

## INTELLIGENCE

# Investigation opened into Swiss encryption firm linked to CIA

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**The Swiss government has opened an investigation into a decades-old spying affair involving Swiss firm Crypto, following reports by Swiss public broadcaster SRF, German broadcaster ZDF and The Washington Post.**

The government confirmed on Tuesday that it had opened an investigation into the reports that Crypto, a Zug-based communications encryption firm, was secretly used by the CIA and West German intelligence services for decades.

The services jointly bought into the business in 1971, hiding behind the façade of a Liechtenstein-registered foundation, according to 280 pages of documents that were reported on in Switzerland by [public broadcaster SRF](#)  
[external link](#)

Over the next decades, the intelligence services listened in on and read hundreds of thousands of messages between governments, embassies and military commands worldwide.

The spying allegedly continued until at least 2018, and over 100 countries worldwide were targeted.

Crypto reportedly had two types of encryption products: one fully secured, the other non-secured, that is, modified to allow the CIA and Germany's BND intelligence services break codes.

## Swiss involvement

Switzerland was one of the few countries to have been provided with the secure version, and is one of four countries – along with Israel, Sweden, and Britain – that knew of the operation or were in on some of the secret information it uncovered.

SRF's Rundschau news programme reports that the ministry of defence first briefed the government on the case in November last year. The

government opened an official investigation, led by a former supreme court judge, following its meeting on January 15.

As a result of the investigation, the economics ministry has also confirmed that the general export licence for Crypto's devices had been suspended “until open questions have been clarified”.

The company itself was liquidated in 2018 and succeeded by a company called Crypto International, which wrote on its website that the espionage links uncovered were “very distressing”.

In 2015, Crypto was also revealed by [a BBC investigation](#) to have worked with the US National Security Agency (NSA) and the British intelligence services during the Cold War.

In its [investigative piece](#)  
[external link](#)

published on Tuesday, The Washington Post called the operation the “intelligence coup of the century” and one of the “most closely guarded secrets of the Cold War”.

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