

# Surveillance for the Common Man: A Global Infrastructure for Mass Surveillance

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

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We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark. The real tragedy of life is when men are afraid of the light. – Plato

Today's news is made up in large part by media hysteria in which the media can enhance their ratings or readership by choosing some random subject with a plethora of potential "talking heads" without doing any substantive research into newsworthy topics. An example of one of today's media subjects is the mass hysteria generated by president (sic) Bush's admission that he authorized illegal wiretaps of American citizens inside the United States. On the surface, this appears to be a subject of concern; and certainly it is a subject of Constitutional concern. However, this invasion of American privacy is certainly not a "first". In fact, this spying on Americans is so common as to hardly be deserving of special mention. The only thing unique about today's "news" is that a whistleblower opened today's government's activities to public scrutiny.

But even the Rush Limbaugh's of the airwaves know virtually nothing of the subject of global mass surveillance and certainly have no interest in assigning their research "experts" to exploring a subject that would jeopardize their propaganda role in the eyes of their "dear leader". Even for the very few with the time, fortitude and interest in the subject of legal and illegal surveillance of the global community by cooperating governments, the subject has been made very, very difficult to penetrate by the cloak of secrecy constructed by the consortium of governments involved.

The first part of this article will further explore and explain the alarming characteristics of mass surveillance programs; the latter part of the article will examine the "not so obvious dangers" the programs pose to the civil rights of American and foreign citizens by further detailing the type programs that have thus far been uncovered and the type information being collected on the individual as well as the inherent abuses of this power.

This article by necessity will fall on the deaf ears of our Congress (because Congress has no other type ears) and hopefully will be ignored by the intelligence and Gestapo agencies of our government. The target of this information would normally be the American people with their power to influence their political representatives to demand increased civil rights oversight. But today, Americans apparently have little desire to avoid the inevitable calamity that lack of concern, apathy and a carefully nurtured ignorance foster. Americans are getting the government they deserve. So, there is no target audience for this report. It should be read exclusively for its entertainment value.

Changing Reasons for Spy Systems and Programs.

Present day spy systems were conceived during World War II. The end of the war brought the danger of funding and personnel cuts to the various spy systems that had been developed through the cooperation of the “allies” during the war. The onset of the Cold War became the answer to the “spooks” most fervent prayer. Not only were personnel and funding cuts avoided, but budgets became inflated past the “spooks” wildest dreams; as budgets were inflated, oversight by any outside agency dwindled according to their wildest dreams. If there were accidental glimpses into the spy industry’s workings and half-hearted objections raised, agency goals were shifted to meet the challenge of exposure. Military objectives were changed or were expanded to include “justified” commercial targets. Spying for “commercial” reasons were rationalized with many justifications. The results, in many cases, turned out to be oriented for the benefit of corporations that, by coincidence, turned out to be contributors to the “deaf and dumb” political entities who should have been overseeing the “spook” transgressions against the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. So, everyone was happy – the American citizen because he was blissfully ignorant of what was being done to his freedoms, the spook agencies because their budgets and staffing were growing exponentially and the politicians were happy because of the “corporate political contribution manna” falling from heaven.

If the Cold War provided a steroid-type growth stimulus to the spy industry, 9/11 brought about a further undreamed of growth pattern. Not only could budgets and staffing be metastasized, but new surveillance program contracts could be given to favored defense contractors; even the miniscule oversight by Congress of pre 9/11 spy agency programs could be further curtailed without a whimper from Congress. The hysteria created by the government created vision of Bin Laden hiding in a cave with his “super magic” cell phone directing a world-wide network of terrorists was enough to engender a Homeland Security spy apparatus replete with an intelligence czar and virtually unlimited powers, no oversight and a limitless budget. (Of course it has never occurred to Joe Citizen or to our Congress to question how the “will-of-the-wisp Bin Laden could direct such a network from a cave in Afghanistan even with a “super magic” satellite cell phone. Even more to the point, the following sections may cause the reader to question how any Bin Laden communications could possibly escape the detection and locating capabilities of the ECHELON program. However it should be noted that, asking such questions could well earn one the label of terrorist sympathizer).

## **Programs of Mass Surveillance and Their Characteristics.**

### **1. The ECHELON Program.**

“The existence and expansion of ECHELON is a foreboding omen regarding the future of our Constitutional liberties. If a government agency can willingly violate the most basic components of the Bill of Rights without so much as Congressional oversight and approval, we have reverted from a republican form of government to tyranny.” [1] The breeding ground for ECHELON was laid in 1947 between the US and four partners – the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and Canada. Since then additional partners have been drawn into the system so that at present, within Europe, all email, telephone and fax communications are routinely intercepted by the United States National Security Agency, transferring all target information from the European mainland . . . to Fort Meade in Maryland[2] . . . Additionally, space-based electronic communications “vacuum cleaners” pick up radio, microwave and cell phone traffic on the ground.[3] The program is administered by the National Security Agency (NSA) and boasts the most enviable array of

intelligence equipment and personnel in the world. "The NSA is the largest global employer of mathematicians, featuring the best teams of codemakers and codebreakers ever assembled." [4] With this "land-based system of intercept stations, intelligence ships sailing the seven seas and top-secret satellites . . . very few signals escape the system's electronic grasp. Having divided the world up among the UKUSA parties, each agency directs its electronic "vacuum-cleaner" equipment towards the heavens and the ground to search for the most minute communications signals that traverse the system's immense path". [5] Additionally, at least three major domestic fiber-optic telephone trunk lines - each capable of carrying 100,000 calls simultaneously - were discovered (in 1997) to be wired through the British equivalent of Fort Mead -Menwith Hill. This allows the NSA to tap into the very heart of the British Telecomm network. This scope of surveillance capability and sophistication is duplicated with each of the other NSA spying partners so there is virtually no communication signal generated on the planet that is not within the grasp of these giant signal "vacuum cleaners".

Even this technical sophistication does not fully explain the power of this program. The true power comes through the combination of the mechanical and electronic components allowing the interception of global communication signals with the software that allows the intercepted communications to be properly separated by category, origination/destination, subject matter, priority, etc. for most effective analysis in terms of tracking trends and "hot spots". This surveillance program is an extremely powerful tool in the hands of any government or agency and is very, very effective as a political tool/weapon or as commercial espionage weapon. The program is capable of intercepting an individual cell phone signal and, through voice recognition programs, recognize and categorize the call for trend analysis or individual content.

### **ECHELON Capabilities.**

In short, "the extraordinary ability of ECHELON to intercept most of the communications traffic in the world is breathtaking in its scope. These programs and computers transcend state-of-the-art; in many cases, they are well into the future. Processing millions of messages every hour, the ECHELON systems churn away 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, looking for targeted keyword series, phone and fax numbers, and specified voiceprints". [6]

#### **1. Resistance to "Snooping on the Snoops".**

There is concerted resistance by intelligence heads, law enforcement agencies and political representatives for oversight and control of surveillance activities such as those of ECHELON. All sorts of convoluted, complex legal arguments are raised to defend the activities of ECHELON, protect power kingdoms and avoid shining the light of public scrutiny and oversight on these and all other spying activities. The Oklahoma City bombing, 9/11 and the embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania are all persuasive arguments presented to justify the status quo and further unrestricted growth of the programs. The argument for "security" always triumphs over common sense and concerns for civil rights violations. Additionally those in government who attempt to pry too closely into the workings of ECHELON with civil rights concerns have frequently been warned off after finding themselves targeted for investigation by the intelligence "system".

. . . "But despite the real threats and dangers to the peace and protection of American citizens at home and abroad, our Constitution is quite explicit in limiting the scope and powers of government. A fundamental foundation of free societies is that when

controversies arise over the assumption of power by the state, power never defaults to the government, nor are powers granted without an extraordinary, explicit and compelling public interest”.

As the late Supreme Court Justice William Brennan pointed out: The concept of military necessity is seductively broad, and has a dangerous plasticity. Because they invariably have the visage of overriding importance, there is always a temptation to invoke security “necessities” to justify an encroachment upon civil liberties. For that reason, the military-security argument must be approached with a healthy skepticism: Its very gravity counsels that courts be cautious when military necessity is invoked by the Government to justify a trespass on [Constitutional] rights”. [7]

## **2. Abuses of our System of Government by the System(s) of Surveillance.**

The systems of espionage, in all their forms, beg for abuse by those wishing to maintain their positions of power and influence. The mushrooming range of espionage used by the surveillance system(s) oversteps the threshold of abuse by a wide margin. The systems have been used to spy on political opponents and label as subversives those who expose the excesses of corrupt government activity, disregard for human rights, corporate pollution and even the promoters of the gospel of Christ. That the intelligence powers of the United States should be arrayed against peaceful organizations both within and without the country in the name of “security” is blasphemy against our Constitution and demonstrative of our government’s desire not to monitor, but to control.

Although economic spying is probably one of the least offensive parts of the government’s surveillance programs, it bears mentioning because its exposure shows the versatility of the programs and the “tailoring” efforts of monitored information to uses other than strictly interpreted national “security” matters. Economic spying has reached such a level that there have even been departments created within the government whose mandate is that of passing ECHELON gathered information to various US companies for exploitation against foreign industrial competitors. While this may be interpreted as a beneficial by-product of the system, its use is a double-edged sword because foreign partner governments and economic competitors can use the same information in the same manner against the United States.

The incestuous relationship between the companies producing the ECHELON technology and the intelligence agencies is one that may not meet the strict interpretation of “conflict of interest”, but at the very least represents an improper use of taxpayer funds.

It should be noted that: “while the UKUSA is a product of Cold War political and military tensions, ECHELON is purely a product of the 20th Century – the century of statism. The modern drive toward the assumption of state power has turned legitimate national security agencies and apparati into relationship pawns in a manipulative game where the stakes are no less than the survival of the Constitution. The systems developed prior to ECHELON were designed to confront the expansionist goals of the Soviet Empire – something the West was forced out of necessity to do. But as Glyn Ford, European Parliament representative for Manchester, England, and the driving force behind the European investigation of ECHELON, has pointed out: “The difficulty is that the technology has now become so elaborate that what was originally a small client list has become the whole world.”[8]

## **Conclusion.**

It must be remembered that although the sophistication and capabilities of ECHELON is futuristic and would seem to be all encompassing, it is only one of many similar programs in use and on the drawing boards of our government. The total spy and surveillance capability of the United States and its allies is truly beyond comprehension – and apparently beyond control. Journalists have been working for 40 years to penetrate even the fringes of ECHELON capabilities. There are unknown numbers of programs in their infancy that are just as powerful in their own ways as ECHELON. Put together and working against Americans, other nations and the “global” individual with no oversight from the American government or any other government, the possibilities of a New World Order are terrifyingly close to the grasp of our more unscrupulous politicians. If one considers the evolution of the automobile since the end of World War II and compares that evolution to that of the spy and surveillance programs our government has constructed, then we may get a “feel” for the present state of the black art of espionage as it exists today. If we consider the history of the totalitarian governments of Russia and Germany since 1930, we can see the absolute dedication of tyranny to its own survival and growth at any cost. Today, if we can tear our attention away from the latest “Survivor” epic, we can see face to face the evil that is being prepared for those who adhere to the tenants of our Constitution. The gulags of today hold an assortment of Muslims and Arabs that our government says wishes to do us harm. Tomorrow they may hold an assortment of Americans who our government “says” wishes to do “it” harm.

### **Reference:**

[1], [2], [3], [4], [5], [6], [7], [8] from ECHELON: America’s Secret Global Surveillance Network Copyright 1999/2000 Patrick S. Poole

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See also <http://home.hiwaay.net/~pspoole/echres.html>

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