

NSA AND CIA HACKED ENRIQUE PEÑA NIETO BEFORE THE 2012 ELECTION

Part of the frenzied discussion about the possibility that Russia hacked the DNC includes claims that the US would never do something so dastardly.

Except that the Foreign Government Section 702 Certificate makes it clear the NSA is authorized to spy on foreign based political organizations even within the US (and would have far more liberty under EO 12333). Among the parties specifically authorized for targeting in 2010 was Pakistan's People Party, the incumbent party in a nominal ally.

Indeed, the Snowden documents have an even better example of the US spying in advance of an election – when, in June 2012, NSA targeted the texts between Enrique Peña Nieto and nine of his closest associates.

The NSA's intelligence agents in Texas must have been asking themselves such questions when they authorized an unusual type of operation known as structural surveillance. For two weeks in the early summer of 2012, the NSA unit responsible for monitoring the Mexican government analyzed data that included the cell phone communications of Peña Nieto and "nine of his close associates," as an internal presentation from June 2012 shows. Analysts used software to connect this data into a network, shown in a graphic that resembles a swarm of bees. The software then filtered out Peña Nieto's most relevant contacts and entered them into a databank called "DishFire." From then on, these individuals' cell phones were

singled out for surveillance.

According to the internal documents, this led to the agency intercepting 85,489 text messages, some sent by Peña Nieto himself and some by his associates. This technology “might find a needle in a haystack,” the analysts noted, adding that it could do so “in a repeatable and efficient way.”

This would have been in the weeks leading up to the election on July 1.

There is one difference: We don't know what our spooks did with the information gleaned from the 85,489 texts kept from candidate EPN (it was a close election, and I presume we preferred EPN to Andrés Manuel López Obrador). NSA and CIA (with which NSA partnered on this hack) certainly did not release any information we know of from those texts. A more interesting question, in this case, is whether the US used anything from those texts to reassure ourselves – or ensure – that EPN's campaign promises to change Mexico's level of cooperation in the war on drugs (which of course also means spying) would change once he won the election, as they did.

None of this excuses Russia if it hacked the DNC. But it does provide a very concrete example where the US hacked the most intimate network of a person running for office – and of an ally, no less.

Spies steal information, even from political candidates. Including American spies.