

Spying on Americans: New NSA Whistleblower Speaks

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A former member of U.S. military intelligence has decided to reveal what she knows about warrantless spying on Americans and about the fixing of intelligence in the leadup to the invasion of Iraq.

Adrienne Kinne describes an incident just prior to the invasion of Iraq in which a fax came into her office at Fort Gordon in Georgia that purported to provide information on the location of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. The fax came from the Iraqi National Congress, a group opposed to Saddam Hussein and favoring an invasion. The fax contained types of information that required that it be translated and transmitted to President Bush within 15 minutes. But Kinne had been eavesdropping on two nongovernmental aid workers driving in Iraq who were panicked and trying to find safety before the bombs dropped. She focused on trying to protect them, and was reprimanded for the delay in translating the fax. She then challenged her officer in charge, Warrant Officer John Berry, on the credibility of the fax, and he told her that it was not her place or his to challenge such things. None of the other 20 or so people in the unit questioned anything, Kinne said.

Kinne dates this incident to the period just before the official invasion of Iraq or possibly just after. She says that because the US engaged in so much bombing prior to the official invasion, she cannot recall for sure.

Prior to September 11, 2001, Kinne says, it was unacceptable to listen in on or collect information on Americans. The practice was barred by United States Signals Intelligence Directive (USSID) 18. Kinne recalls an incident in 1997 in which an American's name was mentioned, and she and her colleagues deleted every related record because they took very seriously the ban on collecting information on Americans. Kinne was serving from 1994-1998 on active duty as an Arabic linguist for military intelligence at Fort Gordon in Georgia, sending reports to and collaborating with the NSA. She served at the same station after 9-11 when she was activated as a reservist.

Kinne says that post-9-11 she and others routinely collected information on people even after identifying them as aid workers for non-governmental organizations. A common rationale was that the phones of such organizations could conceivably be seized by terrorists. She recalled one case in which she was listening to an American talk to his British colleague in an international aid organization. The Brit expressed concern about the American military eavesdropping, and the American replied that they couldn't possibly be doing that because of USSID 18. Kinne recalls that her colleagues got quite excited and behaved as if the American had divulged secrets by mentioning that directive. They

continued eavesdropping on the man although they were unclear at that point whether they were permitted to spy on Americans.

Shortly after this incident, however, in mid-2002, they were given a waiver to spy on Americans. This waiver was communicated to Kinne and her colleagues orally, and she assumed that it had come from the President or someone very high up. The waiver, she says, also permitted spying on Canadian, French, German, Australian, and British citizens without probable cause.

Many of the people, including Americans, whom Kinne spied on were journalists. These included journalists staying at a hotel in Baghdad that later showed up on a list of targets. Again, Kinne says, she expressed concerns to her officer in charge, letting him know that the military should be informed or the journalists should be warned to move to another location. Kinne says Berry brushed her off. He was, she says, “completely behind the invasion of Iraq. He told us repeatedly that we needed to bomb those barbarians back to kingdom come.”

Berry was promoted to Chief Warrant Officer. Kinne left, went back to school, and took a job at the Veterans Administration helping some of the victims of the fixing of intelligence that she had witnessed. And early this year she joined a tour of Vermont with activists Cindy Sheehan, John Nichols, Dan DeWalt, and veterans of the war, a tour promoting the passage of impeachment resolutions in Vermont towns, a tour that helped effect the passage of those resolutions in over 40 towns up and down the state. Kinne found the experience “life-changing”, and she’s now decided to tell everything she knows, and to encourage others still in the government to speak out and release documentation.

“I wish that I had said something back then, but I don’t think people would have listened,” Kinne said.

Kinne, who now works for the VA at White River Junction, Vermont, said that she has written to Senator Patrick Leahy, who has not replied to her. Kinne has become active in Iraq Veterans Against the War. She said that the news of the current escalation of the war also helped move her to act. “That’s the only reason why I am choosing to break whatever rules I may have just broken by telling you about it,” Kinne said. “Because I think that this all needs to stop, and it needs to stop now. And the only way it’s going to stop is if people start speaking out.”

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