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NSA Records and Stores Content of All Phone Calls in Two Countries

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According to new documents made public yesterday by Edward Snowden, the National Security Agency records the content of every phone call made to, from, and within the Bahamas and at least one other country.

An internal NSA document explains that the content-recording program, codenamed SOMALGET, is "deployed against entire networks "to allow the US government to record"over 100 million call events per day" from the two countries. SOMALGET is part of a broader program, called MYSTIC, which monitors metadata from several other countries, including Mexico, the Philippines and Kenya.

Details of the program were first reported on Glenn Greenwald's t*he Intercept*web site. The *Intercept* writes that the NSA "appears to have used access legally obtained in cooperation with the US Drug Enforcement Administration to open a backdoor to [the Bahamas'] cellular telephone network…"

A 2012 internal NSA memo explains that "SOMALGET collection systems forward full-take metadata in real time and buffer full-take audio for nominally 30 days. It makes possible the selection of audio content against the buffered data after the fact, in near real-time, or up to 30 days later."

Even if claims by the administration that the NSA only stores the content of calls for 30 days are true, that means that at any given time, the NSA can trawl through the content of *three billion* phone calls accumulated from the Bahamas and the unknown country. This far surpasses the alleged economic surveillance committed by members of the Chinese military, against whom the Department of Justice filed criminal charges earlier this week. *The Intercept*decided not to publish the name of the second country where 100 percent of phone calls are recorded on the grounds that the authors have "specific, credible concerns that doing so could lead to increased violence." In a subsequent post on Twitter, Greenwald said that the NSA and Director of National Intelligence "urged us aggressively" to suppress the names of all countries in question. Greenwald further claimed that the journalists at *The Intercept* were convinced that "innocent people would die" if the name of the fifth country was released.

In response to *The Intercept's* abstention from publishing the second country, however, WikiLeaks announced yesterday that it would reveal the name within the next days. WikiLeaks wrote that the population of the world should be apprised of the details of the government's spying operation, regardless of specious claims by the NSA that leaks put human life at risk.

“We will reveal the name of the censored country whose population is being mass recorded in 72 hours,” read a message posted Tuesday morning on WikiLeaks’ twitter account. Another tweet added: “It is not the place of Firstlook [t*he Intercept*] or [the *Washington Post*] to decide how a people will chose to act against mass breaches of their rights by the United States.”

Both MYSTIC and SOMALGET, as well as countless other spying programs, are carried out without the knowledge of the governments in the targeted countries. Although the Bahamas granted the US Drug and Enforcement Agency the ability to install wiretap equipment, the Bahamian government told t*he Intercept* that it “was not aware of” the storage of every call on the island.

The accumulation of phone conversation audio is not limited to only two countries, moreover. In March, John Inglis, then serving as NSA Deputy Director, told the *Los Angeles Times* that the NSA tracks and records every email, text, and phone-location signal sent in Iraq.

That same month, the *Washington Post* published internal NSA slides showing that the government is working towards “full-take audio” in six countries—which presumably include the countries cited in t*he Intercept* .

“With proper engineering and coordination there is little reason this capability cannot expand to other accesses,” an NSA document published by the *Post*reads. Faced with coercion from the Obama administration, the *Post*obediently refused to name those countries targeted for SOMALGET expansion.

The installation of “collection devices” requires close cooperation between the US government and its corporate collaborators. An internal NSA document revealed that in regards to the MYSTIC program, the US sells the need to access foreign telecommunication systems by claiming that “the overt purpose” is “for legitimate commercial services for the Telco’s themselves.” The document also explains that “[O]ur covert mission is the provision of SIGINT [Signals Intelligence].”

The NSA also relies on major corporations to help process the data. For example, the weapons manufacturer General Dynamics has an eight-year $51 million contract to process “all MYSTIC data and data for other NSA accesses.” The company also aids with processing SOMALGET data.

Further internal documents show that the MYSTIC programs are carried out as part of integrated operations led by the Central Intelligence Agency and the Defense Signals Directorate, an Australian intelligence agency.

Once more, President Obama’s avowal that “people around the world, regardless of their nationality, should know that the United States is not spying on ordinary people who don’t threaten our national security” has been shown to be an unambiguous lie.

The fact that the NSA has targeted the Bahamas, just 150 miles off the coast of Florida, is further proof that the threat of “terrorism” is simply a curtain behind which the framework of a police state is being constructed. What’s more, the absence of Islamic fundamentalists in the small tropical island nation has forced the government to use the threat of drug dealing as justification for widespread state surveillance of an entire nation’s population—as

well as its visitors, many of whom are US citizens.

This expansion of the constitutional exception to the prohibition of unreasonable searches and seizures to standard narcotics prosecution is significant. The government now claims that the need to prevent ordinary crimes justifies widespread warrantless state surveillance. By this measure, nothing is unconstitutional.

Although the true depth and extent of the SOMALGET and MYSTIC programs are as yet unknown, one thing is clear: what has been revealed so far provides further confirmation that the US government is in the process of building a global surveillance apparatus in the hope it will one day be able to read and listen to every communication made throughout the world.

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