



General Intelligence and
Security Service
*Ministry of the Interior and
Kingdom Relations*

Espionage

How to recognise and
counter it



Espionage is of all ages and it poses a serious threat to the Netherlands. At the same time, espionage is almost imperceptible and few people are aware of the dangers. All sorts of countries spy in and on the Netherlands. Not just digitally, but also in the classic sense, by using people. Why do they do this and why is this harmful? More importantly: how do you recognise espionage and what can you do to counter it?

What is espionage?

Passing on knowledge on Dutch foreign policy, copying and selling documents of the European Commission, or hacking a high-tech company in order to obtain company secrets. These are all examples of espionage. But what is espionage exactly? Espionage is the covert collection of intelligence (information) or objects (for example products or machines). This information could involve sensitive (personal) data, technology, or state secrets.

The Netherlands is an attractive target for espionage. Our country is a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the European Union (EU) and as such has interesting information at its disposal. We are moreover host to many international organisations, such as the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the International Criminal Court (ICC). Dutch universities and businesses also have access to a lot of knowledge and advanced technology.

It is the task of the General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) to identify espionage, to provide support in preventing and ending espionage, and to increase awareness of espionage.

Who engages in espionage and why do they do this?

All sorts of countries engage in espionage in and against the Netherlands in order to acquire information or objects which they can use to their advantage. There are various reasons to do this. A country may want to keep an eye on emigrated compatriots abroad to see whether they pose a threat to the regime. Or a country may wish to map the political situation and decision-making processes in the Netherlands in order to influence these. Countries can also steal economic knowledge in order to promote their own national economy.

Some countries engage in large-scale espionage and have professional intelligence services to carry out this work as best as possible. The AIVD investigates these countries. Which countries pose the biggest threat depends strongly on the (inter)national situation. Relations between countries can change quickly, allowing new players to take part in the espionage game.

What form does this espionage take?

Foreign intelligence services engage in espionage in different ways. Nowadays a lot of espionage has gone digital: intelligence services hack computers in order to steal information without being discovered. Ministries, research centres, and businesses

active in the high-tech, chemical, and energy sectors are often the victims of digital attacks.

Espionage is also still carried out in the classic manner, by approaching individuals and using them to gain access to information. Employees of intelligence services look for interesting people to talk to (sources) or recruit, such as civil servants, researchers, high-ranking public officials, and journalists. Persons in supporting positions can also be interesting to intelligence services, because they too might have access to confidential information.

Why is espionage harmful?

Espionage occurs outside of the public's view. For many it is therefore difficult to imagine that espionage is detrimental to our national security, but this clandestine way of information gathering can in fact have a significant impact. If another country were, for example, to gain access to secret information, that country could use the information to influence decision-making processes or take other measures. Countries can use information on their own population abroad in order to intimidate or even assassinate their opponents.

Espionage can also cause economic damage. As soon as other countries gain access to confidential corporate information, this impacts the financial position of the companies in

question. With copies of blueprints and one-of-a-kind equipment, a spying country no longer has to pay the (often outrageously high) research and development costs itself. This could result in a decrease in the Dutch company's sales or hamper its competition with a foreign competitor. When the results and methods of a certain research project are used in secret in another country, the project may cease to be cost-effective. There is also a risk that knowledge on nuclear technology could fall into the wrong hands. It is important, therefore, that confidential information or technology cannot simply be channelled away to other countries.

How do you recognise espionage?

Espionage is largely the work of people. Imagine you have information that may be of interest to others, so that you catch the eye of an intelligence service. The service will use someone to get into contact with you. This person will attempt to build a relationship of trust with you. He or she will present themselves as a diplomat, journalist, or entrepreneur, for example, in order to build a natural rapport with you. There are telltale signs, however, that may indicate that you are dealing with an intelligence officer.

Intelligence services often carry out extensive preliminary research into persons who may be of interest to them. They will go online, for example, to search for people with access to

sensitive files. They also search for personal information, such as someone's hobbies or sports club memberships in order to get to know someone better. This information is then used to 'coincidentally' come into contact with you.

Has the first contact been a success? Then more meetings will follow. They will take you out to dinner, give you presents, and you may think that you are becoming friends. Meetings will often take place outside of the house and the intelligence officer will be particularly interested in your personal matters. All that time he or she is pursuing only one goal, however: to convince you to engage in espionage. Eventually the intelligence officer will ask you to supply information in exchange for money. At first this information may be trivial, a test to see how far you are willing to go, but later they will ask for sensitive documents you have access to.

What can you do to counter espionage?

The first step is to be aware of the fact that espionage exists. When a contact gives you a strange feeling, it is always sensible to adopt a reserved attitude and report this to your employer's security department. You can prevent espionage by recognising the signs. Do you suspect espionage by a foreign intelligence service? Report this to your employer and notify the AIVD: aivd.nl/contact.

Be aware that information regarding your work and your network can be very valuable to others. Information that you have easy access to, such as seemingly harmless documents or working conditions, may be of interest to an intelligence service. An intelligence service may also be interested in your ties with important people.

Find a good balance in what you share online about yourself and your work. Do not post to LinkedIn or Facebook that you are working on sensitive documents. Be aware of what you share and most of all whom you share it with.

Protect your devices. Intelligence services may be interested in the information on your phone or laptop. Be alert for phishing e-mails, install security software and make sure that you keep it up to date. It is also prudent to keep any devices that contain valuable information close to your person when you are travelling and to keep them in your carry-on luggage rather than your checked luggage. For more information, consult the AIVD publication 'Travelling abroad - Safety risks'.

Of course not all contact with someone from another country means you are dealing with an intelligence service, but it is good to remain aware of the nature of the relationship. Make sure that you do not come to depend on this person and be aware of the underlying intentions of your contacts.

Want to know more?

Do you want to know more about espionage and the work of the AIVD? Go to aivd.nl/espionage.



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June 2020