which information could be shared and which withheld, the agency recognized the conversations they had swept up included U.S. lawmakers, creating an “Oh-s— moment,” an official said, that the NSA was also spying on its own Congress members.

The NSA dealt with the sticking point by removing the lawmakers’ names from intelligence reports and any trace of personal information.

Government officials for Israel, Germany, and France declined to speak when asked for comment by Wall Street Journal, which was also turned down by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and the NSA.

Republican presidential candidate Ted Cruz said the revelation is “indicative of the Obama Clinton foreign policy and their inability to distinguish their friends from their enemies” and attacked Obama’s stance on Israel.