

NSA Reading Content of Americans' International Communications

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Thursday saw yet another revelation in the ongoing exposure of a cluster of unconstitutional surveillance programs run by the National Security Agency (NSA) and other agencies of the US government. In a front page article, the *New York Times* revealed that vast quantities of emails sent and received by Americans communicating with people abroad are swept up, "cloned," and combed through by NSA analysts, on the basis that the messages contain certain words or phrases deemed suspicious by the government.

According to the *Times*, international data-sweeps target "apparently most" of the email traffic flowing to and from the US. The newspaper writes: "The NSA is temporarily copying and then sifting through the contents of what is apparently most e-mails and other text-based communications that cross the border... While it has long been known that the agency conducts extensive computer searches of data it vacuums up overseas, that it is systematically searching—without warrants—through the contents of Americans' communications that cross the border reveals more about the scale of its secret operations."

The *Times* cited congressional testimony last June by NSA Deputy Director John Inglis, who replied to a lawmaker who asked if the agency listened to the phone calls or read the emails of American citizens by saying, "We do not target the content of US person communications without a specific warrant anywhere on the earth."

These words were carefully chosen to conceal a lie. NSA analysts supposedly do not "target" Americans, they just regularly and systematically seize their emails and examine their contents, without a warrant, if they happen to contain any one of an unknown number of "target" words.

Under the email and text message vacuuming procedure, an individual need not be in contact with someone targeted for surveillance to have his communications read. It is sufficient to mention the name of the targeted group, or any other word potentially associated with that group. According to the *Times*, no Foreign Intelligence Surveillance (FISA) court ruling regarding such "about the target" searches of electronic communications has been disclosed to the public.

The *Times* article, which, given the number of unnamed senior intelligence officials it cites, has all the earmarks of a damage control piece written in collaboration with the NSA, nevertheless it reveals factual information that demolishes claims by Obama and other US officials that there are no mass surveillance operations targeting the American people.

It vindicates warnings by former NSA contractor-turned whistle-blower Edward Snowden that NSA analysts are eavesdropping on the private voice and written communications of millions of Americans, as well as millions more people internationally.

The article was published just one day after Obama declared on the nationally televised "Tonight Show with Jay Leno" that "there is no spying on Americans" and that "we don't have a domestic surveillance program."

The government is capturing phone calls, emails and texts from every American. As Glenn Greenwald reported in the *Guardian* in early June, the NSA collected 97 billion pieces of intelligence all around the world in March of 2013 through a program called Boundless Informant, including 3 billion from the US.

Responding to Obama's claims on the Leno show, Judge Andrew Napolitano, a *Fox News* senior judicial analyst, said former NSA staffers have corroborated that "the government has the ability to access from storage the actual emails and texts that every American has sent in the past two-and-a-half years and the sound of telephone calls, the voices on the calls, that Americans have made in the past two-and-a-half years."

As Napolitano observed, Judge Roger Vinson signed a court order on April 25, 2013 directing the telecom giant Verizon to surrender telephone information on 113 million customers between the dates of April 25 and July 19.

The Center for Constitutional Rights released a statement at the time of Vinson's ruling, saying, "This order from the FISA court is the broadest surveillance order to ever have been issued: it requires no level of suspicion and applies to all Verizon subscribers anywhere in the US."

The lying from every corner of the US political establishment to conceal the police state spying operations is rampant and systematic. When asked during a Senate hearing earlier this year, "Does the NSA collect any type of data at all on millions or hundreds of millions of Americans," Obama's director of national intelligence, James Clapper, committed the crime of perjuring himself before Congress. "No, sir," he replied.

Former NSA and CIA chief Michael Hayden has made provocative statements in recent days, speaking out in favor of the surveillance programs and denouncing anti-surveillance "activists."

Warrantless mass data collection began under Hayden, who was the NSA head during the launching of STELLARWIND, the Bush administration mass surveillance program. In a moment of striking candor, Hayden expressed his contempt for sections of the population that are anti-surveillance and pro-Snowden, while suggesting that these elements may launch retaliatory operations against the US should Snowden be brought to trial.

"If and when our government grabs Edward Snowden, and brings him back here to the United States for trial, what does this group do?" asked Hayden, referring to Snowden supporters as "nihilists, anarchists, activists, LulzSec, Anonymous, twenty-somethings who haven't talked to the opposite sex in five or six years."

Jameel Jaffer of the American Civil Liberties Union said that "dragnet surveillance will be poisonous to the freedoms of inquiry and association" and described the massive scale of the programs: "The NSA has cast a massive dragnet over Americans' international

communications, collecting and monitoring virtually all of them, and retaining some untold number of them in government databases. This is precisely the kind of generalized spying that the Fourth Amendment was intended to prohibit.”

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