The NSA, Snowden and the Tension between the US and Its European Allies

In June 2013, Edward Snowden, who was working as an NSA contractor for Dell and Booz Allen Hamilton, leaked thousands of documents revealing many global surveillance programs run by the NSA. Snowden downloaded more than 1.7 million intelligence files from US agencies, the biggest number of secrets ever to be stolen in the history of the United States. However, Snowden only shared between 50,000 and 200,000 documents with reporters. Although this number makes up only a small fracture of the documents that were captured, the contents of the documents were enough to create worldwide awareness of how privacy of individuals and even diplomats and politicians could be invaded in the name of protection against terrorism. The leaked documents contained important information about covert global surveillance systems and databases run by the NSA and the United Kingdom’s Government Communication Headquarters (GCHQ) such as PRISM, DISHFIRE, Tempora, Fairview and MYSTIC. The real controversial aspect of these leakages was that the NSA was collecting data and information on foreign state officials, and billions of telephone records a day of mobile users all around the world. Although the US officials condemned Snowden’s actions because he endangered the security of Americans by revealing state secrets, the fact that he was
brave enough to share how the NSA spies on foreign countries, world leaders and the general population made him a hero in the eyes of many.

As a result of countless stories based on Snowden’s leaked documents, it became evident that the NSA has spied on many prominent foreign governments and their leaders. The German newsweekly Der Spiegel disclosed that the NSA targeted at least 122 world leaders. Specific targets of the intelligence agency over the years included German chancellor Angela Merkel, Ukrainian prime minister Yuliya Tymoshenko, the French Foreign Ministry, and the leaders at the 2010 G8 and G20 summits in Toronto. The NSA utilized its corporate partnerships with major US companies such as AT&T, Microsoft, Google and Verizon in order to intercept the communications of the targeted foreign governments and leaders.

Since the NSA surveillance scandal erupted, the tension between the US and EU countries have been on the rise. Although there have been negotiations between EU ambassadors and the US on global surveillance programs, mainly PRISM, and data privacy, the issue continues to damage the US foreign relations.

For my project, I will first research various controversial NSA surveillance practices and programs through Snowden’s leaked documents and online sources such as the whistle-blowing website WikiLeaks. This first part will include both technical and judicial aspects of the implemented programs. For the technical part, I will first explore what technologies are used to implement surveillance programs such as PRISM. I will also analyze how the NSA infiltrates networks and collects information via tapping into fiber-optic cables, acquiring massive amounts of
metadata, and utilizing backdoors. After building a solid technical and judicial foundation of the NSA surveillance programs, I will then research and analyze European NSA surveillance concerns and what the efforts are to settle the data privacy issues between the leaders of European allies and the US officials.

My main deliverable will be a final paper describing various NSA surveillance programs focusing on their technical and judicial aspects, how these programs create frictions between the US and the European allies, and what is being done or can be done to alleviate these frictions.

**Timeline of the project:**

- **Week 1 - 2:** Research on the technical aspects of the NSA global surveillance programs
- **Week 3 - 4:** Research on the judicial aspects of the NSA global surveillance programs
- **Week 5 - 6:** Gathering information about the frictions between the US and European allies caused by the data privacy issues.
- **Week 7:** Research on ongoing efforts and possible solutions to the tension between the US and European allies caused by the controversial surveillance programs of the NSA
- **Week 8 - 10:** Final paper