

Everyone is Fair Game: Spy Agency Conducts Surveillance on All US Citizens

By [RT](#)

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The Obama administration overruled recommendations from within the US Department of Homeland Security and implemented new guidelines earlier this year that allow the government to gather and analyze intelligence on every single US citizen.

Since the spring, a little-known intelligence agency outside of Washington, DC has been able to circumvent the Fourth Amendment to the US Constitution and conduct dragnet surveillance of the entire country, combing massive datasets using advanced algorithms to search and seize personal info on anyone this wish, reports the Wall Street Journal this week.

There's no safeguard that says only Americans with criminal records are the ones included, and it's not just suspected terrorists that are considered in the searches either. The National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) has been provided with entire government databases and given nearly endless access to intelligence on everyone in the country, regardless of whether or not they've done anything that would have made them a person of interest. As long as data is "reasonably believed" to contain "terrorism information," the agency can do as they wish.

What's more is the NCTC can retain that information for years, reviewing it whenever they'd like to take a look.

The update to the agency's policies, [reported](#) by RT at the time and reexamined this week in the Journal, expose any person in the country to invasive and nearly endless government surveillance.

"This is a sea change in the way that the government interacts with the general public," Mary Ellen Callahan is reported by the Journal to have said during a Situation Room meeting earlier this year within the walls of the White House. At the time, Callahan was chief privacy officer at DHS as well as one of the only staffers inside the Obama administration concerned with what was about to happen.

According to documents obtained by the Journal through Freedom of Information Act requests and conversations between the paper and persons familiar with that Situation Room sound-off, Ms. Callahan unsuccessfully argued against updating a 2008 Justice Department memo about what intel the NCTC can have and how they use it. Just weeks after that meeting, new guidelines were authorized and, within months, Ms. Callahan was working elsewhere.

Despite her efforts, a 32-page document, "Guidelines for Access, Retention, Use and

Dissemination by the National Counterterrorism Center and other Agencies of Information in Datasets Containing Non-Terrorism Information,” went into effect, and with that the NCTC was no longer restricted to only terrorism-related intelligence and instead

“The 2008 memo’s title referred to NCTC’s access to ‘terrorism information’ contained in non-terrorism datasets. The 2012 title simply refers to ‘information’ in those datasets,” reports the Journal. “The removal of the word ‘terrorism’ is an indication of how this memo expands NCTC’s mandate to allow surveillance of US citizens based on more than just the terrorism information.”

Indeed, the changes aren’t just within the name of the document. The 2012 update to the NCTC’s data-mining policies expand the intelligence the agency can comb while at the same time removing safeguards that were in place for privacy’s sake. Under the new rules, data on innocent Americans can be retained for five years, and intel on anyone “reasonably believed to constitute terrorism information” can be kept until the end of time.

“It’s breathtaking” in its scope, one former senior administration official tells the Journal.

According to the paper, “flight records, casino-employee lists, the names of Americans hosting foreign-exchange students and many others” can be collected indefinitely and searched at will within the NCTC, an agency only nine years old and not nearly as well-known as her sister spy groups: the CIA and FBI.

Once the NCTC has the info, though, they can decide who else can be made privy to it. If the US government is so inclined, intelligence on specific citizens can be sent to any foreign nation in the world.

“Literally anything the government collects would be fair game, and the original agency in charge of protecting the privacy of those records would have little say over whether this happened, or what the spy agency did with the information afterward,” writes Chris Calabrese, legislative counsel at the American Civil Liberties Union’s DC branch. Calabrese testified before Congress earlier this year, and in a blog post authored by him in July, he describes just how detrimental the new policies are to personal privacy.

“That sharing can happen in relation to national security and safety, drug investigations [or] if it’s evidence of a crime or to evaluate sources or contacts. This boundless sharing is broad enough to encompass disclosures to an employer or landlord about someone who NCTC may think is potentially a criminal, or at the request of local law enforcement for vetting an informant,” he writes.

On the blog PrivacySOS, civil liberties advocate Kade Crockford [condemns](#) the spy program by saying any safeguard that could be implemented wouldn’t end what appears to be a serious constitutional violation.

“And even if it was an effective anti-terrorism technique, widespread, warrantless surveillance of every single living human being – suspicious or not – damn sure isn’t democratic practice. We are supposed to be innocent until proven guilty in this country, not the other way around,” Crockford writes.

In his post from earlier this year, the ACLU’s Calabrese says the real dangers could come if the government decides to supplement their statistics with other private information

purchased from third-parties.

✘ “What if that spy agency could add commercial information, anything it – or any other federal agency – could buy from the huge data aggregators that are monitoring our every move?” he asks.

Meanwhile, in-between Calabrese’s original post and the Journal’s article from this week, search giant Google [confirmed](#) that the federal government has sent more requests for personal user data in 2012 than ever before.

“This is the sixth time we’ve released this data, and one trend has become clear: Government surveillance is on the rise,” Google explained last month.

The latest revelation from the Journal of course is but the most recent installation in what has become a remarkable year in terms of finding out the truth about Uncle Sam’s shocking full-fledged surveillance. Throughout 2012, several former employees of the National Security Agency (NSA) have stepped up and given interviews about the grievances with the office, particularly their disregard for the privacy of Americans.

“When you open up the Pandora’s Box of just getting access to incredible amounts of data, for people that have no reason to be put under suspicion, no reason to have done anything wrong, and just collect all that for potential future use or even current use, it opens up a real danger — and to what else what they could use that data for, particularly when it’s all being hidden behind the mantle of national security,” NSA whistleblower Thomas Drake [told](#) Current TV host Eliot Spitzer earlier this year.

Journalist Julia Angwin writes for the Journal that the DHS is currently working out the details on how to provide the NCTC with new lists of data, but acknowledges that every federal agency can come up with their own rules regarding what they want handed over.

Earlier this month, former NSA analyst William Binney [spoke](#) with RT and said that the FBI — who maintains databases that can be requested by the NCTC under their latest policies — has been storing the emails of every person in America for at least a decade.

“So, yes, this can happen to anyone. If they become a target for whatever reason – they are targeted by the government, the government can go in, or the FBI, or other agencies of the government, they can go into their database, pull all that data collected on them over the years, and we analyze it all. So, we have to actively analyze everything they’ve done for the last 10 years at least,” he said.

Upon winning a Callaway award for civic courage in DC last month, Mr. Binney explained that he and other former NSA agents “could not be accessories to violations of the US Constitution.” Ms. Callahan has since left her post within the NCTC and is now practicing law in the nation’s capital focusing specifically on privacy.

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