

NSA Tracks Porn to Discredit Activists ... and to Blackmail Critics?

By [Washington's Blog](#)

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Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

Huffington Post [reports](#):

The National Security Agency has been gathering records of online sexual activity and evidence of visits to pornographic websites as part of a proposed plan to harm the reputations of those whom the agency believes are radicalizing others through incendiary speeches, according to a top-secret NSA document. The document, provided by NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden, identifies six targets, all Muslims, as “exemplars” of how “personal vulnerabilities” can be learned through electronic surveillance, and then exploited to undermine a target’s credibility, reputation and authority.

Among the vulnerabilities listed by the NSA that can be effectively exploited are “viewing sexually explicit material online” and “using sexually explicit persuasive language when communicating with inexperienced young girls.”

None of the six individuals targeted by the NSA is accused in the document of being involved in terror plots. The agency believes they all currently reside outside the United States. It identifies one of them, however, as a “U.S. person,” which means he is either a U.S. citizen or a permanent resident.

The NSA believes the targeted individuals radicalize people through the expression of controversial ideas via YouTube, Facebook and other social media websites.

According to the document, the NSA believes that exploiting electronic surveillance to publicly reveal online sexual activities can make it harder for these “radicalizers” to maintain their credibility.

Huff Post notes that the NSA is also sharing the information with other agencies:

The Director of the National Security Agency — described as “DIRNSA” — is listed as the “originator” of the document. Beyond the NSA itself, [the listed recipients](#) include officials with the Departments of Justice and Commerce and the Drug Enforcement Administration.

This is nothing new. We've [previously reported](#) that information gained by the NSA through spying is [shared with federal, state and local agencies](#), and they are using that information to prosecute [petty crimes such as drugs and taxes](#). The agencies are instructed to [intentionally "launder"](#) the information gained through spying, i.e. to pretend that they got the information in a more legitimate way ... and to [hide that from defense attorneys and judges](#).

American Civil Liberties Union Deputy Legal Director Jameel Jaffer [said](#):

This report is an unwelcome reminder of what it means to give an intelligence agency unfettered access to individuals' most sensitive information. One ordinarily associates these kinds of tactics with the secret police services of authoritarian governments. That these tactics have been adopted by the world's leading democracy - and the world's most powerful intelligence agency - is truly chilling.

Indeed, this is the exactly same kind of thing which the FBI did in the bad old days. As Huffington Post notes:

U.S. officials have in the past used similar tactics against civil rights leaders, labor movement activists and others.

Under J. Edgar Hoover, the FBI harassed activists and compiled secret files on political leaders, most notably Martin Luther King, Jr. The extent of the FBI's surveillance of political figures is still being revealed to this day, as the bureau releases the long dossiers it compiled on certain people in response to Freedom of Information Act requests following their deaths. The information collected by the FBI often centered on sex — homosexuality was an ongoing obsession on Hoover's watch — and information about extramarital affairs was reportedly used to blackmail politicians into fulfilling the bureau's needs.

James Bamford, a journalist who has been covering the NSA since the early 1980s, said the use of surveillance to exploit embarrassing private behavior is precisely what led to past U.S. surveillance scandals. "The NSA's operation is eerily similar to the FBI's operations under J. Edgar Hoover in the 1960s where the bureau used wiretapping to discover vulnerabilities, such as sexual activity, to 'neutralize' their targets," he said. "Back then, the idea was developed by the longest serving FBI chief in U.S. history, today it was suggested by the longest serving NSA chief in U.S. history."

That controversy, Bamford said, also involved the NSA. "And back then, the NSA was also used to do the eavesdropping on King and others through its Operation Minaret. A later review declared the NSA's program 'disreputable if not outright illegal,'" he said.

[The ACLU's] Jaffer, however, warned that the lessons of history ought to compel serious concern that a "president will ask the NSA to use the fruits of surveillance to discredit a political opponent, journalist or human rights activist."

"The NSA has used its power that way in the past and it would be naïve to think it couldn't use its power that way in the future," he said.

The New York Times [argues](#):

This is precisely the way that politically directed, clandestine surveillance goes off the rails — by digging into personal behavior. Because all of these operations are conducted in secret, according to secret rules, the public has no way of knowing whether the targets are actually enemies of the state, or just individuals who have fallen out of the state's favor.

J. Edgar Hoover compiled secret dossiers on the sexual peccadillos and private misbehavior of those he labeled as enemies — really dangerous people like Martin Luther King Jr. and President John F. Kennedy, for example.

Government officials have repeatedly claimed that the National Security Agency's collection of metadata is perfectly legal. We should not worry about the N.S.A., according to President Obama, because there are safeguards in place to protect our constitutional rights. Agents would never, ever misuse that information to, say, check on where you've been web surfing.

We hate terrorists, and are opposed to religious extremists of any kind who are trying to whip up hatred. The problem, of course, is that the government's targeting is not limited to *actual bad guys*, and the government may now [label the average American citizen as a "potential terrorist"](#). It should be clear to everyone by now that NSA spying is [not very focused on terrorism](#) ... especially given that history shows that mass spying is [always focused on crushing dissent](#).

TechDirt [points out](#):

It's important to note here that the "targets" in this case are not US persons, and they all do appear to dislike the US, and some appear to have advocated for jihad against the US. However, as the report notes, most of them are not terrorists or even connected to any terrorist organization. They're just activists and advocates who have spoken out criticizing the US. In one case, a guy was targeted for claiming that "the U.S. brought the 9/11 attacks upon itself" — an argument that plenty of respectable people have made. The lack of any terrorist connection is actually, stunningly, used against these individuals, as one NSA document notes that since they don't communicate with terrorists it's worse because it suggests "that the target audience includes individuals who do not yet hold extremist views but who are susceptible to the extremist message."

Remember, high-level U.S. officials have been warning of tyranny based upon a surveillance state spear-headed by the NSA for [40 years](#).

Indeed, it is well-documented that the NSA was already spying on American Senators more than [4 decades ago](#). And a high-level NSA whistleblower says that the NSA is [spying on – and blackmailing – top government officials and military officers](#), including [Supreme Court Justices, high-ranked generals, Colin Powell and other State Department personnel](#), and many other top officials. And see this:

He says the NSA started [spying on President Obama](#) when he was a candidate for Senate:

Another very high-level NSA whistleblower – the head of the NSA’s global intelligence gathering operation – says that the NSA [targeted CIA chief Petraeus](#).

And a senior ACLU policy analyst who has worked on issues related to NSA data gathering (Jay Stanley) hints that the NSA may be exercising [actual or implied leverage against politicians](#):

Everyone has dark suspicions about their political opponents from time to time, and Americans are highly distrustful of government in general. When there is any opening at all for members of the public to suspect that officials from the legislative and judicial branches could be vulnerable to leverage from secretive agencies within the executive branch — and when those officials can even suspect they might be subject to leverage — that is a serious problem for our democracy.

Indeed, top constitutional experts say that the Obama and Bush administration are not only [worse than Nixon](#) ... but worse than the [Stasi East Germans](#). Indeed, [history seems to be repeating ... or at least rhyming](#).

Postscript: We wonder whether some of [these guys](#) are a tad nervous about the new NSA spying revelations.

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